



STRATEGIKA

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Conflicts Of The Past As Lessons For The Present

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U.S. TROOP DEPLOYMENTS IN GERMANY

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ABOUT THE POSTERS IN THIS ISSUE

Documenting the wartime viewpoints and diverse political sentiments of the twentieth century, the Hoover Institution Library & Archives Poster Collection has more than one hundred thousand posters from around the world and continues to grow. Thirty-three thousand are available online. Posters from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia/Soviet Union, and France predominate, though posters from more than eighty countries are included.

America—A European Power No More? Shifting Tectonics, Changing Interests, and the Shrinking Size of U.S. Troops in Europe

By Josef Joffe

The Trump drawdown of U.S. troops in Europe is not the end of the alliance, but part of a familiar story. America's military presence has been contested from Week 1—make that February 4–11, 1945. At Yalta, Franklin D. Roosevelt assured Joseph Stalin that the United States would soon depart from Europe. Its troops—three million at the peak—would all be gone in two years.¹ Nor would the U.S. assume the burden of “reconstituting France, Italy and the Balkans. . . . It is definitely a British task.”² At the end of WWII, it was back to the future of 1919. Europe would again be on its own.

As late as 1949, when the Cold War was already in full swing, abandonment was reaffirmed. At a Senate hearing on the NATO Treaty, Secretary of State Dean Acheson was asked whether the U.S. would “send substantial numbers of troops over there as a more or less permanent contribution.” Acheson replied: “The answer . . . is a clear and absolute NO!”³ Famous last words. U.S. troops are still in Europe—a lifetime after FDR told “Uncle Joe” that they would be gone in two years.

None of Donald Trump's predecessors ever bad-mouthed NATO as “obsolete.” But threats of retraction have been routine. The most famous one was John Foster Dulles's “agonizing reappraisal” of 1953 if the Europeans did not mount a common defense, then known as “European Defense Community.” The French scuttled the project because they would not get into bed with their German archenemy. The U.S. stayed nonetheless. Indeed, by then, the troop level had risen from a low of 100,000 in 1950 (Army and USAF) to 284,000. The peak was 320,000 in Germany alone—at the height of the Berlin Crisis in 1962.⁴

Donald Trump's drawdown, as announced in 2020, is also old hat. By 2004, under George W. Bush, the U.S. presence had melted down to 80,000. Eight years later, Barack Obama cut it by some 10,000, explaining that “free riders aggravate me.”⁵ Obama just did it without fanfare and blackmail à la Trump, which in so many words ran: “Pay up, or we pull out.”

So, Mr. Trump is in good company. The only new part of this old story is a lateral move—out of Germany and into Poland with some thousand GIs. Currently, there are 62,000 all over Europe, more than half in Germany. That is one-fifth of the historical maximum. What is the moral of this topsy-turvy tale?

One, the U.S. remains a European power, whether at 320,000 or 62,000. SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe), the commander of NATO forces, is still an American (General Tod D. Wolters). There are some 200 U.S. nuclear weapons in the theater—down from a peak of 6,000. Though a tiny number, these nukes are a lot more valuable than UK and French systems because they would force an aggressor to attack *American* nukes



Image credit: Poster Collection, US 2714, Hoover Institution Archives.

backed up by thousands of strategic warheads. Such a decision will not be taken lightly. So, the couplings continue to hold.

Two, numbers, alas, do matter; 62,000 U.S. soldiers strewn across 11 countries do not an autonomous fighting force make. These units constitute an archipelago that would require massive reinforcements from the U.S. to jell into a real war-fighting capability. They are “trip wires” that might trigger a full-fledged counter-offensive if the U.S. cavalry rides to the rescue.

Three, American troops are in the wrong place to deter a Russian foray. The bulk, as always, is deployed in Germany where a vastly larger force once guarded the “Fulda Gap,” a natural invasion route for Soviet tank armies. Today, the likely front line is Poland’s eastern border, some 1,400 km from western Germany, where most U.S. forces are located—and even farther away from Latvia and Estonia abutting directly on Russia.

Four, there is the enduring gap between strategy and politics. Logically, 500 million wealthy Europeans should have reacted to U.S. withdrawal symptoms by mounting a credible defense on their own. Naturally, they cashed in their peace dividends after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Take Germany, the largest and richest EU member. It cut its troop strength from 500,000 to 180,000, its tank force from 3,000 to less than one-tenth that size. And why not? Once the predestined battlefield, they could now shelter behind their East European NATO allies. Belarus and Ukraine, now autonomous, provided an additional buffer. Suddenly, Russia was very far away.

No more, what with Putin forging into Ukraine, extending his covetous hand to Belarus, and pressuring the Baltics. It is a twin wake-up call. As the U.S. went into retraction under Obama, Russia is back to expansionism. True, the Europeans have been rearming modestly since 2014, but they are a long, long way from an *e pluribus unum* in matters of defense. Twenty-seven do not add up to one. And Brexit Britain, with remnants of a global vocation, is out of the equation.

Five, the bottom line. As in the past 70 years, a weakening American commitment does not produce what strategic reason would demand—and what Messrs. Obama and Trump may have hoped for. Europe is not likely to grow into a strategic actor commensurate with its vast resources.

What are the implications for U.S. policy, be it under Trump II or Biden I? “Pay up, or we pull out” does not galvanize the Europeans, as the past suggests. On the other hand, the U.S. now has bigger fish to fry in this new “Two-And-A-Half Power World.” America is still on top, but China is out to expel from it from the penthouse of global predominance. Russia is the half-superpower. Deficient in terms of economics and demography, Putin’s Russia superbly plays a weak hand, expanding into Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa.

Having ruled the world for 500 years, Europe seems “out of history,” to deploy a Hegelianism. It does not match towering assets with ambition. But whether beholden to Republicans or Democrats, MAGA or “Come Home, America,” U.S. grand strategy will ignore Europe at its own peril. Half a billion people and the world’s No. 2 economy add up to an enormous weight in the global scales. So, in the competition with China and Russia, it is obviously in the American interest to keep Europe on its side.

In this scheme, sheer troop numbers are less critical than American behavior toward its allies of 70 years. True, priorities have changed. China, a resurgent Russia, the Middle East, and North Africa overshadow Europe as a region of concern. But for all the recurrent conflict with the Europeans, America has never treated allies worse than adversaries. Under No. 45, though, Europe turned into a target of opportunity. While alternately flirting with Putin, Xi, and Kim Jong-un, Mr. Trump has played a brutal zero-sum game with the Europeans: I win if you lose, especially in trade. States are no shrinking violets, but respect plus give-and-take goes a long way with long-time allies.

Let’s talk hard-headed interests: What’s in it for the United States as it peers into the future of its military presence in Europe—and Germany in particular? The worst case is “Good-bye, Europe,” as FDR intimated to Stalin in 1945. Let’s imagine an escalatory spiral where the U.S. keeps punishing and humiliating Germany, exacting tribute and trade advantages while pulling out more troops. Berlin digs in while yielding to the classic temptation of weaker partners, which is to compensate for a loss in security by reducing the demand for it. That strategy spells out propitiation of Russia and China, with allies turning into intermediaries. In anger, the U.S. pulls an FDR and bolts from Germany, the linchpin of the strategic order. If America’s forward base in Germany goes, so will NATO.

It would not be smart to go down that treacherous path. In many American eyes, on the left and the right, the U.S. is supposedly doing the Europeans a costly favor by protecting them at a steep discount. Look again, and the ledger is not lopsided after all. On a practical level, regard Ramstein Air Force Base in western Germany as *pars pro toto*. It is a critical American hub not only for European but also global operations.

From there, the U.S. monitors the air space from the Arctic to the Antarctic. From Ramstein and a string of other bases in Germany, the U.S. has deployed troops and aircraft to various theaters like Iraq or Libya. Ramstein has acted as operations center for drone strikes in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Somalia. Ramstein is the HQ for USAF Europe and Africa. It hosts AIRCOM, NATO's Allied Air Command. The endless list keeps stressing the obvious. Ramstein et al. are not just outposts, but fixtures of America's global primacy.

Mr. Obama started the troop cuts, and Mr. Trump has been doubling down. So, a hostile divorce? Think again. Why would Berlin tear up its U.S.-issued reinsurance policy if a purely European defense remains pie in the sky? Why would Washington ditch a precious strategic asset that underpins its global status? So, in Forrest Gump's immortal words: "Stupid is as stupid does."

Luckily, the facts do not bear him out. In Ramstein, the U.S. is building the largest military hospital outside the country for a cool billion dollars—with 5,000 rooms and 9 operating theaters, to be completed in 2024. Why build if you intend to bolt? And then at a time when Russia is pressing westward and China is pushing forward its New Silk Road into Europe? Why did Mr. Trump organize two huge NATO exercises to demonstrate American readiness to fight along with its allies: *Trident Juncture* in 2018 and *Defender Europe* in 2020? (COVID-19 stopped the U.S. deployment.)

If the alliance were indeed "obsolete," Mr. Trump would not dispatch a battle group to Poland—right into harm's way. FDR believed in "Uncle Joe"; nobody has such illusions about Vladimir Putin who is pumping fresh lifeblood into the old lady NATO. Alliances do die, but rarely when threats are rising. Soaring across the Atlantic, mutual contempt does not have a place in the cold-eyed strategic calculus of nations. At least, it should not when the stakes are growing and alternatives—Europe and America home alone—are worse than a rocky marriage.

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- 1 As recounted by Louis Halle, *The Cold War as History* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), 82.
 - 2 In an FDR memorandum to Acting Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, February, 21, 1945, as quoted in Herbert Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 340.
 - 3 *North Atlantic Treaty Hearings before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, April–May 1949* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), 47.
 - 4 For the numbers and enduring U.S. debate, see Hubert Zimmermann, "The Improbable Permanence of a Commitment: America's Troop Presence in Europe," *Journal of Cold War Studies* (Winter 2009), 3–27.
 - 5 As quoted in "The Obama Doctrine," *The Atlantic*, April 2016.



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Image credit: Poster Collection, US 7171, Hoover Institution Archives.

Is It Wise to Pull Out and Redeploy 12,000 U.S. Troops from Germany?

By Angelo M. Codevilla

President Trump's decision to return the U.S. 2nd Cavalry Regiment currently stationed in Germany to American soil (6,500 troops), as well as to redeploy mostly Air Force units from Germany to Italy and command headquarters to Belgium and Poland (another 5,600), will have mostly modest positive military consequences and has already benefited America diplomatically. The military consequences are modest because U.S. forces in Europe have long since ceased to be potential combatants. The diplomatic ones flow from the fact that NATO Europe is a growing political problem for America, that Germany is the negativity's heart, and that removing some troops is probably the gentlest way in which the U.S. may begin to alleviate that problem.

The redeployments make eminent sense in terms of the current limited military plans for Europe. Shifting an F-16 squadron to Italy along with the command elements of a fighter wing and associated civil engineering and support units is almost certainly the most operationally significant move. The eastern Mediterranean, more easily accessible from Italy, where our so-called ally Turkey as well as Iran threaten mayhem, is the only place in the European theater where U.S. forces might conceivably be used in combat or for deterrence.

Moving the U.S. European Command and the U.S. Special Forces Command to Mons, Belgium, near the Supreme Headquarters Allied Forces Europe and the NATO headquarters will create a massive, largely redundant bureaucratic complex. It will rearrange an awful lot of largely meaningless paper shuffling, and raise further questions about their usefulness.

Shifting the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, the last major U.S. ground combat unit left in Europe back to U.S. soil is, conceptually, a major improvement. Commander of the U.S. European Command, Gen. Tod D. Wolters, said it would "allow those units to regain maximum U.S. at-home-station readiness and more effectively support global contingencies while still maintaining a keen focus on Europe." It would be good were this to become the way that our statesmen look at our island nation's military forces: stationed at home where their safety, support, and readiness are maximized, and from whence they can be concentrated in doses tailored to overwhelm enemies abroad before returning home.

But that does not seem to be how the DoD views the redeployment—at least not entirely. That is because the department will move the Army's V Corps headquarters to Poland, to which—and to the Baltic States as well—it plans to rotate combat brigades. The redeployment of air forces to Italy is also meant to enable the capacity to fight land-air battles on the northern and southern frontiers of Russia and Eastern Europe. But for the U.S. even to pretend that it might fight such battles is most irresponsible. These forces are so relatively small and at the end of their tethers to be "trip wires"—another word for bluff. It would behoove U.S. military planners to ask what they would do were the wires tripped and the bluffs called.

The diplomatic consequences of withdrawing U.S. troops from Germany had begun well before the announcement because its possibility had loomed for decades.

Even before the Soviet collapse, Europe's political deformation had put in doubt the capacity of U.S. deployments to "keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down." The European, and especially the German, bodies politic were increasingly well-disposed toward Soviets, ill-disposed toward Americans, and so haughty about both that they pretended to dictate American behavior. Thus, whether American troops' presence in Europe in general and Germany in particular was of any benefit to them, Americans were compelled to ask what, precisely, our presence there gained for us. The relationship paid dividends to the American individuals and institutions involved in it. The practical benefits that their European counterparts also drew from the relationship forged a bond between them—very much including shared contempt for ordinary Americans.

The spectacle of U.S. Democratic politicians lionized and Republicans demonized helped sharpen the question: Just what do we get out of stationing troops in Europe? The Russians were not going to invade. And the Europeans, Germans first, continued choosing to become ever more dependent on Russia for energy, and using the U.S. as the "bad cop" as they improved their own relations with Russia and Russia's sometime client Iran to America's disadvantage.

President Donald Trump boiled down ordinary Americans' resentment by pointing out that the Europeans were not meeting agreed-upon goals for military spending. Had he asked what of value to the United States the Europeans, Germans first, would have bought even with the requisite amounts of cash, the lack of a compelling answer would have made a powerful case for what used to be called "an agonizing reappraisal" of our military relationship with Europe.

The announcement of partial withdrawal inspired German politicians to express regret, and even condemnation, as if Trump had committed an infidelity. But the most important thing about their reaction is what they did not say, will not say, and cannot say, namely how that withdrawal hurts Americans.

If these Europeans and their U.S. counterparts are serious, they will prepare a reaction for when the U.S. announces that it will withdraw the B61-12 nuclear bombs that are now to be delivered by German *Tornado* fighter-bombers, and later by F/A-18E/F *Super Hornets* that Germany is purchasing to replace them. But Germany chose not to buy the far more capable F-35A. What purpose does less than optimal American nuclear collaboration with a Germany less than committed to . . . well we really do not know to what Germany may or may not be committed. That is why any argument for retaining any troops in Germany or anywhere else in Europe really does have to be made strictly on the basis of what good it may do for Americans.

The partial withdrawal announced on July 29 has already served the purpose of reminding Europeans that the U.S. armed forces exist for America's sake.



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Image credit: Poster Collection, US 7131, Hoover Institution Archives.

Return of Forces from Germany?

By Peter R. Mansoor

On September 11, 1944, a patrol led by Staff Sergeant Warner L. Holzinger of Troop B, 85th Reconnaissance Squadron, 5th Armored Division, crossed the Our River from Luxembourg into Germany. Those five soldiers were the vanguard of a mighty Allied force that would within eight months conquer the Third Reich, thereby ending World War II in Europe. U.S. troops have been on German soil ever since, first as forces of occupation and since 1949 as part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Their presence advances American national security objectives: ensuring the stability of Europe, keeping European allies out of the Russian orbit, and providing bases from which U.S. forces can deploy to the Middle East, as they have done twice since the end of the Cold War. There is no logical strategic or economic rationale for deploying them elsewhere, either within Europe or withdrawing them back to the United States.

In announcing the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Germany, U.S. defense secretary Mark Esper remarked that the new force posture would enhance U.S. deterrence against Russia by providing more flexibility to rotate forces into Poland and the Baltic and Black Sea regions. There is no doubt that NATO's center of gravity has shifted eastward with the accession of Poland, the Baltic States, and other central and Eastern European nations. Rotating more U.S. forces into the Baltic and Black Sea regions to deter Russian adventurism makes sense. What is inexplicable is how moving U.S. brigades from Germany back to the United States furthers this goal. Units based in Germany can use the excellent European rail system to deploy east; units based in the United States have to fly their personnel across the Atlantic Ocean to meet their equipment in Europe, a much more difficult proposition. Transportation nodes in Germany such as Bremerhaven and Ramstein Air Base—the largest U.S. air base outside the United States—also serve as major logistical hubs; they cannot easily be replicated elsewhere.

Moving U.S. Army Europe and European Command headquarters to Belgium places them further from the potential theater of operations in Eastern Europe. The shift of a fighter squadron from Germany to Italy likewise puts it further away from potential flash points in Poland and the Baltic. U.S. brigades positioned in Germany are also closer to crisis zones in the Middle East and North Africa. As for moving U.S. Africa Command from Stuttgart to elsewhere, perhaps the administration should consider actually moving it closer to the African continent. The one move that actually makes sense is the positioning of V Corps headquarters in Poland, where it is better positioned to command and control U.S. forces deployed to Eastern Europe. Otherwise, the movement of U.S. headquarters and troops west and south when the most critical area of concern has shifted east is geographically challenged and strategically bankrupt.

The economics of redeployment also do not pan out. Redeploying U.S. forces to other areas of Europe or back to the United States will cost billions of dollars, while keeping them in place in Germany costs nothing. Germany in fact pays a portion of the cost for basing U.S. troops on its soil, making their positioning there a cost-effective proposition. German training areas are superior to those at most bases in the United States, with the exception perhaps of Fort Hood, the Joint Readiness Training Center in Louisiana, and the National Training Center in California. Keeping several brigades in Germany to enable them to use the exceptional training installations at Grafenwöhr and Hohenfels will keep them at higher states of combat readiness than returning them to the

U.S. mainland, and transporting those units to Eastern Europe will cost a fraction of deploying brigades from the United States to Europe.

Since moving U.S. forces out of Germany makes little strategic sense, why is the Trump administration moving forward with this idea? Contradicting his secretary of defense, the president has stated that the move is in response to Germany's unwillingness to meet NATO's target for defense spending (2 percent of GDP). But Germany has not met this goal since the mid-1990s; neither have twenty-one other member states. So why lower the hammer now?

President Trump and German chancellor Angela Merkel have sparred over a number of issues, from defense spending, the construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline linking Russia and Germany, and Berlin's trade surplus, to relations with China, climate change, and the Iranian nuclear deal. In late May, Trump extended Merkel an invitation to attend the G-7 conference in Washington, which at the time was scheduled for mid-June. Chancellor Merkel politely declined the invite, citing the ongoing coronavirus pandemic as a reason to defer travels. Trump no doubt took the rebuff personally; two months later he committed the United States to withdrawing a third of its troops from Germany.

The redeployment of U.S. troops is hardly a done deal. The Trump administration made the announcement with little interagency or international coordination and inadequate planning. The move will require months to plan and years to execute; Congress will also have to allocate funds for new bases, which some lawmakers are already balking at providing. If Trump is reelected in November, the redeployment will likely continue, however haltingly. The Biden campaign has already committed to reexamining the decision and a Democratic administration will likely reverse course, leaving U.S. forces in Germany at current levels. U.S. forces stationed in Germany are not just a show of support to the NATO alliance, but provide needed capabilities that enhance the national security of the United States—as has been the case ever since Staff Sergeant Holzinger stepped onto German soil seventy-six years ago.

POLL: Is it wise to pull out or redeploy 12,000 U.S. troops from Germany?

- Add more troops: the current level of U.S. troops was already too small to anchor the NATO alliance in Germany.
- Keep the present level of troops to reassure NATO of the U.S. commitment to the alliance.
- The current 12,000-troop pullout from Germany is too small; pull out another 10,000.
- Redeploy *all* troops from Germany to Eastern Europe where they are more needed.
- Bring *all* troops home; World War II has been over for 75 years and the Cold War for 31.



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that included two combat tours, the first as a brigade commander in Baghdad and his final duty as executive officer to General David Petraeus, commander of Multi-National Force-Iraq. His latest works are *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War* (Yale University Press, 2013), a history of the surge in Iraq in 2007–8; and *Grand Strategy and Military Alliances* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) and *The Culture of Military Organizations* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), both co-edited with Williamson Murray.

Discussion Questions

1. Why defend Germany given its huge GDP and trade surpluses with the U.S.?
2. Why do Germans poll as the most anti-American nation in Europe?
3. Why is Germany insisting on a U.S. troop presence while concluding a huge natural gas deal with Russia?
4. What is the view of the other NATO nations about the U.S. withdrawal?

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Col. J. P. Clark and Dr. C. A. Pfaff, *Striking the Balance: US Army Force Posture in Europe, 2028—A Study Sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of the Army* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2020). <https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/index/collections.cfm?id=SSI>
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IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean

Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of “War, Revolution, and Peace.” Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: “The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man’s endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.” From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the “Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict” has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution’s dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

Strategika

Strategika is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.



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