

Trump withdraws 5,000 US troops from Germany as Berlin steps up rearmament

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The announcement by President Donald Trump to withdraw 5,000 US troops from Germany and halt the planned deployment of US intermediate-range weapons in Germany marks a further escalation of the crisis in transatlantic relations.

Not only a brigade is affected but also the battalion for long-range precision strikes planned under President Biden, which from 2026 was to bring, among other things, Tomahawk cruise missiles to Germany. These systems can strike Russia and were regarded in Berlin as a central component of NATO's war escalation.

The German government is responding with a dual tactic. Publicly, it is downplaying the conflict with Washington. In practice, it is using it to accelerate the most extensive rearmament since the end of World War II.

Defense Minister Boris Pistorius declared that it had been "foreseeable" that "the US would withdraw troops from Europe and also from Germany." At present, he said, "we are talking about 5,000 US soldiers out of a total of almost 40,000 currently stationed in Germany." Cooperation with the Americans remained "close—in Ramstein, Grafenwöhr, Frankfurt and elsewhere," and the US continued to concentrate in Germany "military functions, for example for its security interests in Africa and the Middle East."

However, it was also "clear," he added, that "within NATO we must become more European in order to remain transatlantic. In other words: We Europeans must take more responsibility for our security. Germany is on a good path. We are growing up: Our Bundeswehr is getting larger, we are procuring more equipment more quickly and relying on innovation, and we are building more infrastructure."

This is precisely the core of Berlin's response: an even more aggressive military buildup to emancipate German and European imperialism from the United States.

The Bundestag's military commissioner, Henning Otte (CDU), called for rapid countermeasures to close the gap left by the withdrawal of US troops. "The withdrawal of US combat units" was "a bad signal for Germany's defense capability" and had to be "compensated," Otte warned in comments to *Der Spiegel*. The federal government must make it clear to Washington that such a decision also weakens the US, "as it would forgo advantageous infrastructure and social

support in Germany." At the same time, this meant for Germany "more than ever to rapidly increase its own defense capabilities."

This meant that the planned personnel expansion of the Bundeswehr must be reflected in capabilities and guaranteed operational readiness. Pistorius must now quickly deliver the defense posture. As military commissioner, he would "strictly ensure that the Bundeswehr is not overstretched and that no hollow structures arise on paper." Personnel growth must be "guaranteed—if not sufficiently on a voluntary basis, then with an obligation for all."

In other words: The reintroduction of conscription, which has already been prepared legislatively, is now to be implemented swiftly. Germany's rearmament and war plans are not simply a reaction to Trump but part of a comprehensive strategic reorientation of German militarism.

Only a few days ago, Defense Minister Pistorius and Inspector General Carsten Breuer presented, for the first time in the history of the Bundeswehr, a comprehensive military strategy. Its declared goal is to make the Bundeswehr the "strongest conventional army in Europe."

Plans include increasing personnel to 460,000 deployable soldiers (260,000 active troops and 200,000 reservists), building additional large formations, permanent forward deployment on Russia's border, expanding air defense, drone, cyber and space capabilities, preparing "deep precision strikes," and integrating the state, economy and society within the framework of "total defense." Pistorius is demanding that industry and production be more strongly oriented toward military requirements. This is preparation for a war economy.

It is precisely for this reason that Friedrich Merz and his government are trying to rhetorically downplay the developing rupture with Washington. They need time to push through this historic rearmament program. After the US announcement, Merz declared that he saw no connection between his remarks on the war against Iran and Trump's decision. At the same time, he emphasized the good relationship with Washington and the importance of the transatlantic partnership. These reassurances are purely tactical. Berlin wants to prevent the conflict with the US from prematurely complicating the political implementation of its war agenda.

The immediate trigger of the latest escalation is the dispute over the war against Iran. At the end of April, Merz had declared that the US was being “humiliated” by Iran and had no recognizable exit strategy in the war. Trump responded with furious attacks against the chancellor. Shortly afterward came the announcement of the troop withdrawal and new tariff threats against European, and particularly German, car exports. On May 1, Trump announced that tariffs on cars and trucks from the EU would be raised from 15 to 25 percent. Germany would be particularly hard hit.

However, Trump’s outbursts against Berlin cannot obscure the fact that the German government politically and strategically supports the US-Israeli war of aggression against Iran. After a phone call with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Sunday, Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul wrote on X that Germany, “as a close US ally,” shared the same goal as Washington: Iran must completely and verifiably renounce nuclear weapons and immediately reopen the Strait of Hormuz, as also demanded by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Merz, for his part, reaffirmed on the same day Germany’s willingness, under certain conditions, to participate in a mission to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. “If you (Trump) want us to help you in such a conflict, then call us beforehand and ask us,” the chancellor declared on the TV program hosted by Caren Miosga.

Berlin thus continues to stand behind the war, even if it comes into conflict with Washington over tactics, pace, immediate costs and planning.

The reason for these conflicts ultimately lies in the clash of differing imperialist interests. The federal government supports the attack on Iran but pursues its own objectives. It does not want to be a spectator in the redivision of the Middle East but an active player.

That Berlin is already positioning military assets for this purpose is shown by the deployment of the minesweeper “Fulda” to the Mediterranean in preparation for possible participation in a mission around the Strait of Hormuz. When Merz criticizes US war policy, it is not because he opposes the war but because he fears that Washington could escalate the situation strategically and economically in a way that damages key German interests.

Above all, however, Germany’s ruling class fears that an expanding war in the Middle East could undermine the most important front of its own imperialist efforts: the NATO offensive against Russia in Ukraine. There, Berlin and the European powers are now assuming the leading role.

During the visit of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to Berlin, a new “strategic partnership” was signed. Germany and Ukraine agreed on closer cooperation in arms production, including a joint drone program, the delivery of thousands of drones, and investments of several hundred million euros in Ukrainian “deep strike capabilities,” i.e., long-range offensive capabilities.

Following Trump’s missile halt, these plans are being pursued even more intensively. CDU foreign policy expert Roderich Kiesewetter declared after Trump’s announcement that no US intermediate-range weapons would be stationed in Germany: “We could jointly develop such missiles with Ukraine.” The US withdrawal is thus being used as a pretext to intensify the escalation of war against Russia. Ukraine is being used not only as a proxy in the war against Russia but as a partner in building European and German offensive weapons.

The attempt to downplay the conflict with Washington therefore also serves the purpose of concealing the far-reaching consequences of this development. The ruling class knows that its policy will meet with explosive social and political resistance. The most extensive rearmament since Hitler, the preparation of conscription and a war economy, the reorientation of industry and infrastructure toward military needs, and the increasingly open war offensive against Russia and in the Middle East can only be enforced through massive attacks on social and democratic rights at home. The more the crisis of NATO and transatlantic relations intensifies, the more aggressively Berlin reacts both externally and internally.

The conflict with the US is not a temporary episode. It is an expression of the unraveling of transatlantic relations and NATO. The sharp transatlantic conflict was already visible in the dispute over Greenland at the beginning of the year. Now the same contradictions are emerging sharply on the war fronts in the Middle East and against Russia, in troop deployments, missile programs, and trade policy. Behind the phrases of “responsibility,” “deterrence,” “strategic autonomy,” and the supposed defense of “freedom” and “democracy,” German imperialism is pursuing its own aggressive great-power policy.

Workers and young people must not be deceived by this. Merz and the federal government stand no more for “peace” than the warmongers in Washington. While Trump prepares the next escalation against Iran and responds to differences among the still nominally allied NATO powers with blackmail, troop withdrawals and a tariff war, German imperialism is pursuing the goal of its own independent war capability with Russia as its main target. The answer to this madness can only be the building of an independent international movement of the working class against world war, rearmament and capitalism.



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