



Top general: Cheaper to keep troops in South Korea than U.S.

Ryan Browne

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Washington (CNN)—Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump has accused South Korea, Japan and Germany of short-changing the United States for the cost of being safeguarded by American troops and argued that he would negotiate better deals if commander in chief.

But defense officials and military experts say the United States is saving money in many cases by stationing troops overseas and having host countries pick up a lot of the tab.

While many foreign policy experts have long maintained that the United States receives more than its fair share of benefits in terms of security and influence by having foreign bases for troops, the Pentagon is now arguing the deployments make financial sense as well.

The top U.S. commander in South Korea said on Tuesday that it was "absolutely" cheaper to have American troops in the Asian country rather than back home, when questioned on the subject at a Senate hearing.

Army Gen. Vincent Brooks told the Senate Armed Services Committee that "the Republic of Korea is carrying a significant load" of the U.S. commitment and pays "about 50% of our personnel costs of being there," in response to questioning from Republican Sen. John McCain of Arizona.

The general's comments stand in stark contrast to statements made by Trump during the course of the campaign.

"South Korea has to pay up. Germany. We protect Germany," he told CNN's Wolf Blitzer in January. "We protect so many different countries. We get nothing."

He also told CNN, "South Korea should pay us and pay us very substantially for protecting them."

And at a CNN town hall in March, he said the same of Japan: "We are supporting them militarily." He continued, "With Japan, they have to pay us or we have to let them protect themselves."

The Trump campaign did not respond to a request for comment on the general's statement.

There are about 49,000 U.S. troops stationed in Japan, 28,000 in South Korea and 38,000 in Germany.

Brooks noted that the Korean government was providing \$808 million to support U.S. troops in the region in addition to paying for 92% of a \$10.8 billion base relocation project in Korea, which he described as "the largest (Pentagon) construction project we have anywhere in the world."

Zack Cooper of the Center for Strategic and International Studies agreed that the cost of returning U.S. troops would be higher than keeping them in East Asia.

He told CNN, "If you were to shift U.S. forces currently in Japan and Korea back to the U.S., you would have to place them somewhere, and those facilities are fairly expensive to build and maintain."

Cooper added that countries like Japan and Korea pay for the maintenance and utilities for U.S. bases and facilities in the region. He said Japan pays about \$2 billion a year in this type of support.

Were these troops to be redeployed to the United States, the American taxpayer would be forced to incur these costs.

The Atlantic Council's Magnus Nordenman told CNN there were similar cost-sharing arrangements with U.S. bases in Germany and weapons-storage facilities in Norway in which the host nations undertake the cost of maintaining these installations.

Nordenman also highlighted indirect savings associated with these forward bases stemming from the proximity of U.S. forces to theaters of operation in Afghanistan and Iraq, reducing transportation costs for U.S. forces to reach combat.

These savings would also apply to U.S. bases in Kuwait, Bahrain, Djibouti and the UAE.

Christopher Preble of the Cato Institute said some of these cost-sharing arrangements were not as generous as sometimes advertised by the U.S. government. But he added that without reducing the number of active duty U.S. military personnel, there would be no significant savings from relocating troops back to the United States.

Preble, Cato's vice president for defense and foreign policy studies, pointed out that no presidential candidate, including Trump, had called for a reduction in the number of active U.S. forces.