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Rep. Mike Coffman believes the time has come for American troops to leave Europe.

The Aurora Republican and former Marine will propose pulling all four of the Army brigade combat teams out of Western Europe — including the tactical supporting units such as helicopters and aircraft.

There are 79,000 U.S. military personnel stationed in Europe, mostly in Germany but also in Italy and the United Kingdom.

"The reality of this proposal is that I feel like I have the wind at my back. I think their time has come," Coffman said. "I think if there weren't budget pressures, it would be dismissed. Hey, the military likes it over there. We're not getting complaints from our soldiers in Germany.

They like being there."

Coffman's proposal, which he will unveil in the coming weeks to go into the Defense Authorization Bill for 2013, goes above and beyond the Obama administration's wishes — an unusual political twist since Coffman is a Republican and there is a Democrat in the White House.

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said in January he would like to withdraw two of the four brigade combat teams in Western Europe — half of what Coffman wants.

Moreover, defense spending is customarily a sacred cow within the Republican Party, and

Coffman has butted heads before with GOP colleagues on the House Armed Services Committee on his desire to drastically pare spending in this area.

Removing full-time troops in Europe saves money only if it means there are fewer U.S. troops worldwide, Coffman said. Just shifting them somewhere else is redundant and could cost money, he said. The average annual cost of a full-time soldier is between \$120,000 and \$130,000, and Coffman hopes for an overall attrition in forces.

Ian Brzezinski, a former U.S. deputy assistant secretary of defense for Europe, on Monday called the cuts a bad idea.

He said he didn't know what had changed in Europe: Russia keeps building up forces along its borders with Poland and Estonia.

Brzezinski also said it is an important part of the transatlantic bargain to back up European security so that those countries stand with the U.S. in potential scenarios in the Middle East and Africa.

"When you have forces stationed, they're there 365 days a year, they are training, they are socializing, they are building trust with Europeans every day," he said. "You can't surge trust."

Coffman said he got the idea after spending time in Germany in the early 1970s, guarding the border for the U.S. Army. After the Berlin Wall fell, he said, there was no longer a need for so many people there.

"I remember why we were there in the first place and why that mission is no longer valid," he said.

Defense faces a severe budgetary bloodletting thanks to a couple of recent compromises between Congress and the White House. The federal government spent roughly \$42 billion less

on defense in 2012 than in 2011 — a drop from \$687 billion to \$645 billion. This includes Iraq and Afghanistan funding.

An additional \$600 billion is scheduled to be slashed indiscriminately over the next 10 years because the congressional "super committee" last fall failed to reduce the federal deficit by at least \$1.2 trillion.

Most members of Congress oppose these cuts and vow to "fix" them legislatively before the end of the year.

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