



By: TA | AP Insight

How much will Trump's confusion about US troops in Europe cost Americans?



The U.S. military is waiting for clarity from the Pentagon following President Donald Trump's **back-and-forth on troop levels** in Europe, upending the lives of military personnel and potentially costing taxpayers millions of dollars, two U.S. defense officials told The Associated Press.

NATO allies were bewildered in May when Trump said he would send **5,000 U.S. troops** to Poland just weeks after ordering the same number pulled from Europe, following a spat with Germany's Chancellor **Friedrich Merz** over the Iran war.

The Trump administration says troop reductions in Europe have long been planned and coordinated with allies.

The Republican president announced on social media two weeks ago that he was **sending troops to Poland** — the same day the Pentagon had officially ordered the **cancellation of a rotation of soldiers** heading there, one of the defense officials said.

The unit's equipment was already on the way. Sending it cost the military \$32 million, said U.S. Transportation Command, the military agency largely responsible for moving troops and gear across the globe.

The abrupt changes are forcing the military to “retroactively engineer” a policy in line with the president’s latest pronouncement, the official said.

Both officials were briefed on the decisions and, along with others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military matters.

The uncertainty is not only rattling **European allies** worried about the message being sent to Russia, but it also risks hurting morale among American troops — some of whom had their rotations canceled shortly before departure — and comes as the Army budget is already strained.

Changes to troop deployments

to Poland add up

The rotational deployment to Poland of 4,000 troops from the Army’s 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, based in Fort Hood, Texas, was canceled in a memo sent to the military at the beginning of May. European allies found out mid-month.

Some of those troops were told shortly before traveling not to get on a flight to Poland, while those who had been sent ahead — initially around 1,000 troops — are still waiting for confirmation they are being sent back, a U.S. military official said.

The military also is still waiting for details from the Pentagon on how to satisfy Trump's order to send 5,000 troops to Poland, that official said.

The working assumption is that they will come from units already in Europe, rather than an additional deployment from the U.S., the official said.

U.S. Transportation Command had chartered a ship to take the team's equipment from Texas to Poland and transport a departing unit's gear back to America.

The incoming team's portion of the cost was \$32 million, including chartering the ship and loading and unloading the gear.

Because the ship was chartered to take one unit to Europe and bring another back, it is hard to say if that amount would have been saved had the decision to halt the deployment been made before the new team had already begun moving overseas.

However, the military official said the unscheduled move of personnel and equipment back from Europe is most likely not a cost the Pentagon budgeted for and would be an additional expense.

Total costs of canceling the rotation are hard to quantify because of many factors, said Joe Costa, a former senior Pentagon official who now focuses on challenges faced by the U.S.

military as director of the Atlantic Council's Forward Defense program.

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They most likely stem from returning equipment and troops sent ahead of the deployment and would probably be on the low end of the rotation's overall cost, Costa said.

The greater impact is on the readiness of troops who were trained for one mission and may be deployed on another, he said.

U.S. military contracts with private companies to transport troops and equipment contain cancellation clauses that often add extra fees if a deployment is called off, said John Deni, a senior nonresident fellow at the Atlantic Council who has studied such costs.

"The question is what additional costs were incurred by deciding to send them back prematurely, changing the arrangements, changing the plan?" said Deni, a former U.S. military adviser and planner who focused on forces in Europe.

It is not clear if the Pentagon can recoup those costs or those associated with moving the unit to Europe.

The Defense Department did not answer questions about the costs of changing the deployment plans, and the White House referred a request for comment to the department.

Pentagon officials have repeatedly said they planned to lower troop levels to have Europe shoulder more of its own defense and that the decision was part of a "comprehensive, multilayered process."

Last month's memo also led to the cancellation of a deployment to Germany of a battalion trained in firing long-range rockets and missiles.

Pulling troops stationed in Germany would be more expensive

When Trump first threatened to remove 5,000 troops from Europe, Pentagon officials initially suggested pulling back the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, which is based permanently in Germany, the defense official said.

Instead, officials decided to cancel the rotation of the other unit to Poland. Then Trump threw that plan into confusion as well.

Pulling the troops stationed in Germany could cost in the low billions because there is no dedicated space and infrastructure in the U.S. to accommodate them and their families, Costa said.

"The other option is basically breaking up the unit," Costa said. "They move the equipment in different places. They move the people to different places. That carries significant readiness costs because now you're artificially jamming pieces of units into places where they don't necessarily belong."

Pulling or pausing deployments can hurt morale among soldiers and families because they plan for them months and years in advance - John Deni

Pulling or pausing deployments also can hurt morale among soldiers and families because they plan for them months and years in advance, Deni said. The uncertainty can be disruptive.

"That's often the last thing you want to do to military families," Deni said.

It is still unclear what will happen to U.S. troops stationed in Europe, the two officials said. Options include moving military units assigned to Germany to Poland, but that could take several years and cost more, the military official said.

Troop changes happen during an Army budget shortfall

The moves come as the Army is facing a budget shortfall, which the service's top uniformed officer, Gen. Christopher LaNeve, recently acknowledged to Congress.

Estimates put the deficit somewhere between \$2 billion and \$6 billion, according to an Army official who also spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive defense matters.



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One impact has been cutting training courses for soldiers nationwide, which ABC News earlier reported.

In a statement, the Army said it has issued guidance to its commands to “make tough and sound resource decisions that optimize and prioritize resources toward their most critical requirements, to include major training and readiness events.”

The Army official also noted that the service has been tasked with missions like the National Guard deployment in Washington, a bolstered presence along the U.S.-Mexico border and its part in the Iran war — all of which have strained its budget.

The Department of Homeland Security expects to reimburse the Army for its role in the border mission.

Army Secretary Dan Driscoll told lawmakers at

a May 15 hearing that he was “optimistic” there would progress on those payments “within a week or two.” But to date, the Army has not been reimbursed.

“We want those backfilled payments,” Driscoll said then.

The U.S. military in Europe also is scaling back support for non-combat related training and ruthlessly prioritizing critical functions, the military official said.