

U.S. Plan Is Said to Pull a Third of Fighter Jets It Provides NATO for Europe

di Christopher F. Schuetze e Eric Schmitt

The United States plans to significantly reduce the aircraft and warships that it makes available for NATO operations in Europe, according to two senior European officials, accelerating America's effort to scale down the protection it has offered to European allies for eight decades.

The decision would limit NATO's ability to launch long-range strikes and conduct surveillance. It was communicated to allies in early June in a written document, parts of which were reviewed by The New York Times. The European officials, who were briefed on the decision, spoke on the condition of anonymity to speak more freely about sensitive military plans.

The planned drawdowns include:

- Reducing the number of F-16 and F-15E fighter jets from roughly 150 to 100
- Reducing maritime reconnaissance aircraft from 26 to 15 and cutting all eight aerial refueling tanker jets previously available to Europe
- Reallocating a missile-launching submarine and an aircraft carrier, along with several warships and scores of jets that join the carrier's missions
- Reallocating one of two groups of bombers previously assigned for Europe's defense

The Pentagon declined to comment on the specific numbers in the document, and referred to a [statement](#) by its European Command last week that spoke in general terms of its intention to reduce its commitments in Europe.

These details, some of which were first reported in the German news outlet Die Welt, provide the clearest picture yet of the extent to which the Trump administration intends

to reduce its commitment to NATO, a military alliance created in the aftermath of World War II. NATO's purpose was mainly to protect American allies in Europe from external threats like the Soviet Union, and its European members still see it as essential to their ability to deter Russia.

The Pentagon has not yet publicly revealed the timeline for the drawdown but American officials have indicated it will take effect very soon — far earlier than European counterparts had been preparing for. The abrupt cutoff of American forces would affect NATO's ability to, for example, monitor Russian submarine traffic or launch long-range Tomahawk missiles deep into Russian territory.

Though Europeans have similar missile-launching capabilities, experts say that the missiles act as a bigger deterrent to Russia when wielded by the United States, since Europeans may be warier of deploying them.

“While each of these cuts can be managed individually, together they represent a significant posture change and pose challenges to European deterrence readiness across the spectrum,” said Giuseppe Spatafora, of the European Union Institute for Security Studies, a Paris-based think tank.

President Trump has complained for years about the burden that the United States shoulders in its contribution to NATO. He has repeatedly called on Europe to do far more to defend itself without American support, and threatened to leave the alliance altogether. But his administration had only followed through with one-off announcements about relatively small withdrawals from individual countries — until the June document detailing the sweeping reductions to American support for NATO as a whole.

The cuts will be mitigated by the fact that U.S. troops in Europe will still constitute one of the largest NATO forces on the continent. The drawdown's effects will also be softened by the fact that European leaders, seeing a need to rely less on U.S. support, were already in the process of rearming their countries.

But Britain's defense secretary quit on Thursday, accusing the government of spending too little on its military. And Europe is struggling to coordinate its rearmament; on Tuesday, Germany confirmed its [withdrawal from a project](#) to build a new fighter jet with France and Spain.

For some Europeans, the specific number of American assets assigned in Europe is less important than the question of whether Mr. Trump is prepared to deploy any of them in combat.

Anton Hofreiter, a German lawmaker, said: “NATO’s main problem is that, as long as Trump is president, there is no longer any faith that the U.S. would come to the Europeans’ aid in the event of an emergency.”

The drawdown comes at a particularly tense moment for Europe. In late May, a Russian drone [hit an apartment block in Romania](#), the first such strike in a major urban area in NATO territory. Combined with other Russian [drone intrusions](#) into NATO airspace, it raised European fears that Russia might expand its aggression beyond its invasion of Ukraine.

Ed Arnold, of the Royal United Services Institute, a security think tank in London, said that while the drawdown could be worse, “it will have the effect of focusing minds,” he said.

The details of the drawdown were communicated privately as top American defense officials spoke publicly about their intention to reallocate forces to defend American interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

The head of the Pentagon’s European Command, Gen. Alexis G. Grynkewich, [said](#) in early June: “There has been an unhealthy codependence in the NATO Force Model on U.S. forces.”

The general, who is NATO’s top military commander, added: “President Trump, Secretary Hegseth and others have been clear that this needs to change, and it will change. The potential reality of simultaneous conflict in multiple theaters demands it.”

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