The Improbable Permanence of a Commitment

America's Troop Presence in Europe during the Cold War

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When the U.S. Senate held hearings in 1949 on the North Atlantic Treaty, Iowa Senator Bourke B. Hickenlooper asked Secretary of State Dean Acheson a simple question about the government's plans for the defense of Europe: "Are we going to be expected to send substantial numbers of troops over there as a more or less permanent contribution to the development of these countries' capacity to resist?" Acheson's reply was unequivocal: "The answer to that question, Senator, is a clear and absolute NO!"[1] This response could hardly have been more erroneous. Today, even with the Cold War long over, a substantial number of U.S. troops are still based in Europe, most of them in Germany. From 1953, U.S. forces (including Air Force as well as Army personnel) in Germany totaled as many as 300,000 soldiers. In the late 1960s this number fell to roughly 250,000. The figure rose again to more than 280,000 in the 1980s, and only after 1989 was the troop strength gradually reduced to the present size of approximately 70,000 (see Table 1).[2] The European Command consists currently of about 100,000 personnel.[3]

Why was Acheson so wrong, and did he deliberately mislead the Senate? Certainly, the political circumstances of the early 1950s prevented a rapid end to the troop commitment. Most likely, Acheson had in mind a timeline different from that envisioned by Senator Hickenlooper. The secretary of state was

1. *North Atlantic Treaty Hearings before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations: Administration Witnesses, April–May 1949* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), p. 47.

2. On the history of the U.S. troop commitment in Europe, see Simon Duke and Wolfgang Krieger, eds., *U.S. Military Forces in Europe, 1945–70* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993); and Daniel Nelson, *A History of U.S. Forces in Germany* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987).

3. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2007–08* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 31–35.

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Table 1 U.S. Troop Strength in Germany 1945–2003

Year	*Army*	*USAF*	*Year*	*Army*	*USAF*
1945	2,613,000	67,860	**1974**	217,400	46,684*
1946	278,042	33,441	**1975**	217,400	45,795*
1947	103,749	21,053	**1976**	218,300	29,507
1948	91,535	23,015	**1977**	218,400	33,393
1949	82,492	19,181	**1978**	218,400	34,460
1950	79,495	19,436	**1979**	222,400	34,979
1951	121,566	29,758	**1980**	225,600	36,043
1952	256,557	30,377	**1981**	238,400	36,637
1953	243,842	40,896	**1982**	239,100	37,798
1954	251,500	35,560	**1983**	239,837	39,244
1955	247,600	41,650	**1984**	248,700	40,012
1956	250,300	39,218	**1985**	250,100	41,112
1957	235,000	38,052	**1986**	250,100	40,325
1958	227,800	34,372	**1987**	250,100	40,703
1959	229,700	33,203	**1988**	245,000	40,223
1960	226,500	33,132	**1989**	242,800	40,031
1961	232,900	38,248	**1990/91**	203,100	41,100
1962	277,600	36,339	**1992**	192,600	29,900
1963	251,600	36,724	**1993**	117,500	30,900
1964	263,000	38,140	**1994**	81,000	22,200
1965	262,300	37,354	**1995**	70,500	16,100
1966	236,700	35,951	**1996**	60,400	15,050
1967	215,000	38,184	**1997**	60,500	15,165
1968	210,000	32,303	**1998**	42,600	15,140
1969	225,000	32,200	**1999/2000**	51,870	15,270
1970	215,000	30,436	**2001**	56,000	12,400
1971	215,000	32,508	**2002**	57,300	15,650

Table 1 *(Continued)*

Year	*Army*	*USAF*	*Year*	*Army*	*USAF*
1972	215,700	30,438	**2003**	57,200	15,900
1973	216,900	40,069*	**2004**	53,300	15,900

*Figures for the whole European theater.

Sources: Data for 1945 to 1963 are from United States Army, Europe and Seventh Army, Historical Division, *The Replacement and Augmentation System in Europe (1945–1963),* March 1964, in Manuscript Division, U.S Army Center of Military History/DAMH-HSR. Data for 1964 to 1969 are from Daniel Nelson, *A History of US Military Forces in West Germany* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), p. 81. Data for 1970 and 1971 are from Craig H. Murphy, *U.S. Military Personnel Strength by Country of Location since World War II, 1948–73,* Rev. and Updated by C. Lee Evans (Washington, DC: U.S. Congressional Research Service, 1973). Data from 1972 onward are from annual editions of International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance* (London: IISS, 1973 to 2006).

keenly aware of the troops' centrality in the emerging transatlantic security system. The presence of U.S. forces made possible the political construction of the Western alliance. Moreover, without U.S. troops in Europe, nuclear deterrence would have lacked credibility. However, this does not explain why that commitment, which was new for the United States and unprecedented in scale and cost, was never significantly reduced throughout the Cold War.

This question has largely escaped the attention of researchers.[4] Many have taken for granted that the Soviet military threat and the presence of large armies on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain are sufficient to explain the presence of U.S. forces. Indeed, the sharp reduction in troop numbers after 1989 would seem to support such an assumption. The core of this argument is that the soldiers constituted a tripwire against possible Warsaw Pact aggression. Because U.S. personnel were far outnumbered by Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces, the main function of the troop presence was to trigger an American response in case of a Soviet attack on West European territory. Nevertheless, from a purely military-strategic point of view, this reasoning has its shortcomings. The troop commitment deprived the United States of the leeway to respond to an eventual military conflict in Europe in whatever way it wanted. Some members of Congress argued that it would make more sense to withdraw the troops to "Fortress America" and respond to vital threats in Europe from there, thus avoiding involvement in minor European squabbles. Nuclear weapons permitted deterrence of a major war and decreased the likelihood of domestic trouble. A token "tripwire" force supported by nuclear weapons

4. But see James McAllister, *No Exit: America and the German Problem, 1943–54* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 247.

would have been the logical solution. Indeed, this option was proposed by American critics of the troop commitment, whose ranks remained sizable throughout the Cold War. The ceaseless debate in the United States about troop deployments in Europe peaked in the late 1960s and mid-1970s when Senator Mike Mansfield repeatedly introduced legislation to bring U.S. forces back from Europe.

In this article, I will identify the various factors that militated against the permanence of the U.S. troop commitment. I will then show how, despite these pressures, the forces deployed in Europe remained largely intact. I will examine the role of U.S. soldiers in the transatlantic security structure and why this role was not affected by détente in the 1970s, including the negotiations on Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR). The ongoing debate about the U.S. troop commitment in Europe was part of a larger debate about the desirability (or lack thereof) of maintaining large garrisons abroad. What now seems an unquestioned tool of American global strategy was in fact precarious and unusual for U.S foreign policy, even during the Cold War. The exceptional nature of the troop commitment in Europe reflected the far-reaching changes in U.S. foreign policy more generally after World War II.

This discussion here substantiates the claim that scholars must integrate domestic factors into the history of the Cold War and take into account economic factors in the analysis of military-strategic phenomena. If we were to limit our scrutiny of the U.S. troop commitment to a strictly international point of view, and particularly if we were to examine the subject through the lens of power politics, a lengthy study would be unnecessary. Such a narrow focus would suggest the following scenario: Soviet troops were stationed in Eastern Europe, and their U.S. counterparts were stationed in Germany. Each side balanced the other, and when Soviet forces were gradually removed after 1989, the United States simply did the same (though not entirely). The permanence of the U.S. commitment, which was frequently criticized as an onerous burden for taxpayers, appears to vindicate the argument that political and security considerations dominated the international politics of the Cold War. In reality, though, domestic politics and economic factors played an essential role, perhaps even more so than military factors.[5] The domestic political and economic dimensions of the troop commitment will be the focus of this article, which will elucidate the political dynamics of Cold War politics between

5. On the military and socioeconomic impact of U.S. troops in West Germany, see Detlef Junker, ed., *GIs in Germany: The Social, Economic, Cultural, and Political History of the American Military Presence, 1945–2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For a convincing argument on the need to integrate Congress into the historiography of the Cold War, see Robert David Johnson, "Congress and the Cold War: Survey Article," *Journal of Cold War Studies,* Vol. 3, No. 2 (Spring 2001), pp. 76–100.

external threats and domestic exigencies (without, however, getting bogged down in the by-now stale debate between those who concentrate almost exclusively on the dynamics of the international system and those who claim that the Cold War was driven solely by the machinations of domestic elites).

Dilemmas of the U.S. Troop Presence in Europe

In the early 1950s, many Europeans and Americans felt insecure. The Korean War seemed proof enough of the inherently aggressive intentions of the Communist powers, and fears arose that the Soviet Union might make a similar move in Europe. Despite strong U.S. efforts to prop up the West European economies and encourage the Europeans to deploy substantial, well-equipped ground forces, the West European governments seemed incapable of achieving this goal in the short run.[6] The priority of economic growth and the stabilization of war-shattered societies (as well as the attempt to hold on to the remnants of colonial empires) impeded vigorous West European efforts to create large armies against the Soviet bloc. The large-scale stationing of U.S. and British forces proved to be the only way to solve the lingering security problem. On 9 September 1950, President Harry Truman announced that the United States would temporarily bolster its troop presence in Europe.[7] He stressed that a "basic element" of his decision was his expectation that the West European governments would match the U.S. commitment.[8] Behind this exhortation, which one still hears today in meetings of Western leaders, lay the intention of making Acheson's promise come true relatively quickly. This basic premise was strongly emphasized in NSC 82, the classified National Security Council report codifying the "troops to Europe" decision:

> It is the objective to assist the European nations to provide a defense capable of deterring or meeting an attack. When this objective is achieved, it is hoped that

6. For the general development of transatlantic relations during the early Cold War, see, for example, Timothy P. Ireland, *Creating the Entangling Alliance: The Origins of NATO* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992); Geir Lundestad, *"Empire" by Integration: The U.S. and European Integration, 1945–97* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Re-thinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

7. Bryan van T. Sweringen, "Variable Architectures for War and Peace: U.S. Force Structure and Basing in Germany," in Detlef Junker, ed., *The U.S. and Germany in the Era of the Cold War, 1945–68,* 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Vol. 1, pp. 217–224.

8. "Statement by President Truman on Increasing the Strength of U.S. Forces in Europe," in *Documents on International Affairs 1949–1950* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 332.

> the United States will be able to leave to the European nation-states the primary responsibility with the collaboration of the United States, of maintaining and commanding such forces.[9]

Despite the tense climate of the early Cold War, the decision to move sizable numbers of U.S. troops back to Europe so soon after World War II was not taken lightly. U.S. wartime planners, including President Franklin Roosevelt, believed that a permanent troop commitment would be impossible.[10] The Truman administration's success in gaining congressional authorization for this step required a major effort, despite the massive military, economic, and psychological mobilization engendered by the Korean War. U.S. officials and members of Congress questioned whether it was necessary to place American soldiers back in the line of fire. This would, after all, be the first time that U.S. ground troops were deployed on a massive scale during peacetime in Europe. In December 1950, former president Herbert Hoover publicly called for the eventual removal of all American forces from Europe and Asia and advocated a Fortress America strategy limited to the Western Hemisphere.[11] His position was supported by an influential group of senators, notably Robert Taft, who argued for a token force with a clear exit option.[12] The intense debate in Congress that followed Truman's announcement revealed congressional concerns that military deployments in Europe might lead to a major shift in foreign policy and give the administration a free hand in using U.S. forces abroad.[13] Despite these misgivings, Congress approved the commitment after the so-called Great Debate in 1951. The main reasons, apart from the containment argument, were the assurances of the administration that the commitment would be limited, that Congress would be involved in future decisions regarding troop levels, and that in the not-too-distant future Europe would provide for its defense by its own means.[14]

9. From the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense to the President, 8 September 1950, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States,* 1950, Vol. III, p. 277 (hereinafter referred to as *FRUS,* with appropriate year and volume numbers).

10. McAllister, *No Exit,* pp. 16–17.

11. Herbert Hoover, "Our National Policies in This Crisis," *Vital Speeches of the Day,* Vol. 17, No. 6 (1 January 1951), pp. 165–167.

12. Phil Williams, *The Senate and US Troops in Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), pp. 54–55.

13. According to then Senate Minority Leader K. Wherry, "If Congress surrenders its powers to determine whether American troops shall join an international army in Europe, it will have set a dangerous precedent for the President to assign American troops to any other spot on the vast perimeter of Russia." See U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations and Committee on Armed Services, *Assignment of Ground Forces of the United States to Duty in the European Area: Hearings,* 82nd Cong., 1st Sess., 1951, p. 670.

14. Ted G. Carpenter, "US NATO Policy at Crossroads: The 'Great Debate' of 1950–51," *International History Review,* Vol. 8, No. 3 (August 1986), pp. 409–413; and Williams, *Senate,* pp. 98–107.

The debate demonstrated that the traditional conception of U.S. foreign policy, based on the conviction that the United States should not become entangled overseas, still held sway in influential circles.[15] This sentiment dated back more than 150 years to the farewell address of George Washington, who had warned that "it must be unwise for us to implicate ourselves by artificial ties, in the ordinary vicissitudes of [Europe's] politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities. . . . T'is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances, with any portion of the foreign world."[16] This argument resurfaced in all later troop reduction debates. Writing in 1940, Albert K. Weinberg noted that the isolationist tradition of U.S. foreign policy was aimed not at complete detachment but at "non-entanglement," meaning "the absence of a voluntarily incurred relationship, formal or informal, which removes the substantial control of the nation's action . . . from its own choice by playing it in the will, influence, or career of other nations."[17] The troop commitment was exactly such a step, creating an "artificial tie" as strong as could be imagined. The resulting clash between security objectives and ideological preconceptions was inevitable. As soon as political, strategic, or economic changes suggested the possible "return of our boys," the pressure for a corresponding decision would loom. Many Americans perceived the American military presence as a constant anomaly. Hence, why and how Americans continued to agree to such an unprecedented commitment for such a long time are questions that go to the heart of postwar U.S foreign policy.

Initially, few if any U.S. officials consciously wanted to tie the United States so closely to European affairs.[18] Dwight Eisenhower later recalled:

> From the beginning, people who really studied foreign and military problems have considered that the stationing of American forces abroad was a temporary expedient. . . . [T]he basic purpose of so stationing American troops was to produce among our friends morale, confidence, economic and military strength, in order that they would be able to hold vital areas with indigenous troops until American help could arrive.[19]

15. For an assessment of this thinking, see Eric Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured; American Foreign Policy for a New Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

16. George Washington, "Farewell Address" (19 September 1796), in John H. Rhodehamel, ed., *George Washington: Writings* (Washington, DC: Library of America, 1997), pp. 974–975.

17. Arnulf Baring, "American Isolationism, Europe, and the Future of World Politics," in Wolfram Hanrieder, ed., *The U.S. and Western Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 38.

18. Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace,* pp. 119–120.

19. Memorandum from Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Robert Cutler, to the Secretary of State, 9 September 1953, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States,* 1952–1954, Vol. II, p. 456 (hereinafter referred to as *FRUS,* with appropriate year and volume numbers). On Eisenhower's position regarding the troops, see also Thomas M. Sisk, "Forging the Weapon: Ei-

As Eisenhower's comments imply, the Soviet threat was not the only thing that made the deployment necessary. Behind the Truman administration's initiative was also an important economic rationale—burden-sharing. The mounting cost of the Cold War was a central objective in the American push for a West German defense contribution.[20] Although West German forces were not expressly mentioned in NSC 68, the document referred to "separate arrangements with Japan, West Germany and Austria which would enlist the energies and resources of these countries in support of the free world."[21] Thus, one of the core objectives of the commitment was to make itself superfluous. Policymakers apparently did not anticipate that as soon as real burden-sharing was achieved—which would necessarily entail a strong West German component—the U.S. military presence would acquire a new dimension. Not only would it constitute a protective shield against the USSR; it would also be a guarantee against renewed German militarism.[22] The contradiction between the burden-sharing idea and the political logic of the commitment was one of the dilemmas created by the decision to deploy troops.

A second dilemma was also present from the start. Henry Kissinger noted it succinctly in his memoirs: "The greater the pressures for troop withdrawals in the United States, the greater the disinclination of our allies to augment their military establishments lest they justify further American withdrawals."[23] The political mission of the troops—to stay as long as Europe was unable to defend itself—was inherently contradictory. Why should West European countries go to the expense of augmenting their conventional forces if by doing so they would expedite an American troop cut? Behind this reasoning lay a deeper structural factor that—in addition to the Soviet threat—explains the consensus in Western Europe in the 1950s and 1960s on the American military presence. By providing a deterrent against Soviet attack, the U.S. troops freed the West Europeans from having to build up their own

senhower as NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, 1950–2," in Günter Bischof and Stephen E. Ambrose, eds., *Eisenhower: A Centenary Assessment* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), pp. 64–86; and McAllister, *No Exit,* pp. 211–213.

20. This argument is not shared by those who emphasize political and military considerations in the decision to rearm West Germany. See, for example, David Clay Large, *Germans to the Front: West German Rearmament in the Adenauer Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). But these considerations were risky and ambiguous. In West Germany itself, rearmament was highly controversial and divisive.

21. "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security" (NSC 68), 14 April 1950, in *FRUS,* 1950, Vol. I, p. 286.

22. On the central role of U.S. forces in the "dual containment" of the Soviet Union and Germany, see Wolfram Hanrieder, *Germany, America, Europe: 40 Years of German Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 37–62.

23. Henry H. Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little & Brown, 1979), p. 394.

military forces on a commensurate scale. They were free to concentrate on economic progress, and because the United States itself benefited from Western Europe's economic recovery, the system initially worked well.

Over time, the troop commitment became what political scientists call a "sticky institution."[24] Once established, such an institution continues to exist even when the original reasons for its establishment become partially or entirely invalid. The removal of U.S. troops would have required a strong congressional effort. But during the early years of the Cold War, the government's actions abroad were less constrained than they became during the Vietnam War. Only a change in the international climate or initiatives from within the government could end the commitment.

Strategic and Economic Reasons against the Troop Commitment

As early as 1953, when President Eisenhower convened the NSC to discuss the U.S. troop presence in Europe, he remarked that "the real issue was not the pros and cons of redeployment, but rather how fast such a redeployment could be carried out."[25] His view of the troops as a temporary expedient was shared by many in the government, leading to regular troop reduction debates.[26] Most of these did not reach the public. One exception was the so-called Radford plan in mid-1956, a study by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) advocating a large reduction of U.S. conventional forces to save on the military budget. The background of the proposal was the nuclearization of Atlantic defense, which tended to render conventional defense less important.[27] In the face of strong allied protests, the administration ruled out heavy cuts.[28] However, from a strictly military point of view, a large-scale troop presence was of dubious value, consuming funds that could have been used for the creation of more flexible and modern forces. Secretary of

24. James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, "The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Orders," *International Organization,* Vol. 52, No. 4 (October 1998), pp. 943–969.

25. "Memorandum of Discussion at the 168th NSC Meeting," 29 October 1953, in *FRUS,* 1952–1954, Vol. II, p. 571.

26. John Duffield, *Power Rules: The Evolution of NATO's Conventional Force Posture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 92–94.

27. Saki Dockrill, *Eisenhower's New Look National Security Policy* (London: Macmillan, 1956), pp. 53–61.

28. Saki Dockrill, "The Diplomacy of Burden-Sharing in the Case of the Radford-Plan," in Hans Joachim Harder, ed., *Von Truman bis Harmel: Die BRD im Spannungsfeld zwischen NATO und europäischer Integration* (Munich: Oldenbourg Press, 2000), pp. 121–135.

Defense Charles Wilson voiced a widely shared sentiment in 1956 when he said that "current force levels in NATO were unrealistic in view of the new weapons systems and changing Soviet strategy."[29]

Another issue preoccupying the Eisenhower administration was the cost of the troops—and specifically, their foreign-exchange cost.[30] Enormous amounts of dollars had to be converted to European currencies—Deutschmarks in particular—to maintain the troops, contributing to the dollar drain.[31] In the late 1950s, the United States began experiencing balance-of-payments deficits. American economic preponderance and the credibility of the U.S. currency had made the dollar the world's leading international currency, thereby stabilizing international economic relations and preventing the monetary turmoil that characterized the 1930s. The economic security provided by the monetary system became an essential complement to the military security provided by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).[32] The possible unraveling of this system deeply worried the U.S. government. One element of the postwar Bretton Woods monetary system was the link of the American dollar to gold at a fixed rate. Doubts about dollar stability led to increasing conversion of international dollar reserves to American gold, causing U.S. gold reserves to shrink considerably.

Declassified documents show Eisenhower's enormous frustration with this situation. During his final years in office, his references to the necessity of bringing the troops home became a veritable mantra.[33] However, the tension of the 1958 Berlin Crisis made him hesitant to carry out his threats, lest the Soviet Union construe it as a sign of weakness.[34] Furthermore, many officials still believed that the monetary problem could be solved by less drastic measures.[35] Bureaucratic factors also militated against precipitate ac-

29. 285th Meeting of the NSC, 17 May 1956, in *FRUS,* 1955–1957, Vol. XIX, p. 310.

30. The foreign-exchange cost of American forces in Germany rose sharply throughout the 1950s. For Fiscal Years 1953–1955, it was $250 million; in 1957 it reached $425 million; and in 1959 it was $686 million. See "Briefing Paper for the Anderson-Dillon Mission: Support Costs," November 1960, in Box 14, Office of German Affairs, Bureau of European Affairs, Record Group (RG) 59, U.S. National Archives and Record Administration (NARA), College Park, MD.

31. On the history of this problem, see Francis J. Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958–1971* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

32. For an exposition of this argument, see Hubert Zimmermann, *Money and Security: Monetary Policy and Troops in Germany's Relations to the U.S. and the U.K., 1955–71* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

33. See for example, "Memorandum on Conference with the President," 16 October 1959, in *FRUS,* 1958–1960, Vol. IX, p. 70.

34. Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 105; and Duffield, *Power Rules,* pp. 133–134.

35. "Memorandum on Conversation SACEUR Norstadt-Eisenhower Conversation," 4 November 1959, in *FRUS,* 1958–1960, Vol. VII, Part 1, pp. 497–500.

tion.[36] The Cold War had given the State Department unusual clout in the policymaking process, including on matters of foreign economic policy. The Cold War also silenced potential critics of the troop commitment in Congress. The international situation, many felt, demanded that both parties in Congress rally behind the president. International crises typically give the executive in any country greater leeway in pursuing international policies. Thus, only relatively minor reductions were carried out in the late 1950s. By the same token, the decline of Cold War tensions in Europe during the 1960s brought the troop issue back into the domestic debate.

Troop Reduction Debates during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations

The administration of John F. Kennedy inherited the debate about U.S troops in Europe and decided that for strategic reasons ("flexible response") a strong conventional force in Europe still made sense.[37] However, Acheson later recalled that he

> was never quite sure how completely [Kennedy's] mind was sold on this. . . . The thing that continually seemed to bother the President about this was the continuation of so large a body of American troops in Europe without any plan that they should come home on a specific date.[38]

Kennedy's misgivings were attributable to his worries about the dollar problem. He saw the strength of the currency as a vital element of American power.[39] One way to try to reconcile military imperatives with economic necessities was by urging the Europeans to increase their own conventional defenses "as a matter of highest priority."[40] But these attempts proved futile, and the Kennedy administration tried instead to negotiate financial compensation for the foreign exchange losses, capitalizing on West Germany's insistence on an unchanged force commitment. After hard negotiations, the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) arranged that FRG weapons

36. On the impact of bureaucratic politics on foreign policy, see Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971).

37. Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace,* pp. 283–297.

38. "Oral History Interview of Dean Acheson by Lucius Battle," 27 April 1964, Washington, DC, pp. 11–13, in John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, MA.

39. "The deficit in our balance of payments and the problems associated with it continue to be major problems which influence national security policy along a broad front." See "National Security Action Memorandum No. 225," 27 February 1963, in *FRUS,* 1961–1963, Vol. IX, pp. 47–48.

40. "Policy Directive: NATO and the Atlantic Nations," 20 April 1961, in *FRUS,* 1961–1963, Vol. XIII, p. 288.

purchases in the United States would recycle the dollars streaming in.[41] A complicated deal serving numerous objectives emerged. The FRG used its monetary strength to forestall American troop reductions and to gain access to modern weapons; U.S. defense manufacturers profited from increased weapon sales; the U.S. Treasury Department used the receipts to balance its accounts; and the State Department was glad to defuse this major bone of contention with Europe.[42]

The so-called offset agreement of 1961 and its successor agreements came to play a major role in stabilizing the American troop presence, particularly when the traditional rationales lost their validity. As fears of direct Soviet aggression in Europe subsided, the United States tacitly accepted the status quo and began to strive for some kind of détente, causing the deterrent value of the troops to diminish.[43] The danger of revived German militarism also seemed increasingly far-fetched in light of the FRG's close economic, political, and military links to the West. U.S troops were no longer needed to "keep the Germans down." The escalating monetary problem reinforced these perceptions. When reports showed that the ambitious goal of eliminating the balance-of-payments deficit at the end of 1963 would not be fulfilled, Kennedy grew increasingly frustrated: "The President said that we must not permit a situation to develop in which we would have to seek economic favors from Europe . . . He thought we should be prepared to reduce quickly, if we so decided, our military forces in Germany."[44] An intense debate about troop reductions divided the Kennedy administration in 1962–1963 and soon reached the public.[45] The timing was unfortunate for the FRG, coming at the outset of Ludwig Erhard's chancellorship. News of impending troop reductions undercut the new chancellor's policy, which was founded on the steadfastness of the American commitment in Europe. A fierce conflict ensued between him and an influential minority advocating greater independence from

41. Zimmermann, *Money and Security,* pp. 123–141.

42. For the broader background, see Hubert Zimmermann, "Franz-Josef Strauß und der deutsch-amerikanische Währungskonflikt in den sechziger Jahren," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (Munich), Vol. 47, No. 1 (1999), pp. 57–85.

43. This is the argument of Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace.*

44. "Summary Record of NSC Executive Committee Meeting 38 (Part II)," 25 January 1963, in *FRUS,* 1961–1963, Vol. XIII, pp. 488–489. See also Kennedy's remarks to the NSC, 22 January 1963, in *FRUS,* 1961–1963, Vol. XIII, pp. 484–487.

45. In September 1963, Eisenhower gave a widely reported interview in which he recommended drawing down forces in Europe to one division. On 19 October 1963, Assistant Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric delivered a speech that seemingly hinted at reductions in connection with exercise Big Lift, which involved the transfer of large forces out of Europe and back. See Williams, *The Senate,* pp. 137–138.

the United States.[46] Members of this latter group, such as Helmut Schmidt and Franz-Josef Strauss, held that an unchanged U.S. troop commitment should not be a fixed dogma, particularly if it became a political straightjacket on West Germany's autonomy.[47] This domestic dilemma lay behind the unprecedented commitments Erhard undertook to stabilize the American troop level.

Initially, the protests of the Erhard government achieved their aim. In October 1963, Secretary of State Dean Rusk announced in West Germany that U.S. troop levels would not diminish: "We have six divisions in Germany. We intend to maintain these divisions here as long as there is need for them—and under present circumstances, there is no doubt that they will continue to be needed."[48] Prior to the speech, however, Rusk had told West German Defense Minister Kai-Uwe von Hassel that

> (1) If NATO does not meet its force goals—and most member countries have not—how can we explain it to our people and justify our continuing to meet our goals? (2) The offset. If our gold flow is not brought under control, the question could become an issue in next year's elections. The continuation of Germany's payments under the offset agreement is vital in this respect.[49]

When Erhard met the new U.S. president, Lyndon B. Johnson, shortly thereafter, Johnson repeated the assurances given by Rusk, but he emphasized even more strongly the importance he attached to continued offsets.[50] With the advent of the Johnson administration, the link between offsets and force levels became official policy—a point communicated to the West Germans. For the U.S. government, the troop commitment now served two related functions: bolstering the alliance with the FRG and acting as leverage to preserve the Bretton Woods system. However, the Vietnam War soon became a new element in the debate on U.S. troops in Europe, bringing Congress back into the debate.

46. Reiner Marcowitz, *Option für Paris? Unionsparteien, SPD und Charles de Gaulle 1959–69* (Munich: Oldenbourg Press, 1996).

47. "Time to Start U.S. Pullback in Europe: Interview with F. J. Strauss," *U.S. News & World Report,* 18 April 1966, p. 20.

48. "Address in the Paulskirche, Frankfurt, Oct. 27, 1963," in *U.S. Department of State Bulletin,* No. 1272, 11 November 1963, pp. 726–731.

49. "Memorandum on von Hassel-Rusk Talks," 25 October 1963, in Box 1, 1988add, Papers of George McGhee, Georgetown University Library, Washington, DC.

50. For the talks on 28–29 December, see *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bunderepublik Deutschland: 1963* (hereinafter referred to as *AAPBD: 1963*), Vol. III (Munich: Oldenbourg Press, 1994), pp. 1672–1713, esp. pp. 1673–1674, 1696. All translations from German are mine. On Johnson's policy toward Europe, see Thomas A. Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

Vietnam and Détente: The Domestic Debate about U.S. Troops in Europe

Vietnam accelerated the trend toward a different American view of commitments in Europe. Because of the West European governments' lukewarm response to the Vietnam War, the old burden-sharing controversy reemerged with new hostility. Why, Johnson asked, should the United States continue to make sacrifices for the defense of Europe if the Europeans would not lend a helping hand to their ally in time of war?[51] Vietnam also put additional pressure on the balance of payments.[52] Many officials in the Johnson administration, such as Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, were inclined to trim U.S. force levels for budgetary reasons. These tendencies were reinforced in February 1966 when French President Charles de Gaulle ordered all U.S. military personnel to leave France—an act that seemed to underline Europe's ingratitude and gave the impression that U.S. troops were not welcome.[53] As a result, Congress, which had long been critical of the troop commitment, reentered the debate with a vengeance. In August 1966 a group of influential senators introduced a Sense of the Senate resolution advocating large-scale force reductions in Europe. The resolution came to be called the Mansfield Resolution, after its main sponsor, the Democratic majority leader Mike Mansfield.[54] Mansfield argued that it was "not a desirable situation for a foreign power either in Eastern Europe or Western Europe to keep somewhere in the neighborhood of a million men in these two camps, a quarter of a century after the events which initially put them there."[55] He did not force a vote on his resolution, but he conveyed a warning of what was to come.

At the same time, the offset arrangements, which the U.S. government regarded as essential for the maintenance of stable troop levels, came unraveled. In September 1966, shortly before a visit to Washington, Erhard admitted that the FRG was unable to continue offset payments. Secretary of Defense McNamara, who saw the European contingent as an economic and political liability and wanted to shift troops to Vietnam, immediately seized

51. On Europe and the Vietnam War, see Christopher Goscha and Maurice Vaïsse, eds., *La guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe, 1963–1973* (Brussels: Bruylant, 2003).

52. Hubert Zimmermann, "Who Paid for America's War? Vietnam and the International Monetary System, 1960–75," in Lloyd C. Gardner, Andreas Daum, and Wilfried Mausbach, eds., *America, the Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and International Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press), pp. 151–174.

53. Williams, *Senate,* pp. 140–142.

54. U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record,* 89th Cong., 2d. Sess., 31 August 1966, pt. 16, p. 20554.

55. U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record,* 91st Cong., 2d Sess., 24 January 1970, p. S496.

the opportunity. A telephone conversation with the president just before Erhard's visit demonstrates his rationale:

> McNamara: From a military point of view, Mr. President, I think substantial force adjustments are justified. Unless we handle it right, however, there would be a terrible political cost. And that's our problem. . . .
>
> LBJ: Looks like to me, we ought to take advantage of this opportunity to make him tell us that he cannot afford to have our troops there.
>
> McNamara: . . . [A]nd he wants our troops out. That's what I think we ought to do, Mr. President. That's right. That's exactly right.[56]

Johnson, however, remained ambivalent, fearing the impact of troop cuts on the international standing of the United States. In a telephone conversation he told Senator Russell Long:

> Now, all that time, I had Rusk notify the Russians that, "Would you be interested in reducing some of your 22 divisions if we would make a corresponding reduction in NATO?" And they came back with a little indication—no commitment—emphasize, no commitment. But we got a response, a little feeler, that we thought was good. . . . I'm more anxious than any man on that goddamn committee on balance of payments to get troops out. But sure as hell I don't want to get them out with 22 [Soviet] divisions there and kick off World War III. And every damn man on that resolution will run and hide, by God, when you say "You kicked this thing off, you pulled a goddamned Chamberlain and you ran out and said you were going to pull out."[57]

In effect, Johnson was using the prospect of mutual force reductions to deflate congressional criticism of the troop commitment. Although this was not a new idea, it became, for the first time, a useful option. Already in 1967 a proposal for mutual reductions of NATO and Warsaw Pact forces in Europe was included in NATO's Harmel report.[58] In Reykjavik in June 1968, the NATO defense ministers recommended "that a process leading to mutual force reduction should be initiated" and that talks with the Soviet Union should be aimed at "balanced" cuts.[59]

However, with the Johnson administration on its way out, the prospect for talks was still highly uncertain. Although President Johnson agreed in

56. "Telephone Conversation of 26 September 1966," in *FRUS,* 1964–1968, Vol. XV, p. 435.

57. "Telephone Conversation Between President Johnson and Senator Russell Long," 1 September 1966, in *FRUS,* 1964–1968, Vol. XV, pp. 402–404.

58. Helga Haftendorn, *NATO and the Nuclear Revolution: A Crisis of Credibility, 1966–67* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 320–385.

59. For the so-called signal of Reykjavik, see "Declaration on Mutual and Balanced Force Reduc-

principle with the thrust of the Mansfield resolution, he decided to oppose it in order to preserve his autonomy in foreign policymaking. His stance was complicated, however, by the West Germans' decision to stop any further offset payments after Johnson refused to let Erhard off the hook and contributed to the chancellor's downfall.[60] To defeat the Mansfield resolution, the administration needed a new offset agreement. The traditional offset mechanism could no longer provide help for the weak dollar, bolster the U.S. security commitment to West Germany, and provide an important argument in the American domestic debate. The U.S. government tried to end the impasse through a trilateral (U.S.-UK-FRG) diplomatic review of the economic and political conditions for the troop commitment. The core problem was to find a mechanism that would keep the traditional security structure intact but would eliminate the burden on Anglo-American monetary policies.[61] The negotiations turned out to be rough going. Johnson, being keenly aware of his own historical legacy, feared accusations of being the leader who not only lost Southeast Asia but also destroyed NATO. Torn between this fear and the need to placate congressional critics, the president, after six months of indecision, finally settled for a compromise presented by his advisers. The continuation of the troop presence was traded for unparalleled West German cooperation in the management of the dollar.[62]

At the end of April 1967 a series of "agreed minutes" was signed that recorded the results of the trilateral discussions.[63] The United States officially cut 35,000 men and 96 of its 216 tactical aircraft in West Germany to placate Congress. Despite these reductions, the large-scale presence of American soldiers in the FRG was preserved—an enormous success given the desperate situation at the beginning of the year. However, the outcome was extremely close. The numbers, furthermore, tell only part of the story. The combat readiness of U.S. forces in Europe declined noticeably. In early 1968 the U.S. military estimated that more than 90 percent of all U.S. Army units in Europe were so short on manpower that they would be unable "to conduct sustained combat operations for 90 days."[64] A parallel development was the dete-

tions," in *NATO, Texts of Final Communiqués, 1949–74* (Brussels: NATO Information Service, 1974), p. 210.

60. On the Erhard visit, see Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe,* pp. 125–140; and Zimmermann, *Money and Security,* pp. 171–208.

61. David P. Wightman, "Money and Security: Financing American Troops in Germany and the Trilateral Negotiations of 1966/67," *Rivista di storia economica,* Vol. 5, No. 1 (1988), pp. 26–77.

62. "Memorandum for the President: US Position in Trilateral Negotiations," 23 February 1967, in Box 4, Bator Papers, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

63. "Final Report on Trilateral Talks," in *FRUS,* 1964–1968, Vol. XIII, pp. 562–569.

64. "Total of U.S. Troops in Europe," Memorandum by NSC aide Robert N. Ginsburgh to Walt W. Rostow, 19 March 1968, Doc. CK3100214291, Declassified Documents Reference System.

riorating quality of the troops.[65] A series of criminal incidents strongly damaged the image of U.S. soldiers in Europe.

Nixon and the Troops: Administration versus Congress

The debate initiated by the Mansfield resolution lasted for almost ten years and revived the uneasiness felt by many members of Congress during the hearings in 1949 about the founding of NATO and the commitment of U.S. forces.[66] The debate about the Mansfield resolution became particularly acrimonious after Richard Nixon was elected president in November 1968 and sought to bring "peace with honor" in Vietnam.

After deliberating for almost a year about the future of U.S. military deployments in Europe, the Nixon administration decided for several reasons to try to maintain existing troop levels. The decision was partly attributable to the fact that the Treasury Department and the civilian leadership of the Pentagon—each of which since the Eisenhower years had consistently advocated withdrawal—were dominated by the White House bureaucracy, which wanted to preserve existing deployments. Nixon's national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, interpreted American national interests on a systemic level and sought to ward off public and congressional pressure. This outlook was reflected in National Security Decision Memorandum 95, which noted that "in view of the strategic balance between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, it is vital that NATO have a credible conventional defense posture to deter and, if necessary, defend against conventional attack by Warsaw Pact forces."[67]

Kissinger and Nixon viewed NATO as the central pillar of U.S. influence in Europe and worried that any unilateral withdrawal might weaken the American position there. Kissinger also doubted

> that the very threat of U.S. troop reductions would bring about a greater defense effort by the united Europeans themselves. In actual fact, . . . Europe—though united it would be a Great Power—is not yet united, and Italians, Germans, Frenchmen, Beneluxers [*sic*], and Scandinavians think of themselves as small, in

65. Nelson, *History*, pp. 83–84.

66. For a contemporary assessment in the United States, see John Newhouse, ed., *US Troops in Europe: Issues, Costs, and Choices* (Washington, DC: Praeger, 1971).

67. "National Security Decision Memorandum 95: U.S. Strategy and Forces for NATO," 25 November 1970, in Box H-208, National Security Council Institutional Files, Nixon Presidential Materials, NARA. See also "SRG/DPRC Meeting on NATO Security Issues," Memorandum by Odeen for Kissinger, 25 May 1973, in Box H-067, Senior Review Group Meetings, Institutional Meeting Files, Nixon Presidential Materials, NARA.

> terms of military strength, and in need of protection by the only super power that happens to exist in the non-Communist world: the U.S. When big brother even appears to falter, the little brethren will not move forward courageously—as we seem to think—but, on the contrary, they will anxiously take several steps backwards.[68]

The troop presence, he believed, was necessary not only to deter the Soviet Union but also to stabilize Europe. Bonn's *Neue Ostpolitik* stirred anxiety in Washington.[69] The motive of controlling Germany was instilled with new meaning.[70] However, this motive appeared quite exaggerated to those who were not hard realists, as Senator Mansfield argued in a conversation with Kissinger and West German Chancellor Willy Brandt: "The fear of Germany is simply not plausible today."[71]

Another argument used by the administration was that the troops could serve as leverage in relations with Western Europe on economic issues. In a talk with Franz-Josef Strauss, a leading figure in the West German opposition, Kissinger commented: "You simply cannot expect the U.S. to defend an economic competitor. . . . You simply cannot expect this to go on indefinitely."[72] Hasty troop reductions would have weakened U.S. leverage with the Europeans as well as with the Soviet Union. Under Secretary of State Elliot Richardson elaborated this geopolitical argument in a speech in early 1970.[73] Later in the year, Nixon announced that

> The United States will, under no circumstances, reduce, unilaterally, its commitment to NATO. Any reduction in NATO forces, if it occurs, will only take place on a multilateral basis and on the basis of what those who are lined up against the NATO forces—what they might do. In other words, it would have to be on a mutual basis.[74]

68. Memorandum from Henry Kissinger to President Nixon, n.d. (probably October 1969), in *FRUS,* 1969–1976, Vol. I, p. 119.

69. Memorandum by Hans Helmuth Ruete, 27 November 1969, in *AAPBD: 1969,* Vol. II, p. 1339. See also Mary E. Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Détente, and Östpolitik, 1969–1973* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

70. "NSSM 83: A Longer Term Perspective on Key Issues of European Security," November 1969, in Box H-047, Senior Review Group Meetings, Institutional Meeting Files, Nixon Presidential Materials, NARA.

71. Luncheon Conversation between Brandt, Kissinger, Mansfield, et al., 29 September 1973, in Box 2318, Subject Numeric Files 1970–73, RG 59, NARA.

72. Memorandum of Conversation between Kissinger and Strauss, 10 September 1972, in Box 2, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Nixon Presidential Materials, NARA.

73. "The U.S. and West European Security," *Department of State Bulletin, 1970,* Vol. 62 (9 February 1970), p. 158.

74. "Speech by Nixon in County Clare, Ireland," 4 October 1970, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon, 1970* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), p. 806.

The Nixon administration's assessment is remarkably similar to that of the Kennedy administration ten years earlier. But the assessment turned out to be unstable. Why did the Nixon administration become such a fervent defender of existing troop levels in Europe? Evidence suggests that balance-of-power arguments were of only secondary importance in driving Nixon's policies on this matter.

Instead, the decisive motive was the president's desire to preserve his foreign policy autonomy against an increasingly assertive Congress. The troops became a core element in one of the most acrimonious executive-legislative conflicts after 1945. The fundamental issue was the balancing of responsibility for the conduct of foreign policy. Congress's challenge to executive dominance amid the furor of Vietnam prompted a sharp response from the administration. The issue came to the fore during the 1972 presidential election, when Nixon's Democratic opponent, Senator George McGovern, campaigned on the slogan of "Bring America Home," not only from Vietnam but also from Europe.[75] Ordinarily, the question of troop deployments in Europe would have remained a minor issue. As in the past, Nixon eventually would have concluded that U.S. troop strength in Europe was excessive and that cheaper means were available for projecting U.S. influence in Europe. In fact, planning for reductions in Europe had continued during the initial part of the Nixon administration (in an exercise codenamed REDCOSTE), with projections of major cuts.[76] The hostility between Congress and the president, however, made the issue a question of prestige and reduced the administration's leeway in undertaking limited reductions, lest they become a pretext for additional congressional requests.[77] Nixon himself was ambiguous about troop cuts, as evidenced by his remarks at a meeting with Republican congressional leaders in February 1970: "Again to the Mansfield resolution to bring troops home from Europe, if they pass the resolution to bring home two divisions, said the President, it would have a detrimental impact. We may do it ourselves, but we have to do it our way."[78]

The most serious of the many executive-legislative confrontations on the troop reduction issue occurred in May 1971 when Senator Mansfield proposed an amendment to the Military Selective Service Act that called on the administration to cut forces in Europe by 50 percent as of the end of the year.

75. Kissinger, *White House Years,* p. 1247.

76. "Memorandum from Kissinger to Under Secretary of State Richardson," 21 July 1969, in *FRUS,* 1969–1976, Vol. III, pp. 65–66.

77. John Yochelson, "The American Military Presence in Germany: Current Debate in the US," *Orbis,* Vol. 15, No. 4 (Fall 1971), pp. 784–807.

78. "Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant Buchanan to Nixon," 18 February 1970, in *FRUS,* 1969–1976, Vol. I, p. 194.

The amendment, if passed, would have been legally binding unless the president vetoed it and the Congress failed to overturn the veto.[79] The administration took the challenge very seriously and started a massive lobbying campaign that was supported by the old transatlantic establishment (Acheson, John J. McCloy, Lucius D. Clay, and others), former presidents Truman and Johnson, and a wide range of former ambassadors. Acheson denounced the Mansfield amendment as "asinine" and "sheer nonsense," and Nixon warned that the reductions would be an "error of historic dimensions."[80] The administration enlisted West European governments in the effort. All the European defense ministers agreed that the NATO force-planning exercises under way should be designed to help the U.S. government in this domestic debate.[81] The same purpose was served by the public assurances offered by the West Europeans that they would augment their defense capabilities—pledges that were never carried out.[82]

The debate over the Mansfield amendment also became the main impetus for U.S. pursuit of the MBFR talks. The West Europeans were well aware of this connection: "[The Mansfield amendment] results in pressure for the [U.S.] government to become active on the MBFR issue. This has resulted in public declarations and the idea to make a proposal for negotiations."[83] Kissinger claimed that "the Europeans invented MBFR to stop unilateral reductions."[84] Visitors to the United States reported that U.S. policy on the issue was shaped predominantly by domestic debates.[85] Administration officials privately informed the West German government that MBFR was mainly an "Anti-Mansfield operation."[86] West German leaders heartily approved of this effort, seeing distinct advantages in MBFR.[87] Troop reductions, they believed, would be compatible with *Ostpolitik* and would curb incessant American requests for financial help. The cuts would be domestically acceptable (especially given the recent negative image of the U.S. military), and the role of

79. Steven J. Brady, "Der amerikanische Kongress und die Bundesrepublik," in Detlef Junker, ed., *Die USA und Deutschland im Zeitalter des Kalten Kriegs,* Vol. II, *1968–90* (Munich: DVA, 2001), pp. 134–135.

80. Cited in Williams, *Senate,* pp. 183–184.

81. "Grewe to Auswärtiges Amt: Meeting of European Defense Ministers," 12 June 1970, in *AAPBD: 1970,* Vol. II, pp. 975–976.

82. "Bonn Warns U.S. on Troop Cutback," *The New York Times,* 15 May 1971, p. 9.

83. Ambassador Pauls to Auswärtiges Amt, 20 May 1971, in *AAPBD: 1971,* Vol. II, p. 811.

84. Conversation between Kissinger and French Minister of Defense, Michel Debré, 11 July 1972, in Box 24, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Nixon Presidential Materials, NARA.

85. Memorandum by Botschafter Roth, 3 July 1971, in *AAPBD: 1971,* Vol. II, p. 1048.

86. "Mutual Balanced Force Reductions," Memorandum by Graf zu Rantzau, 15 February 1970, in *AAPBD: 1970,* Vol. I, p. 25; and Kissinger, *White House Years,* pp. 399–402.

87. Memorandum for the Federal Security Council, 2 March 1970, in *AAPBD: 1970,* Vol. I, p. 343.

West German forces in Europe would become larger with a corresponding increase in their political weight.[88] Moreover, if German troops were included in the reductions, lower defense expenditure might be possible.[89]

MBFR proved important in the narrow defeat of the Mansfield amendment in the summer of 1971 and again in November of the same year. Paradoxically, it was Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev who provided the critical impetus for blocking the amendment's passage. As the debate intensified in Congress, Brezhnev called for the initiation of full MBFR negotiations, a move that allowed opponents of the Mansfield amendment to argue that unilateral cuts would be a concession to Moscow.[90] The precise motives behind Brezhnev's announcement are unknown, but presumably he preferred an American troop presence and relatively stable spheres of influence in Europe to a German-dominated central front.[91]

The MBFR negotiations, which officially began in 1973, did not receive enthusiastic backing after Mansfield's legislation was defeated. The Nixon administration was not prepared to take a definitive stance on MBFR at a time of domestic uncertainty.[92] Kissinger spelled this out in a guidance memorandum for a meeting between Nixon and British Prime Minister Edward Heath, advising the president to reaffirm his intention to "maintain troops at roughly present levels, provided the Europeans are making a vigorous defense effort on their own behalf." Kissinger also recommended that Nixon stress the need for an offset of the balance-of-payments impact from the troops. On MBFR, the U.S. government position was to avoid a quick reduction and to create the impression, for the benefit of Congress, that serious negotiations were in fact under way.[93] The talks dragged on throughout the 1970s without much progress.

Apart from the prospect of MBFR, the fading of the economic rationale for troop cuts helped the Nixon administration to parry Mansfield's challenge. In August 1971, Nixon abruptly ended the gold convertibility of the dollar, thus eliminating the fear of gold losses that had haunted his predeces-

88. The French, even in talks with the West Germans, cited this as one factor in their opposition to MBFR. See Ambassador Ruete to Auswärtiges Amt, 24 June 1971, in *AAPBD: 1971,* Doc. 210, p. 982, note 28

89. This possibility was emphasized by West German Defense Minister Helmut Schmidt. See Memorandum by Ambassador Roth, 28 June 1971, in *AAPBD: 1971,* Vol. II, p. 1029.

90. Jonathan Dean, *Watershed in Europe: Dismantling the East-West Military Confrontation* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1987), pp. 103–104.

91. Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, DC: Bookings Institution Press, 1985), p. 116.

92. "NSDM 142: Presidential Guidance on MBFR and a European Conference," 2 December 1971, in U.S. Department of State, *The Rise of Détente,* Vol. II.

93. "Kissinger Memo for the President," 31 January 1973, in *The Rise of Détente,* Vol. II.

sors. Although the concomitant fall in the value of the dollar made the commitment more expensive in budgetary terms, the balance-of-payments argument lost much of its force. This gave greater weight to the geopolitical arguments advanced by officials like Fred Bergsten of the NSC staff:

> What would be the signal to the Soviets if we were to do so? It could only be that the U.S. had become so pitifully weak on the economic and financial front that we could no longer make any pretense of maintaining our defense posture around the world.[94]

Kissinger readily agreed with this argument.

Nonetheless, the U.S. administration continued to seek offsets from West Germany, arguing that payments were needed to placate Congress.[95] State Department officials told Kurt Birrenbach, an FRG parliamentarian with close ties to the United States, that offsets played an important role in the ongoing conflict between Congress and the administration over foreign policy, including troop deployments. Without a satisfactory agreement, they warned, the danger of troop reductions would greatly increase.[96] New agreements were concluded, but U.S. officials found it increasingly difficult to pressure the West Germans. Helmut Schmidt, who was then defense minister, declared in the United States in 1970 that there was "no dogma that the U.S. troops have to remain once and for all in their present strength in Europe."[97] This reflected a tacit consensus in Bonn that U.S. disengagement was unavoidable in the long run.[98] The FRG's readiness to extend economic or political help for the sake of an unchanged troop level waned. The value of the forces declined as West Germans sought a peaceful rapprochement with the Eastern bloc, though they never came close to demanding the withdrawal of U.S. forces from West German territory, as de Gaulle had done in France in 1966.

Moving troops back from Vietnam to Europe helped to stabilize the levels. The Mideast War in October 1973 provided the Nixon administration with another justification for keeping forces in Europe (though not necessarily at the same level). The presence in Europe, the administration argued, was valuable if intervention was needed in the Middle East or other flashpoints—

94. "Information Memo to Kissinger," 3 December 1970, in *FRUS,* 1969–1976, Vol. III, pp. 119–120.

95. Ambassador Pauls to Auswärtiges Amt, Jan 19, 1970, in *AAPBD: 1970,* Vol. I, pp. 61–63. See also Docs. 13, 50, and 84, in *FRUS,* 1969–1976, Vol. III.

96. Birrenbach to Chancellor Brandt, 2 July 1971, in Vol. 342, Referat I A 5, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (PA-AA), Berlin.

97. "Speech to the Council of Foreign Relations, New York," 8 April 1970, *Mitteilungen des Bundespresse- und Informationsamts,* Vol. 49 (April 1970), p. 466.

98. See, for example, "Offset," Memorandum for Foreign Minister Scheel, 27 October 1971, in Vol. 342, Referat I A 5, PA-AA.

a factor that is still often cited for keeping U.S. soldiers in Europe.[99] Nixon used these arguments in 1973 when seeking to reverse Mansfield's initial success in getting an amendment passed in the Senate that requested roughly half of U.S. forces in Europe to be cut. A month after the amendment was adopted, a House-Senate conference committee agreed to delete it.[100] Again, the outcome of the debate was extremely close. In November 1973, both houses in Congress passed an amendment sponsored by Senators Henry Jackson and Sam Nunn that called on the administration to reduce U.S. troops abroad whose cost was not covered by allied payments. In the ensuing negotiations the West German government refused to make payments that would replace U.S. defense expenditures and offered instead to invest in the U.S. military infrastructure in the FRG, to buy more weapons, and to extend interest-free credits.[101] The Nixon administration accepted these offers and argued that the Jackson-Nunn amendment was fulfilled. After 1977, the intense congressional pressure subsided.

The congressional moves in the early 1970s were seen by the administration as a worrisome threat to U.S. credibility. Even if the Nixon administration, with its geopolitical and strategic outlook, was predisposed to defend the troop level in Europe, the president was at least as likely to reverse his positions if a failure to do so would seriously damage his electoral prospects. The defeat of the Mansfield amendment signaled that the commitment of troops to Europe on a long-term basis was no longer deemed exceptional even amid the severe strains imposed by Vietnam. Future challenges to the troop level were not as serious.

Although congressional activity never again reached this level, new debates about U.S. forces in Europe arose at various points in the late 1970s and 1980s because the principal arguments against the commitment remained valid. In June 1984, for example, Senator Nunn introduced an amendment calling for large-scale reductions if the West Europeans would not improve their defense efforts.[102] Again the amendment was defeated. Shortly before the end of the Cold War, many members of Congress, as well as other influential

99. Sizable U.S. weapon deliveries from West Germany to Israel after the cease-fire led to a bitter row between Washington and Bonn, which saw its attempts at neutrality undermined. See "Ambassador von Staden to Foreign Minister Scheel: Conversation with Kissinger," 26 October 1973, in *AAPBD: 1973,* Vol. III, pp. 1663–1668.

100. Nelson, *History,* p. 6.

101. "Memorandum from Political Director Peter Hermes," 1 February 1974, in *AAPBD: 1974,* Vol. I, Doc. 31, pp. 127–133. For the results of the talks, see "Memorandum by Vortragender Legationsrat I. Klasse (VL I) Ewald Muehlen," 29 April 1974, in *AAPBD: 1974,* Vol. I, Doc. 31, pp. 594–597.

102. See Helga Haftendorn, "Historische Motive, politische Entwicklung und rechtliche Grundlagen," in Dieter Mahncke, ed., *Amerikaner in Deutschland: Grundlagen und Bedingungen der transatlantischen Sicherheit* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1991), p. 8; and Brady, "Der amerikanische Kongress und die Bundesrepublik," pp. 137–138.

political figures such as Zbigniew Brzezinski and even Kissinger, advocated massive reductions.[103] After 1990 a sharp decline in U.S. force levels in Europe did in fact occur. With the Cold War over, this trend evoked no protests from the Europeans. Still, sizable contingents remained and became part of a controversy in the wake of the Iraq war in 2003, when Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld threatened to relocate them to friendlier East European countries. The debate confirmed that the motive of providing a tripwire for NATO, which once was the major reason for deploying the troops, is a thing of the past.[104]

Conclusions

This analysis of U.S. troop deployments in continental Europe during the Cold War highlights the need for the systematic inclusion of domestic and economic factors in the history of détente. The permanence of the large-scale U.S. troop presence stemmed from a much more complex constellation of policies than the parallel between the end of the Cold War and the drawdown of U.S. forces in the early 1990s indicates. Many different factors—the tradition of non-entanglement in U.S. foreign policy; the advent of new technologies (nuclear weapons, airlift capabilities); the slow but nonetheless considerable build-up of European capabilities; the growing economic pressures and political unrest; the emergence of détente; and the need to deploy troops to other trouble spots—came close to bringing sharp cuts much earlier. The fact that this did not happen was attributable, first, to the pathology of the West German situation. The West Germans could not provide the level of defense commensurate with their anti-Communist rhetoric and the goal of reunification that pitted them against the Eastern bloc. They depended on staunch U.S. support, symbolized by a stable troop level. In the 1960s, Bonn was able to guarantee this by relying on economic diplomacy. Another factor that contributed in the 1970s to the longevity of the troop commitment was the Nixon administration's desire to forestall congressional initiatives. These two factors—West Germany's growing financial power and Nixon's determination to avoid encroachments on executive authority—accounted for the improbable permanence of the U.S. military commitment.

Thus, the troop presence at times was much more fragile than it appears to have been in hindsight. More than twenty years passed before overseas mil-

103. Jeffrey Record, ed., *The Future of the U.S. Military Commitment to Europe* (Indianapolis: Hudson Institute, 1989), pp. 12–14.

104. See International Institute for Strategic Studies, "The U.S. Global Posture Review," *Strategic Comments,* Vol. 10, No. 7 (September 2004), p. 5.

itary deployments became an accepted part of U.S. foreign policy. The debates in the 1960s and 1970s underscored the importance of the passage of time. Once the deployments in Europe were accepted, they served as a precedent for U.S. policy elsewhere, paving the way for the establishment and expansion of America's military presence around the world—even after the disaster of Vietnam.

Finally, the troop-level debate during the Nixon administration indicates that the history of U.S. foreign policy during the period of détente and afterward was different from most of the traditional Cold War international history. One lasting legacy of the debates in the early 1970s, as well as of the Watergate scandal and other transgressions by the Nixon administration, was that Congress regarded the far-reaching autonomy of the executive as an unacceptable situation that was partly responsible for major failures such as Vietnam and for bitter executive-legislative conflict. Congressional efforts to rein in the executive through the War Powers Act and other measures buffeted U.S. international policy throughout the 1970s. This domestic competition accentuated the international economic developments in the late 1960s and 1970s that gave rise to Mansfield's push for troop cuts. In all these ways, U.S. foreign policy in the 1970s was shaped by a larger and more complex set of factors than in earlier decades.

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