

# *U.S. to pull about 12,000 troops from Germany, half to stay in Europe*

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Washington, July 30 (RHC)-- The U.S. says it will withdraw about 12,000 of its troops from Germany and place them in other European countries to "counter Russia."

Unveiled by U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper speaking from Pentagon, the plan has provoking bipartisan opposition in Congress and widespread dismay among other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

According to Esper, the number of US troops in Germany would be reduced by around 11,900, from some 36,000 to 24,000, which is even more than the 9,500 announced last month.

This comes as critics maintain that the plan will cost billions of dollars for the US and will weaken the country's position in Europe vis a vis Russia. "The plan outlined by the administration today to remove thousands of US troops from Germany is a grave error," US Republican Senator Mitt Romney said in a statement on Wednesday.

"It is a slap in the face at a friend and ally when we should instead be drawing closer in our mutual commitment to deter Russian and Chinese aggression," he added.

Meanwhile, Norbert Roettgen, chairman of the German parliament's foreign affairs committee and an ally of Chancellor Angela Merkel, warned on Wednesday that Trump's plan "will weaken the (NATO) alliance."

However, US President Donald Trump defended the move, calling it as a punishment for Germany over failing to meet NATO's defense spending target. "We spend a lot of money on Germany, they take advantage of us on trade and they take advantage on the military, so we're reducing the force," Trump told reporters at the White House on Wednesday.

"They're there to protect Europe, they're there to protect Germany, and Germany is supposed to pay for it," he added. "We don't want to be responsible anymore." The move is the latest twist in relations between Berlin and Washington, which have been strained since Trump announced his plan for withdrawal last month.

From the beginning of his presidency, Trump has pressed Germany to raise NATO spending and accused Berlin of being a "captive" of Russia due to its energy reliance.

About 17,000 U.S. civilian employees support US troops in Germany. It is believed Washington also has nuclear warheads there.

Since World War II, the US military has considered Germany to be one of its most strategic locations overseas, and it serves as a critical logistics hub for troop movements.

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