

Today U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, in response to Defense Secretary Leon Panetta's announced plan to withdraw two brigade combat teams from Europe, sent a letter to the Pentagon where he urged the Defense Secretary to go much further in reducing the U.S. military presence in Europe.

In January, Panetta announced that two U.S. Army brigade combat teams would be withdrawn from Europe in an effort to respond to looming defense budget cuts and to make the military operate more efficiently. Coffman said while he appreciates the challenges the Pentagon is facing, he does not think Defense officials are going far enough.

"The current proposal to remove two brigades from Europe and begin a rotational deployment schedule of one combat brigade to Europe is only a step in the right direction. We must reduce our European footprint further and retain only the headquarters and support infrastructure necessary to support our expeditionary capabilities. There is no longer a strategic reason to maintain the heavy permanent forces in Germany that are a relic of the Cold War," Coffman wrote in his letter.

Coffman believes that since the Cold War ended in 1989, it is unnecessary to still have 79,000 troops stationed in Europe with 45,000 of them in Germany alone when only four of our 28 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies are spending more than 2% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on defense. The United States currently spends 4.7% of its GDP on defense.

"The reason why they can get away with spending so little on defense is that they are relying on the United States to provide it for them," Coffman wrote.

Due to the current fiscal crisis in Europe, Coffman said many of our allies there have drastically reduced their defense spending since they have come to rely on U.S. military forces for protection.

"Since 2008 the defense spending among European NATO countries fell 12%, from \$314 billion to \$275 billion. To continue this trend threatens to eliminate our allies' capacity to contribute to the alliance, and threatens their industrial base," Coffman said. "While I value our strategic partnerships and NATO commitments I believe it is time to clearly signal to them that their current path is no longer sustainable."

Coffman said that the new 10-year strategic guidance issued by the president and Secretary of Defense makes it clear that we will continue to maintain our NATO Article 5 commitments, but that "nothing in this strategy demands that we maintain **any** standing force in Europe."

Coffman also stated in his letter that in order for the U.S. military to modernize its ability to respond to global threats it must close the large bases in Europe and move toward a more agile

strategy.

“By shifting the paradigm away from unwieldy permanent forces stationed deep within the interior of a continent in which we are unlikely to be engaged in major combat operations, and towards smaller expeditionary bases that can provide the necessary command and logistics infrastructure to react rapidly to global contingencies, we will be better prepared to continue to deploy forces or project power,” Coffman said.

“Only by untethering ourselves from the outdated basing model currently in Europe will we gain the strategic mobility and flexibility to respond to future threats,” Coffman concluded his letter.

See below for a full text of the letter or [click here for a PDF](#) .

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February 9, 2012

The Honorable Leon Panetta  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Panetta:

We are at a critical juncture in determining what our military will look like for the next twenty years. As we are faced with these difficult decisions driven by fiscal crisis and a changing global climate, we must take the opportunity to make the bold changes necessary to preserve both our national security and our fiscal sustainability. Making only incremental changes will merely delay the inevitable and force us to have the same discussions in the near future. The place to begin is by making fundamental changes in the way we have based forces in Europe since the end of World War II.

I appreciate the challenges that the Department of Defense is facing, but I don't believe they are being bold enough when considering what is necessary. The current proposal to remove two brigades from Europe and begin a rotational deployment schedule of one combat brigade is only a step in the right direction. We must reduce our European footprint further and retain only the headquarters and support infrastructure necessary to support our expeditionary. There is no longer a strategic reason to maintain the heavy permanent forces in Germany that are a relic

of the Cold War.

The Congressional Budget Office calculated in May of 2004 that removing 95% of forces in Germany alone could save one billion dollars annually. In addition, many of the upfront costs associated with that plan are no longer as severe as we reduce the overall size of our Army, and there are more savings to be had by transferring the bulk of this capacity to the Guard and Reserve components.

Our European allies are facing a fiscal crisis of their own. However, instead of being forced to find the same balance that the United States is trying to achieve, they are able to drastically reduce their national defense infrastructure because they can take for granted that the United States will continue to be the guarantor of their safety. Since 2008 the defense spending among European NATO countries fell 12%, from \$314 billion to \$275 billion. To continue this trend threatens to eliminate our allies' capacity to contribute to the alliance. While I value our strategic partnerships and NATO commitments I believe it is time to clearly signal to them that their current path is no longer sustainable.

Currently only 4 out of our 28 NATO allies are spending even 2% of their GDP on defense. The new Strategic Guidance issued by the President and Secretary of Defense makes it clear that we will continue to "maintain NATO Article 5 commitments and ensure interoperability with allied forces by allocating a U.S.-based brigade to the NATO Response Force and by rotating U.S.-based units to Europe for training and exercises." Nothing in this strategy demands that we maintain any standing force in Europe.

The Strategic Guidance calls for building partner capacity and creating strong strategic alliances. By diversifying our network of allies we will gain access to staging areas in key strategic locations, diminishing our response times and reducing our overseas costs. Recent operations launched out of Camp Lemonier, Djibouti and expanded basing proposed in Singapore, Philippines, and Australia are a step in the right direction.

Our new strategy reflects a shift in thinking about how we array our forces abroad. By shifting the paradigm away from unwieldy permanent forces stationed deep within the interior of a continent in which we are unlikely to be engaged in major combat operations, and towards smaller expeditionary bases that can provide the necessary command and logistics infrastructure to react rapidly to global contingencies, we will be better prepared to continue to deploy forces or project power. We will have unfettered access to strategic choke points, respond globally to areas of humanitarian crisis, or flow forces into a major theater campaign. If we accept this as the way forward then we must fully commit to a change by drastically reducing our European base infrastructure.

The advancement of technology in Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) and networked systems allows us to choose basing and deployment strategies that were not even possible ten years ago. We must take a fresh approach and bold action to both prepare our force for the future and make the right decisions for our long term economic strength.

Only by untethering ourselves from the outdated basing model currently in Europe will we gain the strategic mobility and flexibility to respond to future threats. We must continue to pressure our allies to become more sufficient for their national defense so that we can take on the more arduous task of power projection. Removing our standing European army and replacing it with an infrastructure to facilitate expeditionary operations is the first step.

Sincerely,

Mike Coffman  
United States Congress