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United States: planned reduction of the US military presence in Germany

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On 1 May, a spokesperson for the Pentagon announced that the Secretary of Defence (War) had decided to reduce the US military presence in Germany by around 5,000 troops over the next 6 to 12 months, without providing further details. A statement issued the following day by the Republican chairs of the Committees on Armed Services in the House of Representatives and the Senate indicates that an army brigade is to be withdrawn and that a decision has been taken to cancel the planned deployment of a Long-Range Fires Battalion for this year.

On 4 May, Bavarian politicians and local media reported that the unit in question is the Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT), specifically the 2nd Cavalry Regiment stationed in Vilseck, Bavaria, comprising approximately 4,500 troops. The Pentagon has not yet confirmed these reports. It therefore cannot be entirely ruled out that, instead of the SBCT, a rotational Armoured Brigade Combat Team (ABCT) could be withdrawn, one of two such units deployed to Europe after 2022. The Long-Range Fires Battalion that had been planned for deployment in Germany was intended to complement units of the 2nd Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF) already stationed there, one of five modern brigade-sized formations being developed within the US Army. The 2nd MDTF integrates satellite and signals intelligence units, electronic warfare, cyber capabilities, as well as air defence and rocket artillery components. The battalion was to be equipped with one battery of the Typhon system, armed with SM-6 missiles (with a range of over 500 km) and Tomahawk missiles (with a range of approximately 1,300 km); one battery of the Dark Eagle system, equipped with hypersonic missiles exceeding 3,000 km in range; and one battery of the HIMARS system, armed with PrSM missiles with a range of around 750 km (see '*Enhancing deterrence in Europe: a return to intermediate-range missiles*').

The announced reductions in US forces in Germany appear to be a response by President Trump to the stance and criticism of European allies regarding the US operation in Iran; however, they may also form part of plans being developed by the Pentagon to adjust the US military presence in Europe. If US units are withdrawn from the continent, this would weaken US capabilities to respond effectively on NATO's eastern flank. However, it remains unclear whether the withdrawing formations will return to the United States or be redeployed elsewhere in Europe. There is also speculation regarding potential further reductions of forces in other European states.

Commentary

- **The rationale for the US decision to withdraw troops from Germany remains unclear.** President Trump presents it as retaliation for criticism of US actions towards Iran voiced by Chancellor Friedrich Merz. Over the past two months, the US president has repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with the stance of some European allies regarding the war with Iran and has threatened them with consequences. However, a statement by the Pentagon suggests that the decision to withdraw 5,000 troops from Germany may stem from the Global Force Posture Review carried out by the Department of Defence (War). Elbridge Colby, Under Secretary of Defence for Policy, has expressed a similar view. Republican chairs of the Committees on Armed Services in the House of Representatives and the Senate have criticised the planned withdrawal of US forces from Germany. Mike Rogers and Roger Wicker stated that maintaining strong deterrence in Europe is in the US interest and proposed redeploying troops from Germany to NATO's eastern flank, rather than withdrawing them from the continent altogether.
- **The proposed reduction in the US military presence in Germany would have negative implications for NATO's deterrence if the forces were relocated to the United States or disbanded.** Owing to its wheeled mobility, the 2nd Cavalry Regiment (SBCT) is capable of moving independently and relatively quickly from Bavaria to countries on the eastern flank. After 2014, it participated in exercises and training in the Baltic states and Poland, and after 2020 it deployed sub-units to manoeuvres in Romania and Bulgaria. Withdrawing this permanently stationed formation from Germany within a period of just 6 to 12 months, without fully disbanding it, appears unlikely. Neither the United States nor other European countries currently possess sufficiently developed infrastructure to accommodate around 5,000 troops along with their families. From a logistical perspective, it would be simpler and more cost-effective to suspend the rotational presence in Germany of one of the two ABCTs deployed in Europe after 2022. However, this would further reduce the US presence on NATO's north-eastern flank, as sub-units of this rotational brigade are temporarily stationed in the Baltic states, Finland, Romania and Bulgaria. In turn, the failure to deploy the Long-Range Fires Battalion in Europe for the 2nd MDTF means that the formation would be unable to conduct long-range missile strikes rapidly without first deploying its missile artillery sub-unit from the United States. This would negatively affect the ability to respond to sudden escalation.
- **The German government is approaching the US announcement with caution.** Chancellor Friedrich Merz (CDU), as well as Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD) and Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul (CDU), have stated that they had anticipated the decision. Representatives of the federal government deny that it was influenced by the Chancellor's criticism of the US operation in Iran. At present, approximately 37,700 US troops and 11,500 civilian personnel are permanently stationed in Germany. Greater concern than the withdrawal of a brigade is the US decision not to deploy intermediate- and medium-range missile systems in Germany. In the longer term, Germany aims to develop its own capabilities in this area, as highlighted in the public version of the Military Strategy published by the German Ministry of Defence in April this year (see '*Horizon of ambition: the military strategy and capability profile of the Bundeswehr*'). In July 2025, during Minister Pistorius's visit to Washington, Germany submitted a letter of request for the purchase of the Typhon system, likely including around 400 Tomahawk cruise missiles. However, it has not yet received a response; Germany would be the first

operator of this system outside the United States. It remains unclear whether Washington will approve such a purchase and, if so, whether deliveries might be significantly delayed as a result of the US operation against Iran. In such a scenario, Germany may seek to acquire these capabilities more rapidly through European cooperation under the ELSA project (European Long-Range Strike Approach, or explore alternative means of obtaining them.