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Pentagon proposes major shift of U.S. troops

By MICHAEL R. GORDON
New York Times

WASHINGTON -- The Pentagon has proposed a plan to withdraw its two Army divisions from Germany and undertake an array of other changes in its European-based forces, in the most significant rearrangement of the U.S. military around the world since the beginning of the Cold War, according to U.S. and allied officials.

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- [Graphic: U.S. Troops Overseas](#)

Pentagon policymakers said the aim is to afford maximum flexibility in sending forces to the Middle East, Central Asia and other potential battlegrounds. But some experts and allied officials are concerned that the shift will reduce Washington's influence in NATO and weaken its diplomatic links with its allies, all at a time of rising anti-American sentiment around the world.

The proposal to withdraw the divisions comes at a time when the Army is stretched thin by deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. But Pentagon officials said the move, which has been under consideration for some time and involves forces in Asia as well as in Europe, is unrelated to the current fighting.

Under the Pentagon plan, the Germany-based 1st Armored Division and 1st Infantry Division would be returned to the United States. A brigade equipped with Stryker light armored vehicles would be deployed in Germany. A typical division consists of three brigades and can number 20,000 troops if logistical units are included, though these two divisions have only two brigades each in Germany, with the other brigade in the United States.

In addition, a wing of F-16 fighters may be shifted from their base in Spangdahlem, Germany, to the Incirlik base in Turkey, which would move the aircraft closer to the Middle East; a wing generally consists of 72 aircraft. Under the Pentagon plan, the shift would be carried out only if Turkey gives the United States broad latitude for using them, something that some officials see as unlikely.

The Navy's headquarters in Europe would be transferred from Britain to Italy. Bush administration officials are also discussing plans to remove some F-15 fighters from Britain and to withdraw the handful of F-15s that are normally deployed in Iceland, though final decisions have not been made.

Administration officials said Douglas Feith, the undersecretary of defense for policy, recently briefed German officials on the plan. The Germans were told that the withdrawal plan had yet to be formally approved by President Bush and that the United States would listen to their concerns, a U.S. official said.

Officials said they expected the major decisions on the rearrangement to be made in a month or two. But the main direction of the Pentagon plan appears to be set.

"Everything is going to move everywhere," Feith said a year ago, as the Bush administration was beginning to develop the details of its plan. "There is not going to be a place in the world where it's going to be the same as it used to be."

For Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, the reasons for the reshuffling seem clear and compelling: that the purpose of military units is to fight and win the nation's wars, and they should be stationed in locations that enable the United States to use them most efficiently and with minimal political restrictions.

"It's time to adjust those locations from static defense to a more agile and a more capable and a more 21st century posture," Rumsfeld told reporters on Thursday on a flight to Singapore.



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