



Trump's Drawdown of Troops from Germany Is No Reason to Panic (The USSR Is Gone)

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Given the reaction from advocates of Washington's foreign policy status quo in Europe (and nearly everywhere else in the world), one might think that President Trump's reported decision to order a modest drawdown of 9,500 U.S. troops stationed in Germany was a crime akin to Gen. Benedict Arnold's defection to the British during the American Revolution. NATO partisans portray the move as a betrayal of America's democratic European allies, an impulsive, dangerous gesture, and a geostrategic gift to, wait for it...Vladimir Putin. Council on Foreign Relations scholar Philip Gordon summarizes the foreign policy establishment's indictment succinctly. "President Donald J. Trump's order to withdraw nearly ten thousand U.S. troops from Germany betrays a close ally, undermines confidence in Washington, and makes Europe and the United States less safe."

All of the arguments against the move are deeply flawed. First, it was not an impulsive move, reflecting Trump's supposed pique at German Chancellor Angela Merkel's refusal to attend the forthcoming G-7 summit in the United States. U.S. officials have complained for years about Berlin's anemic defense spending and its free-riding on America's security commitment. In August 2019, U.S. Ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell warned explicitly that a partial or total withdrawal would take place unless Germany boosted its spending and accepted more responsibility for NATO's collective defense effort. Washington's growing impatience with allied free-riding predates the Trump administration, as blunt comments from two of President Obama's secretaries of defense (Robert M. Gates and Chuck Hagel) confirmed.

Second, a withdrawal of 9,500 troops has little operational military significance; Washington still plans to retain 25,000 military personnel in Germany. It's worth recalling that during portions of the Cold War, the United States had nearly 400,000 troops in Europe—most of them in Germany. If reducing force levels from that level to 34,500 didn't drastically alter the

military equation, it's difficult to see how another 9,500 would have such a deleterious impact.

Third, the move is hardly a great boon to Putin. Yet that is the go-to smear whenever Trump or anyone else suggests even the slightest reduction in the U.S. commitment to NATO or a less confrontational posture regarding Russia. Critics keep accusing President Trump of being "Putin's puppet," despite abundant evidence that U.S. policy toward Moscow has grown tougher, not milder, under Trump

The tone in a new analysis by *Politico's* David M. Herszenhorn was typical. His article asserted that Trump had "stunned" Germany and the other NATO allies, with a unilateral move "seen as benefit to Russia." Later in the article, Herszenhorn favorably quoted Retired Lieutenant Gen. Ben Hodges, former commander of U.S. Army Europe. Hodges contended that Russia would be a main beneficiary of the withdrawal — and that a softening of the U.S. military posture was unjustified. "The Kremlin has done nothing to deserve a gift like this," he said. "No change in behavior in Ukraine or Syria or along NATO's eastern flank or in the Black Sea or Georgia, Yet they get a 28 percent reduction in the size of U.S. military capability that was a core part of NATO's deterrence." Even by the usual standards in both the foreign policy establishment and the mainstream media when opposing a change in Washington's European policy, such arguments constitute a knee-jerk endorsement of the NATO status quo.

Opponents of Trump's modest troop drawdown need to look at a calendar. It reads 2020, not 1950 or even 1989. There is no totalitarian Soviet threat, and the Red Army is not poised to pour through the Fulda Gap in Germany and try to sweep to the Atlantic. Today's Russia is a pale shadow of the USSR in terms of population, economic output, and military power. Indeed, the nations of the European Union collectively have a population nearly three times larger, and a GDP nearly ten times larger. The European countries are more than capable of providing for their own defense, if they choose to spend the necessary funds. Germany and its neighbors need to stop whining like weak security dependents of the United States. That act is getting very, very old.

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