

DoD Germany Policy Chief Changes in U.S. Defense Posture

Dr. James Anderson testified on 30 Sep 2020 before the House Armed Services committee about proposed changes to U.S. defense postures in Germany and the European theater. "One important initiative to advance the NDS and to ensure a focus on these priorities is the ongoing comprehensive review of all combatant commands as part of the U.S. European Command review," he noted. A goal is to develop options for posturing base forces to compete more effectively and respond to contingencies both within Europe and globally, he said. To that end, the acting undersecretary said Defense Secretary Dr. Mark T. Esper's five core principles will guide those options by:

- Enhancing deterrence of Russia;
- Strengthening NATO;
- Reassuring allies for improving U.S. strategic flexibility and Eucom's operational flexibility; and
- Taking care of service members and their families.

Anderson said Esper announced in July an update on the status of the U.S. European Command's force posture review following a decision by the White House to limit the number of assigned, active-duty service members in Germany to 25,000 and the DOD's concept to reposition some U.S. forces within Europe and the U.S. to be better situated for great-power competition. The review, he noted, yielded a concept for nearly 12,000 military service members to be restationed from Germany, with almost 5,600 restationed in other NATO countries, and about 6,400 returning to the United States. "The realignment concept includes consolidating headquarters to strengthen operational agility, repositioning some forces in the United States to focus on readiness, and to prepare for rotational deployments and deploying rotational forces to the Black Sea region, NATO's southeastern flank, to improve deterrence," Anderson said. The acting undersecretary outlined the concept's four pillars:

- The consolidation of various U.S. headquarters in Europe outside Germany, including in some cases co-locating headquarters at the same locations as their NATO counterparts in Belgium and Italy. That would help strengthen NATO and improve operational efficiency and readiness with more than 2,000 service members in these headquarters.
- The nearly 4,500 members of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment would return to the United States, as other Stryker units begin rotations further east in the Black Sea region, giving DOD the more enduring presence to enhance deterrence and reassure allies along NATO's Southeastern flank.
- Some 2,500 airmen based in the United Kingdom, who are responsible for aerial refueling and special operations and who had been scheduled to rebase to Germany, would remain in the U.K., ensuring the uninterrupted readiness and responsiveness of those units.

- A fighter squadron and elements of a fighter wing would be repositioned to Italy, moving them closer to the Black Sea region and rendering them more capable to conduct dynamic force employment and rotational deployments to NATO's Southeastern flank.

"This concept to reposition our forces in Europe constitutes a major strategic shift, wholly aligned with the NDS and consistent with other adjustments the [United States] has previously made with NATO," Anderson said. "Over NATO's 71-year history, the size, composition and disposition of U.S. forces in Europe has changed many times. As our planning for the current realignment matures, we will be sure to communicate frequently with Congress and with our NATO allies to maintain visibility and foster cooperation," he said.

As DOD continues to put the NDS in place, the efforts at enhancing its European posture beyond the EUCOM combatant command review have shown recent successes, the undersecretary said, including the signing of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement with Poland in August, which will enable an increased, enduring U.S. rotational presence in that country of about 1,000 U.S. military personnel. These elements are in addition to the 4,500 U.S. military service members already on rotation in Poland and include infrastructure and logistical support provided by Poland, he said.

"Our continued efforts to streamline operations across Europe — including through modernized and new agreements with NATO allies, especially on the Eastern flank — directly support our NDS principles by improving operational flexibility and enhancing deterrence," Anderson told the committee. "The department is confident that these continuing efforts will help us adapt the force and optimize our force posture in Europe as we seek to deter malign actors."