



(WASHINGTON, D.C.) — A Colorado bipartisan measure to dramatically reduce troop levels in Europe passed the House of Representatives on Friday.

The idea was inspired by Rep. Mike Coffman, an Aurora Republican, and Democratic Rep. Jared Polis of Boulder.

It would bring back about 15,000 military service members and staff from the four brigade combat teams permanently stationed in western Europe — mostly in Germany but also in Italy and the United Kingdom.

There currently are 79,000 service members in Europe.

"Americans don't want to keep paying to defend Europe from a threat that no longer exists," Polis said Friday. "If a program isn't working, isn't necessary, or just doesn't make sense, we

should take the budget ax to it." This is the fourth time Polis has tried to reduce troop levels in western Europe.

Coffman, who served in the U.S. Army in Europe during the Cold War in the 1970s, called it "ridiculous" that the U.S. still has so many military personnel there.

"The Cold War has been over with since 1989," he said.

It is uncertain what the measure's fate is from here because it goes above and beyond what the White House wants. The measure was a part of the broader National Defense Authorization Act, which annually sets the Pentagon budget.

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said earlier this year that he would like to keep some presence in western Europe but withdraw two of the four brigade combat teams.

Coffman, who has been a lone Republican wolf on the House Armed Services Committee in support of defense-spending cuts, said savings are only truly accomplished when there are fewer troops overall. Just yanking them out of Europe and putting them somewhere else doesn't reduce spending.

The annual cost of a full-time soldier is between \$120,000 and \$130,000.

Shuttering whole bases and withdrawing 95 percent of the troops and staff there would save as much as \$1 billion a year, according to some estimates, though this amendment doesn't go that far because it simply brings back the four combat teams and leaves installations and staffs in place.

Polis and Coffman's offices were trying to determine Friday how much this plan would save annually.

Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno said these cuts were expected to save "substantial amounts of money" but declined to provide a precise figure "due to the very complex nature of the arithmetic involved."

The Senate will have to pass its own version of the defense reauthorization, and the two sides will debate differences.

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