

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-1304

August 5, 2020

The Honorable Mark Esper
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Esper:

On July 22, I attended a classified briefing with General Tod Wolters, Commander of European Command, and Dr. James Anderson, acting Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, on the removal of nearly 12,000 American service members from Germany. I expressed my serious concerns with the intent of this policy during the briefing. And given contradictions between the content of this briefing and public remarks by you and the President, I am further troubled that the Administration appears to be providing differing withdrawal policy explanations depending on the audience. I request that you provide a coherent, definitive justification for this policy within 14 days, including an explanation for the discrepancies described below.

My opposition to the plan is based on the simple fact that the only rational basis for the move is to punish Germany for the size of its military budget. As the President stated, "We don't want to be suckers anymore.... So we're reducing the force because [the Germans] are not paying their bills." Yet, as I pointed out in the briefing, the argument that the policy is anything other than a petty and counterproductive grudge against a fellow NATO ally is undercut by not only the President's words, but also the movement of U.S. service members to other important allies who also have not yet fulfilled their commitments on military spending.

Aside from the basis of the withdrawal policy, I am also concerned that two major points discussed in the meeting do not comport with more recent public statements. First, the movement of U.S. service members was described as a "concept" and that substantial work remained before changes are implemented. However, during your press briefing on July 29, you stated twice that some movements could move within "weeks."

Second, during the briefing, I twice asked about plans to station additional American troops in Poland and the Baltics. The answers to my questions were vague and noncommittal, but indicated a lack of interest in increasing an enduring presence in these countries that are on the front lines of the Russian threat. Therefore I was surprised when on July 31, U.S. Ambassador to Poland Georgette Mosbacher tweeted: "Great news! The U.S. and Poland completed negotiations on an Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. The EDCA will implement the joint vision of our two presidents to enhance the U.S. military presence in Poland."

On both points, it is not possible to tell which set of statements actually describes what the Administration is trying to achieve. The difficulty of understanding the policy is compounded

by the lack of written materials provided to Congress. Only one page was presented during the briefing, and was taken back at the conclusion of the meeting.

I remain opposed to the policy of removing troops from a close ally's territory – an action which benefits Russian interests – on the basis of a grudge. Regardless, there should be a coherent explanation of what the policy is, and how much it will cost the American taxpayer. I ask that you provide written summaries and descriptions of the withdrawal proposals both to congressional oversight committees and to the public, including an unclassified statement clarifying whether fiscal year 2020 or 2021 appropriations, and in what amounts, are intended to be used to carry out these withdrawals.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
Vice Chairman
Subcommittee on Defense