Statement of Senator Mansfield - It's Past Time to Reduce U.S. Military Forces in Europe

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001
IT'S PAST TIME TO REDUCE U. S. MILITARY FORCES IN EUROPE

by

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United States Senator

It is long past time that a substantial number of American military personnel and their dependents in Europe be brought home to the United States. I have advocated such a substantial reduction in our forces in Europe on the basis of both principle and economics.

It is also time that the countries of Western Europe—which have regained their prosperity since the war—should play a greater part in their own defense.

I have never advocated an abrupt withdrawal or draw-down of U. S. forces in Europe. I believe that such a withdrawal should be gradual in fairness to our allies.

At one time the United States had as many as 385,000 military personnel in Western Europe. That number has declined to a little under 300,000 at present. Yet over-all we now have about 525,000 servicemen and dependents in Europe a quarter of a century after the end of the war.

Although the direct costs to the United States are said to be about three billion dollars a year, it takes about $14 billion a year out of our defense budget to maintain the forces we have in Europe.
The NATO meeting in Brussels in early December 1970 was to me a deep disappointment because of the firm pledge made by the executive branch of the U. S. government to maintain the present level of U. S. forces in Europe. I was also disappointed by the response of our NATO allies to our pressing financial burdens. America's NATO partners are getting off very cheaply at a proposed figure of $195 million a year over the next five years. The compromise reached between President Nixon's administration and America's NATO allies only defers a problem which calls for drastic attention.

The end result will be, in my judgment, a Western European continent weaker than ever and the possibility that the problem will be solved at some time in the future in a hasty and unwise manner.

It is argued that we are waiting for the Soviet Union to offer us a quid pro quo to reduce our costly contest. If that is the case, if we intend to wait until the Soviet Union makes a substantial reduction of its troops in Eastern Europe, we are going to wait a very long time. If that is our policy, we had better become accustomed to maintaining a virtually permanent American presence in Western Europe.

I had hoped that the Nixon administration would, after June 30, 1971, begin a substantial reduction of American troops and dependents in Western Europe. While economic considerations influence my thinking, they are of secondary significance. There is a more important principle at stake.

As I understand the Nixon Doctrine, its purpose is to maintain a low profile all over the world--to bring about a gradual withdrawal of American troops from abroad and to emphasize that the people in the regions concerned should defend themselves with our material assistance. Yet, the Doctrine does not seem to be applied in Western Europe.
I intend to do all that I possibly can to try to bring about a substantial reduction of American troops and dependents in Europe. I think that the American people want to see such a reduction. And I think that a majority of the U.S. Senate wants to see such a reduction.
A U. S. TROOP WITHDRAWAL FROM EUROPE IS INADVISABLE

By Senator Jacob Javits

(Editor's note: A long-time Republican senator from New York state, Mr. Javits is a member of the senate's prestigious Foreign Relations committee. He is a staunch supporter of NATO and is chairman of the North Atlantic Assembly's political committee. He served as an army officer in Europe in World War II.)
I could see no greater irony than for the United States to prejudice its vital security interests in Europe through an impatient withdrawal of its forces from Europe. America's security interests in Europe are paramount. They demand first priority. It is a price the United States must be prepared to continue to pay.

America's allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, particularly Western Germany, are haunted by a fear of a U.S. pullout of its 300,000 troops which they believe would leave them naked before the coercive power of the Soviet Union.

There is a strong current of opinion in high positions in Western Europe which believes there would be swift and silent unravelling of NATO if the United States made significant substantive cuts in the level of troops it maintains in West Germany.

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The next stage, according to this view, would be the imposition of a Manichean-type relationship by the U.S.S.R. on Western Europe.

This is a situation which may not be congenial to the desires of the United States, but I am convinced that it is a reality which must be accepted in determining U.S. policy. Its implications, in the bluntest terms, mean that the maintenance of substantially current U.S. troop levels in Europe is necessary to protect U.S. security interests there.

The United States could deal itself out of a major role in shaping a comprehensive European settlement by a premature draw down of our troops. The threat to our security interests in Europe today is not that of direct military attack. Rather, it is rooted in the psychology and history of Western Europe.

While I can fully understand the reasoning—as seen from the American vantage point—behind the Senate resolution, which calls for substantial reductions in U.S. troops in Europe, I deeply believe that such a move at this time could gravely compromise vital U.S. security interests by precipitating a disintegration of NATO.

The effect of substantial U.S. troop reductions at this time would be determined by the current psychological realities of Western Europe, which are characterized by a pervasive sense of weakness in relation to the
U.S.S.R. Whether this psychological reality is justified from an
objective American perspective, is not the question. In my judgement
the United States must base its policy on the political and psychological
realities as we find them, rather than as we might wish them to be.

All of this does not mean that the United States should not continue
to insist on a more equitable distribution of the burden sharing as
respects the military posture of NATO and the cost to it of maintaining
300,000 troops in Europe. I believe the United States must continue to
take a firm line in negotiations on this question.

However, it is my impression that a new awareness is taking
shape in Europe regarding the importance to European security of the U.S.
conventional military presence there, as well as a new awareness that the
status quo is not acceptable to the United States.

Europe is perhaps appraising whether the United States is all that
big and all that important now that Europe has found some economic
competence, too. I feel I know the answer but Europe may have to find
out anew. I see a great moment of truth looming—really the big crisis of
the post-World War II Western World.

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I do not find that this new awareness of the importance to Europe of the U. S. military presence and the concurrent new awareness of the inevitability of change in the status quo, to have been as yet galvanized into an effective European opinion offering realistic alternatives.

The first efforts, under German leadership, to organize an institutional system of "burden-sharing" to relieve the financial and balance-of-payments costs to the United States of its forces in Europe have produced meager and disappointing results.

A hopeful trend is perceptible but the kind of concrete actions by America's European allies needed by the friends of NATO in the United States to insure that they can hold the line against precipitous U.S. troop withdrawals has not yet galvanized.

I think there is an insufficient sense of urgency on this score in Europe.

However, I think there is general agreement on both sides of the Atlantic that the time has come for a rejuvenated and more unified Western Europe to assume a much larger share of the responsibility for its security.

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The question is whether the mood for retrenchment in the United
States will move that much faster than the movement in Europe for unity
and self reliance in security matters.

While I feel there must be a greater American understanding of
legitimate European concerns on the question of troop levels and
security, I feel strongly that a greater European understanding of American
misgivings and concerns is needed also. And I believe that the developing
crisis in the Mediterranean and Mideast--precipitated by the bold Soviet
thrust to outflank NATO--offers an opportunity to provide the decisive test
for implementing this new European understanding of U. S. problems in
the years just ahead.

Unless there is solidarity between the North American and the European
partners of NATO in meeting the Soviet challenge in the Mideast and
Mediterranean, there may arise serious questions that NATO has a meaningful
and viable future even as a military alliance. It has stood the test of
European disenchantment with Vietnam but it may not be able to stand the
same test as to the Middle East.

Thus far the United States has received very little support and
assistance in meeting the direct challenge posed by the Soviet drive for
hegemony in the eastern and southern littoral areas of the Mediterranean basin. The Soviet complicity in the cheating on the Suez standstill and ceasefire shows the high risk the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is willing to take in the Middle East. If this continues to be the case, I think there will be a psychological reaction in the United States which could hasten and deepen the possibility of heavy withdrawal of U.S. forces in Europe.

There is also the question of West German Chancellor Willy Brandt's "eastern policy" which is also the Kremlin's "western policy." The Soviet objective in "Ostpolitik" negotiations, of course, is to advance its foreign policy goals—which in Europe include the dissolution of NATO, the removal of U.S. influence and military presence, and the imposition of Soviet dominance over the economy and politics of Western Europe.

However, I have faith that the free peoples of the west can and will stick together and hold their own, and that the "Ostpolitik" negotiations will succeed in advancing the security of all of Europe, and in hastening the evolution toward cooperation and peace of the communist societies of the U.S.S.R. and east Europe. Nonetheless, the outcome hangs in the balance.