

Compare and Contrast: US Troop Withdrawal from Germany

By Alexander Tantum

On June 5th, United States President Donald Trump signed off on a plan which involves the U.S. permanently withdrawing one-third of their troops which are currently stationed in Germany. Currently, there are 34,500 U.S. troops stationed in Germany, and the Trump plan calls for having no more than 25,000 troops there. The plan has been pushed by the U.S. Ambassador to Germany, Richard Grenell. The decision has certainly proven to be a controversial one. From a Polish perspective, there have been some mixed reactions. Dr. Łucja Cannon believes that the troop pullout from Germany is “a timely readjustment,” while Ian Brzezinski thinks that the decision is clearly the wrong one. Which argument is stronger?

Dr. Cannon suggests that the decision to withdraw the troops is actually a good move with regards to NATO. While some may say that the troop reduction shows a decrease in United States involvement in supporting Poland, President Trump continues to show his strong support for the country. Cannon notes that President Trump’s strong support of the Three Seas Initiative, which attempts to oppose the Kremlin’s building of their own pipeline, shows that he continues to be an ally to Poland, and that must not be lost within the move of pulling some U.S. troops out of Germany. President Trump is not making this move because of a decrease of support to Poland; rather, the move is financially motivated. Additionally, all of these troops are not being taken out of the region altogether. Instead, they are being moved throughout Eastern Europe, to areas where they may be more needed, including Poland.

Unlike Dr. Cannon, Mr. Brzezinski believes that Eastern European countries including Poland will be weakened by President Trump’s decision to remove troops from Germany, and thus, that it could turn out to be a grave mistake. In addition to Poland’s security, the frontline security of countries such as Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania will be threatened. Brzezinski seems to assume that the majority of the U.S. troops will be moved from Europe entirely, as he makes the point that the move will reduce United States influence in Europe. He also thinks that the Kremlin may be emboldened by the move. Essentially, the significant difference between the opinions of Dr. Cannon and Mr. Brzezinski is that Dr. Cannon does not see the troop pullout as a move which signifies a decrease in support towards Poland and/or a threat to their security, while Mr. Brzezinski believes the opposite.

I see the merits of both Dr. Cannon’s and Mr. Brzezinski’s arguments. With this being said, I find myself more in agreement with Dr. Cannon. I believe it is evident that the United States strongly supports Poland, and pulling troops from Germany does not necessarily diminish that support. In fact, President Trump and President Andrzej Duda met at the White House on June 24, and discussed Trump’s decision to pull troops from Germany. I place myself in line with President Duda’s remarks on the subject. He noted that “I requested Mr. President that he would not withdraw U.S. forces from Europe.” This is what is important. The fact that the troops which are being removed from Germany are not being removed from Europe entirely means that they will remain present within the region, ready to support Poland at a moment’s notice. The United States continues to prioritize their transatlantic relationship with many European countries, including Poland. Additionally, President Trump has taken steps to ensure that moving troops from Germany does not embolden Russia, because he has “...created new NATO institutions... and “...gave significant arms to Ukraine to fight Russian separatists” (Cannon). The United States and Polish relationship will continue to be strong and prosper.