

Troop Withdrawals from Europe: Cold War American Foreign Policy and Military Strategy

Allen Pietrobon, Wilfred Laurier University

Abstract

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In 1971, U.S. Senator Mike Mansfield introduced a proposal calling for a fifty percent reduction of the number of U.S. troops stationed in Europe. The proposal was ultimately voted down in the Senate but it sparked sweeping changes in the defence policies of some major NATO nations. This paper examines the pre and post “Mansfield Amendment” defence policies of Britain, France, and West Germany, and strives to answer the question of how a single failed Senate proposal could lead three major NATO countries to drastically change their defence policies.

Introduction

From the beginning of the Cold War, the foreign policy of the United States had been driven by fierce anti-Communism. This drive to eradicate Communism was bolstered at home by a prosperous economy and a desire to maintain preponderant power in order to stem the spread of Communism.¹ During the early 1970s, with a looming recession, a balance-of-payments crisis, and the faltering war in Vietnam, factions within the United States began to

¹ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 36.

push the U.S. government to consider withdrawing a portion of its military troops from the European theater. The United States could no longer afford to vigorously pursue the aggressive anti-Communist foreign policy of past eras.²

Debate over the burden of maintaining large numbers of U.S. troops in Europe was nothing new. The Pleven Plan of 1950, and later the European Defence Community (EDC) were attempts to create a “European army” which would provide the same level of defence at little cost to the U.S.³ Even Eisenhower’s “massive nuclear retaliation” policy placed heavy reliance on nuclear weapons in an attempt to cut spending on conventional troops.⁴ The question of force levels and burden sharing was (and remains) a major point of contention in NATO. In 1971, this issue boiled over in a very public way when Democratic Senator Mike Mansfield introduced a proposal that called for a 50 percent reduction in the number of U.S. troops serving in Europe within seven months. The amendment ultimately failed to pass but the question of reducing U.S. troops in Europe sparked controversy in both the United States and Europe and succeeded in changing the way the United States and Europe looked at European defence.

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² During the 1961 Berlin Crisis, John Kennedy increased the U.S. military in Europe to nearly its full wartime strength but this was no longer financially possible in the early 1970s.

³ Ellen Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 92.

⁴ Robert Buzzanco, *Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 36.

In the study of Cold War international relations, often the focus is on the impact that official policies had. However, this paper explores a case in which a single amendment that failed to pass had a profound impact on many important NATO countries. It will argue that although Mansfield's amendment ultimately failed, it sparked sweeping changes in the defence policies of Britain, France, and West Germany. The paper begins by outlining NATO's military position in Europe pre-1970, in order to set a point for comparison. It then examines Mansfield's troop withdrawal proposal and the congressional debate that ensued. Finally, European defence stance changes which took place as a direct result of Mansfield's proposal are explored.

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American's position in Europe before 1970

From 1945 to 1965, Western Europe garnered a great deal of U.S. political and military attention. Although U.S. attention was occasionally diverted to international conflicts such as the Korean War,⁵ Europe, and Berlin in particular remained a major source of Cold War tensions. On the international political level Europe was a place where America held immense power and prestige. The American and international public, even with all their doubts about Vietnam and the Cold War, still believed that America was taking the proper steps in Europe. It was Earnest May's informed view that:

⁵ Even the Korean War, however, was initially viewed as a distraction so Stalin could push his way into Europe.

Re-runs of pictures of Berliners cheering the airlift helped keep some of the old faith flickering. It was hard for any American—even a doctrinaire ‘revisionist’—to see the Berlin Wall and not come away convinced that there was some moral difference between the Cold War rivals.⁶

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The notion that the United States was a global super power evolved in part from the Berlin Airlift in 1948 - where the clash of two political ideals was witnessed en-mass by the public for the first time. During and after the airlift the U.S. took major steps to gain public credibility in Europe. From 1948 on, the United States pledged to defend West Berlin’s population from Soviet aggression, and the European community welcomed the role that the United States played as “the leader of the free peoples, the guarantor of allied security, the financial bulwark of the non-Communist world and the apostle of peace.”⁷ United States prestige in Europe continued to improve in the early 1960s when both Eisenhower and Kennedy stood up to Khrushchev over the Berlin Crisis, and a year later when Kennedy forced Khrushchev to back down during the Cuban Missile Crisis. After 1965, the focus turned to Vietnam as the U.S. became more involved there. As the Vietnam War intensified, NATO was dealt a blow when

⁶ Ernest May, “American’s Berlin,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 77, No. 4. (1998): 159.

⁷ Jacob Javits, “The U.S.- Sick Man of the West,” *New York Times*, 16 June 1971, 45.

France withdrew its forces from the integrated command in 1966. Although French troops served more of a reserve roll, this still meant an increased burden on U.S. troops in Europe.⁸

In 1970, approximately 310,000 U.S. troops were stationed across the continent. Of these, 215,000 faced the Soviet border in West Germany.⁹ An additional 24,000 served in the U.S. Navy Sixth Fleet, patrolling European waters.¹⁰ A force of this size was considered an adequate deterrent to Soviet aggression during the 1950s and early 1960s, but the situation changed in the late 1960s. The U.S. was devoting its military resources to South East Asia while the Soviet Union continued to bolster its military position in Europe. By 1970, the United States was faced with the prospect of being weaker than the Soviets in Europe; directly opposing the U.S. army in West Germany were 400,000 Soviet soldiers in East Germany stationed in combat-ready divisions.¹¹

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In addition to men, the Soviets had more tanks and antitank guns. By 1970, it was believed that the Soviet Union had reached parity with the West, thereby nullifying the tactical advantage enjoyed by NATO.¹² The problem, as seen by Democratic Senator Mansfield was less a matter of

⁸ K. Hunt. *NATO Without France: The Military Implications* (London: Institute for Strategic Studies, 1966), 20.

⁹ John McCloy, "The Mansfield Amendment: No," *New York Times*, 19 May 1971, 47.

¹⁰ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac: Vol. XXIX* (Congressional Quarterly: Washington, DC 1973), 925.

¹¹ "NATO: The Bargaining Begins," *Time*, 14 June 1971.

¹² William B. Husband, "Soviet Perceptions of the U.S. "Positions-of-Strength" Diplomacy in the 1970s," *World Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (1979), 497.

Soviet advancement but a matter of U.S. troops in Europe being “inflated and musclebound, with far more logistical than combat capability.”¹³ Some elements in the U.S. military also expressed their disdain for the U.S. position. General Thomas Power of the Strategic Air Command stated in 1970 that they were falling behind in the armaments race with the Russians and Admiral Hyman Rickover claimed it was doubtful that the US could win a war with the Soviet Union.¹⁴

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On a 1969 trip to Europe, Richard Nixon considered the United States’ options in the event of a European war. One of the options was to retain the “flexible response” policy, meaning “a military force that is capable of deterring any threat to the Nation’s security, whatever the mode of aggression.”¹⁵ Part of the flexible response policy meant maintaining an adequate number of troops on the ground in order to both deter, and properly respond to Soviet aggression without having to resort to nuclear weapons as a first response. Flexible response would allow for a conventional war to be fought in instances of smaller conflicts where a nuclear response would be unsuitable. However, even 310,000 strong, U.S. troops in Europe in 1970 were no longer considered by many to be an adequate

¹³ “The Pros and Cons of NATO Troop Withdrawal,” *Time*, 24 May 1971.

¹⁴ “The Presidents News Conference of July 30th, 1970,” *The American Presidency Project* [online database] <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu> (accessed 7 November 2008).

¹⁵ “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union: 17 January 1968” *The American Presidency Project* [online database] <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu> (accessed 7 November 2008)

defence force.¹⁶ These troops may have been adequate throughout the 1940s and 1950s when the United States had military superiority over the Soviet Union and a policy of immediate nuclear response. By early the 1970s the United States had lost its military advantage in conventional warfare. This section has discussed the nature of U.S. military strategy in Europe before 1970, and the precarious position NATO found itself in, in contrast to the Soviet Union. The next section focuses on NATO defence strategy in 1970.

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NATO's perspective of European defense

By far the most technologically powerful military in NATO, the United States was not the only country providing European defence. Since West Germany would likely be the battleground in any NATO-Warsaw Pact war, it had the most to lose. During the decades in which the United States had maintained its policy of massive retaliation, it had become ingrained in the minds of West Germans that their country would become a nuclear battlefield early in any attack from the East.¹⁷ Because it had the most to lose, West Germany supplied the next largest army of the ten NATO members in Europe. European NATO member nations already provided 90 percent of the ground troops in Europe, 75 percent of the combat aircraft and 80 percent of

¹⁶ Determining how much was enough had been an ongoing debate since 1945, but the question returned to the forefront during the 1970s as the U.S. economy declined and Soviet power grew.

¹⁷ Drew Middleton, "NATO Stirred by Hint of U.S. Cutback" *New York Times* 12 April 1970, 2.

the naval units.¹⁸ Many pro-withdrawal U.S. Congressmen took advantage of the fact that the United States provided such a small percentage of overall troops to argue that the U.S. military was hardly essential to the defence of Europe, especially considering that the West German army alone consisted of 320,000 men.¹⁹ While at first glance it would appear that the Congressmen were correct in claiming that West Germany alone fielded more troops than the U.S. army in Europe, the situation was much more complex. A deeper look at the situation of West Germany, France, and Britain is required in order to understand the true readiness of each NATO contributor.

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West Germany

Mansfield's supporters argued that West Germany's 320,000 troops was more than the total number of U.S. troops spread across all of Europe, thus the West German army was more than capable of taking up the slack if the Americans were to leave. The flaw in this logic is that simply having numbers on paper does not take into account how effective a fighting force actually is. Take into consideration that the 320,000 men in the West German army represented that country's *entire* military power, whereas, due to the United States' global reach, the 215,000 U.S. troops stationed in West Germany represented only a small part of the overall U.S. military. In the event of a war,

¹⁸ Henry Stanhope, "European Defense" *The London Times*, 19 February 1974, 1.

¹⁹ Drew Middleton, "Bonn Puts Stress on Army Quality," *New York Times*, 16 December 1971, 8.

the United States could draw from its vast manpower reserves, whereas the West Germans had only 320,000 total active servicemen to work with. In the event of a prolonged conflict, additional elements of the U.S. Army could be airlifted to Europe in relatively short time, whereas the war would most likely be long over before West Germany could draft and train any additional soldiers.

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In comparison to the United States, the West German army suffered from poor morale and was inadequately equipped. It was also poorly trained because the heavily urbanized nature of West Germany limited bare land for training grounds.²⁰ West German defence policy was reliant on the presence of American troops. This was made clear by a German government statement which urged that "United States forces must be in Germany and at the front in order to make it clear that any [Soviet] movement into West Germany would involve the United States."²¹ In the event that the West German army was able to secure more funding, the additional resources would be used to improve the quality of the troops and not the quantity.²² One of the major problems facing the West German army was that since the country did not have an army between 1945 and 1956, many ex-soldiers had moved onto other forms of employment. The Bundeswehr gained a mixed reputation and lost much of its allure as a respectable career.²³

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Roger Berthoud, "Faded Lure of the German Army," *The London Times*, 20 October 1971

France

France had a special interest in ensuring that it would be adequately protected in the event of another war, having borne the brunt of the previous two World Wars. Despite this France fielded one of the smaller standing armies in West Germany, at only 30,000 troops.²⁴ French military experts argued that it was a near impossibility for a conventional war in Europe to occur on a scale that would compel France to intervene without quickly resorting to the use of its nuclear weapons.²⁵ Based on this, the official defence doctrine of the French called for a small “frontier force” capable of dealing with limited conflicts that might crop up. In the event of a major Soviet offensive that could not be immediately stopped by the frontier force, French policy called for a nuclear response.²⁶

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Despite its role as an occupying power, France refused to integrate its forces with NATO. In its announcement of a withdrawal in 1966, France pointed out that it “remained a member of the alliance but...had no troops earmarked for NATO use in the event of war.”²⁷ Despite France’s absence from NATO and focus on nuclear weapons, the impact on European defence was not as dire as might have been expected. French troops were not responsible for first-line defence of any major sector of the

²⁴ Drew Middleton, “French Coolness to NATO is Easing,” *New York Times*, 29 March 1970, 4.

²⁵ Charles Hargrove “France Places Full Faith in Nuclear Deterrence” *The London Times* 19 February 1974, vii.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Drew Middleton, “French Coolness to NATO is Easing”

front and both the equipment and personnel of their units left much to be desired by NATO standards.²⁸

As a result of their belief that a conventional war with the Soviet Union could not be won, France relied on its nuclear weapons as opposed to conventional forces. One third of the 1970 defence budget was allotted to nuclear weapons programs.²⁹ The national defence policy of the French government for the past 15 years had been based on a policy of nuclear deterrence.³⁰ The French were increasingly skeptical of the intentions of the United States, and were understandably concerned that Washington's nerve might fail in the face of a Soviet victory in a conventional war in Europe. An independent French nuclear force was a way to make sure that did not happen. France had no illusions that its conventional forces would ever be powerful enough to match the Soviets, thus their stress on nuclear weapons.

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Britain

Britain had the third largest army in West Germany in 1970, at 53,000 troops.³¹ Britain, like the United States, suffered from a balance-of-payments problem partly as a result of military expenditures in Germany. In 1970 it cost

²⁸ K. Hunt, 7.

²⁹ Drew Middleton, "French Forces may get H-Bombs by 1972," *New York Times* 5 August 1970, 2.

³⁰ Charles Hargrove, "France Places Full Faith in Nuclear Deterrence"

³¹ Alvin Shuster, "Britain to Return 4,500-Man Brigade to West Germany," *New York Times*, 5 March 1970, 1.

³² "Britain, in Shift, Joins NATO Project," *New York Times* [unsigned article] 18 February 1971, 2.

the British government \$330-million a year to station troops in Germany.³² Unlike the French, the British administration chose not to rely entirely on the nuclear option as a viable defence policy. Even in the face of the balance-of-payments problem Britain argued that a sure way to invite armed conflict was to substitute nuclear weapons for troops on the ground. “Any further diminution in strength would force the West to rely more heavily upon the nuclear option...because its conventional forces would probably be able to hold an invading army for no longer than a few hours.”³³ This is not to say that the British did not intend to use its nuclear weapons if necessary, as “the British had an explicit ‘Moscow Criterion’ for its nuclear forces. As long as Britain had the ability to obliterate Moscow, it was assumed, the Russians would not be likely to use nuclear weapons against United Kingdom targets even if the United States was somehow neutralized.”³⁴

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The difference between the defence policies of France and Britain were subtle but important. France intended to use its nuclear weapons at the first sign of Soviet aggression, whereas Britain maintained its nuclear forces mainly as a deterrent or response to a Soviet first strike, and to drag the Americans into a war as a last resort. The British believed that their own nuclear force could serve as a ‘trigger’ for the far larger American nuclear

³³ Henry Stanhope, “European Defense” *The London Times* 19 February 1974, 1.

³⁴ Gwynne Dyer, *War* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2005), 305.

striking force, whether the United States was willing to wage a nuclear war or not.³⁵ From the foregoing, it is quite clear that the United States was the bulwark in Europe, and the positions of the next major NATO contributors were woefully inadequate for replacing American troops in Europe. Mansfield, however, felt differently.

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The Mansfield Amendment

Senator Mike Mansfield was an anti-war Democrat from Montana who, after a 1962 visit to Vietnam, became the first American official to publicly criticize U.S. involvement in that country.³⁶ Being a vocal critic of U.S. overseas involvement, he had been raising the issue of troop withdrawals from Europe in one form or another since 1966.³⁷ The Mansfield amendment called for a 50 percent reduction in the number of U.S. troops serving in Europe by 31 December 1971.³⁸ Even though Mansfield had been raising the issue since 1966, it was not until early 1971 that the amendment he drafted was put to a vote in the Senate. Before 1971, The United States' attention had been focused largely on Vietnam, and European issues were not high on the agenda. Senators such as Republican Minority Leader Hugh Scott represented the mood of the Senate throughout the late 1960s.

³⁵ Gwynne Dyer, 306.

³⁶ "Mike Mansfield Biography" The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation [online database] <http://www.mansfieldfdn.org/> (accessed 26 October 2008).

³⁷ Raymond Garthoff. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1985), 199.

³⁸ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac: Vol. XXVII* (Congressional Quarterly: Washington, DC 1971) 274.

Scott stated that the US would not consider withdrawing troops from Europe while the military was still heavily involved in Vietnam since it might leave the United States exposed.³⁹ With U.S. involvement in Vietnam winding down by the early 1970s, attention shifted back to Europe. Introducing his Bill, Mansfield stated, “several times I have introduced resolutions making clear our belief in the need for a substantial reduction in our forces in Europe. Several times I have held off action because I have not wished to disrupt an allegedly delicate situation.”⁴⁰ It would seem that by 1971, the military situation had shifted enough that Mansfield no longer believed that withdrawing troops would disrupt this so called “delicate situation” in European defence. He also capitalized on the shift in public opinion. By the early 1970s, the American public was largely in support of withdrawing troops from Vietnam and he wanted to harness the public sentiment to give more weight to his Bill, since “the Vietnam War and attendant demographic and social changes at home had... created a strong current of doubt that the Cold War was another ‘good war.’”⁴¹ The amendment went to a vote in the Senate on 19 May 1971 and sparked a vigorous debate on both sides of the political spectrum.

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³⁹ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac: Vol.XXVII*, 275.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁴¹ Ernest May, 159.

Arguments in favor of troop withdrawal

One of the central arguments of the Mansfield amendment was the balance-of-payments crisis that the U.S. was experiencing with Europe. The cost of stationing U.S. troops in Europe amounted to a staggering \$14 billion annually⁴², constituting approximately ten percent of the U.S. payments deficit.⁴³ Mansfield argued that this expenditure was far too much to maintain, and would quickly lead to economic ruin.⁴⁴ Mansfield's supporters argued that U.S. troops in Europe were no longer necessary because there was no consensus amongst military planners on whether the US could win a conventional war against the Soviet Union. Questions were raised about whether the U.S. should even bother spending such enormous sums of money to maintain a force in Europe if it would serve little to no purpose in the event of a war.

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Pro-withdrawal supporters such as Senators Kennedy and Fullbright argued that the Nixon administration had already covertly espoused a pro-withdrawal view since the announcement in 1969 of the "Nixon Doctrine." This doctrine "was a major effort to rethink U.S. world policy and lower the American profile abroad."⁴⁵ Nixon himself seemed to support shifting the

⁴² "The Pros and Cons of NATO Troop Withdrawal," *Time* [unsigned article] 24 May 1971.

⁴³ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac: Vol. XXVII*, 274.

⁴⁴ The United States was spending massive amounts of money in Europe to maintain their military position there. European nations simply could not purchase enough U.S. products to offset this expenditure and the trade deficit increased each year, putting added strain on the value of the American dollar.

⁴⁵ John Steele, "How Real is Neo-Isolationism?" *Time* 31 May 1971.

European defence burden to European countries during the 1970 State of the Union Address when he stated that “the nations of each parts of the world should assume the primary responsibility for their own well-being.”⁴⁶ Nixon again made a similar statement in a 1971 radio address, “today our allies and friends have gained new strength and self-confidence. They are now able to participate much more fully not only in their own defence but in adding their moral and spiritual strength to the creation of a stable world order.”⁴⁷ From the point of view of Mansfield’s supporters, the world had changed and American foreign policy had to change with it.

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Arguments against troop withdrawal

While the Mansfield amendment was being considered by the Senate it drew severe criticism from high places. The White House and the Senate Republican leadership were among the groups that mounted an intensive lobbying campaign to defeat the proposal.⁴⁸ The White House campaign had many big names behind it, including former Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Harry Truman, Secretaries of State Dean Rusk and Dean Acheson, as well as 24 high ranking officials, most of them

⁴⁶ “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union: 22 January 1970” *The American Presidency Project*. [online database]

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu> (accessed: 2 November 2008).

⁴⁷ “Radio address by President Nixon, 25 February 1971” Document 85. *U.S. Department of State, FRUS* [online database] <http://www.state.gov> (accessed: 2 November 2008).

⁴⁸ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac: Vol.XXVII*, 274.

Democrats.⁴⁹ The White House quickly released a hard line statement pertaining to the amendment, which stated, “no amendment and no resolutions dealing in any way with U.S. foreign policy and U.S. NATO commitments [will] be acceptable to the President... the President [will] veto the draft Bill if it requires a cutback of U.S. troops stationed in Europe.”⁵⁰ Nixon’s administration released its own rebuttals to Mansfield’s points. In response to the balance-of-payments argument, Nixon wrote that, “we are currently in the final stages of talks to establish...an agreement with West Germany to offset nearly two billion dollars of United States costs.”⁵¹ Responding to the argument that Europeans were strong enough to take over their own defence, Kissinger wrote that “Europe - though united it would be a Great Power - is not yet united... [is] small, in terms of military strength, and in need of protection by the only super power that happens to exist in the non-Communist world: the US.”⁵² The fact that Europe was not yet united is clearly demonstrated by the actions of France, which refused to integrate with NATO troops and continued to pursue its own defence strategies separate from that of NATO.

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⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ “Letter to the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Armed Services About United States Troops in Europe (Letter written by Richard Nixon, November 23rd, 1971)” *The American Presidency Project* [online database] <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu> (accessed: 2 November 2008).

⁵² “Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon “Document 41. *U.S. Department of State, FRUS* [online database] <http://www.state.gov> (accessed: 2 November 2008).

After talks with Congressional leaders in March of 1969, it became clear that Nixon also preferred to maintain the option of a “flexible response” rather than a nuclear one.⁵³ It seems that Nixon was mainly concerned with the loss of political capital that would come from withdrawing troops from what was an American stronghold, as “one of the advantages of having our troops in Germany was thus military options, but more important was the enormous political effect they provided.”⁵⁴ This political effect came partly from having troops on the ground, thus a multitude of political options to deal with in any conflict that might arise. If the U.S. were to withdraw its troops from Europe, it would lose the enormous power and prestige it worked so hard to build since 1945.

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Results of the debate

A major blow to the amendment came one day before the vote when the Soviet Union tabled an offer to negotiate a multilateral reduction in Central Europe of Warsaw Pact and NATO forces.⁵⁵ Brezhnev called for “a reduction of armed forces and armaments in areas where the military confrontation is especially dangerous, above all in Central Europe.”⁵⁶ In this statement, Brezhnev inadvertently strengthened the argument of the White

⁵³ “Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant (Buchanan) to President Nixon.” Document 12, *U.S. Department of State, FRUS* [online database] <http://www.state.gov> (accessed: 2 November 2008).

⁵⁴ “Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant (Buchanan) to President Nixon.”

⁵⁵ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac: Vol. XXVII*, 275.

⁵⁶ Raymond Garthoff, 115.

House that if troop reductions were to occur, they should occur simultaneously on both sides.⁵⁷ The Mansfield Amendment was put to a vote in the Senate before midnight on 19 May 1971. The amendment was defeated in a 36-61 roll-call vote. Mansfield was supported by 5 Republicans and 31 Democrats; 39 Republicans and 22 Democrats opposed the amendment.⁵⁸ While Mansfield's amendment failed to pass, in the days preceding the 19 May vote, the Senate also considered five other "compromise proposals." These other proposals were related to Mansfield's original proposal in that they all dealt with the issue of U.S. troop withdrawals but they differed in the timing of the withdrawal and the number of troops it would involve. Four of the five other proposals were introduced by Democrats. However, it was the proposal introduced by Republican Senator Charles Mathias that generated the most interest.

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The "Mathias Substitute" as it was termed, called for the President to begin negotiations within NATO to achieve mutual troop reductions in Central Europe.⁵⁹ What made this proposal appealing was the fact that it was so vague. It did not involve timelines or numbers; instead it simply mandated that the President would begin to explore some withdrawal options. The four other proposals took a hard-line stance of setting deadlines and numbers, both of which were completely unacceptable to the Nixon administration.

⁵⁷ Halperin Morton. "How Many Troops do we-They Need in Europe?" *New York Times*, 23 May 1971, E1.

⁵⁸ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac: Vol.XXVII*, 274.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

The Mathias Substitute was appealing enough that “eleven Republicans broke ranks with the Nixon Administration to support the Mathias proposal.”⁶⁰ Of the six troop withdrawal proposals that were presented to the Senate, all of them failed to be ratified by a rather large margin. In light of this, how is it possible that these failed amendments had any effect whatsoever on NATO defence policies?

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All six of the troop withdrawal proposals dealt with the exact same issue, presenting only slightly altered variables. It was clear that a number of Republicans and the majority of Democrats supported the basic idea of troop withdrawals. “Despite the Senate’s rejection of all the amendments, the majority of Senators (60) supported one or another of the proposals.”⁶¹ If all six proposals can be classified as being representative of the same issue, it is clear that the majority of Senators supported the basic notion of withdrawing troops. The Mansfield amendment more than any other issue, showed Europeans that a crack was developing in the United States’ political-military consensus regarding conventional forward defence. From a European perspective, the threat of troop withdrawals had been a rather distant issue ever since Mansfield started calling for troop withdrawals in 1966. The 19 May debate proved that many within the American administration supported the basic idea of troop withdrawals. Just before the vote Mansfield admitted that “sometimes it takes a sledge hammer to make an imprint and place an issue on

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

the table...regardless of the outcome of the vote tonight, it will not disappear.”⁶²

Clearly, from a European perspective the issue of troop withdrawals did not disappear. European governments had to consider that it could only be a matter of time before American Senators put partisan politics aside and agreed on a troop withdrawal strategy that was acceptable to the majority of voting members. Even Kissinger and Nixon expressed their interest in *eventually* exploring the troop withdrawal option, but they were quite irritated by what they regarded as over-eager readiness by some elements in the U.S. government.⁶³ European governments started to get nervous when it became apparent that their defence needs could fall to a single vote in the U.S. Senate and they were forced into action. As Henry Stanhope of *The London Times* remarked, “Europe has had a long time to get used to the idea of Americans leaving the continent in significant numbers, and has pushed the problem to one side to be solved another day. Now it must be faced.”⁶⁴

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Europe’s response

New York Republican Senator Jacob Javits summed up the general European sentiment quite succinctly in a 1971 *Time* article:

⁶² *Ibid.*, 275.

⁶³ Raymond Garthoff, 73.

⁶⁴ Henry Stanhope, “Europe’s Reluctance to Share NATO’s Burden,” *The London Times*, 19 November 1970, 10.

The conclusion of many in Europe that the United States is the sick man is principally attributable to the Vietnam War – the way we blundered into it, the destructive effects of the war at home and on the U.S. world position, and our seeming inability to extricate ourselves effectively from the Vietnam quagmire.⁶⁵

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At the time Javits published this article he was heading an American-European panel that after two years of study, declared in 1973 that “it was necessary to keep United States ground troops in Europe to guarantee the security of Western allies.”⁶⁶ European powers realized that the notion of troop reductions, while it *may* serve their purpose in helping to ease the balance-of-payments problems in the U.S., it would also require Europe as a whole to tread a little more lightly when dealing with the Soviet Union. Europeans saw themselves as getting the raw end of any deal for troop reductions. Most previous U.S. negotiations with the Soviet Union were bilateral upper level agreements that had very little effect on the daily lives of the European population.

Troop reductions however “could directly affect as many as 20 nations and would deal with a welter of men, weapons, firepower and geographical considerations.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Jacob Javits. “The U.S.-Sick Man of the West”

⁶⁶ “NATO Security is Linked to U.S. Troop Presence” *New York Times* [unsigned article] 3 October 1973, 3.

⁶⁷ “NATO: The Bargaining Begins” *Time* [unsigned article] 14 June 1971.

Some within the United States predicted that “even a narrow defeat of the amendment will shake the confidence of [the] ten European allies.”⁶⁸ Europe, which had been reliant on the U.S. military for their protection since 1945, was indeed shaken by the notion of troop cuts. In the face of the 1971 vote, the European members of NATO largely resorted to grim predictions of the future in an attempt to scare the Americans into staying. The North Atlantic Council argued that the alliance’s conventional forces on Europe’s central front would be so weakened that the alliance would be forced to regress twenty years and revert back to a primary reliance on the 1950s strategy of a trip-wire force and massive nuclear retaliation.⁶⁹ In this scenario a small force of allied troops would be placed on the frontier with East Germany.

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In the event of war, this small force would be quickly destroyed giving justification to launch a nuclear strike. While the strategy of a trip-wire force had not quite been officially retired from the United States’ arsenal, by the early 1970s its use as a viable defence strategy was generally frowned upon. Europeans would not stand for a U.S. defence policy that promised to annihilate them at the very hint of Soviet aggression. An unnamed “highly placed [U.S. military] official” stated, “NATO has established a balance in Europe. Take away that military and political balance and we’re back to 1948.”⁷⁰ While some elements

⁶⁸ “Senator Mansfield’s Folly,” *New York Times* [unsigned article] 16 May 1971, E12.

⁶⁹ Drew Middleton. “NATO Stirred by Hint of U.S. Cutback”

⁷⁰ Drew Middleton. “U.S. Military in Europe Disagrees with Mansfield Plan,” *New York Times*, 4 February 1970, 6.

within Europe resorted to grim predictions of a future without American protection, most realized that American troop withdrawals were inevitable. Three days after the Senate vote the *London Times* wrote, "American troop withdrawals must be expected within the foreseeable future...the United States could not be expected to maintain large permanent garrisons overseas indefinitely."⁷¹

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How the threat of troop withdrawals changed European defense policies

Within six months of the 19 May vote, European defence experts met within the 'Euro-group,' which was a forum established for European defence ministers to meet and discuss military integration.⁷² During this meeting the goal was to work out a purely European response to NATO improvements. The delegates claimed that, "the main incentives [for holding the meeting] have been American criticism of European countries for not doing enough and the prospect of American troop withdrawals."⁷³ On 7 December 1971, the group announced that they would collectively increase their 1972 defence spending by more than \$1 billion.⁷⁴ Noticeably absent from the Euro-group talks were any mention of increasing troops numbers. Any discussion of troop levels was deemed to be too politically

⁷¹ "Why US Must Leave Europe," *The London Times*, 22 May 1971, 12.

⁷² Roger Berthoud, "Faded Lure of the German Army" *The London Times* 20 October 1971.

⁷³ Peter Strafford. "European Defense Ministers Increase Share of NATO Costs in Reply to US Criticism," *The London Times*, 8 December 1971, 5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

sensitive, and was left to be dealt with on a nation by nation basis.

The group however, did announce that they favoured putting new technology on the front instead of new troops. Western European defence officials argued that the only means of effectively reducing the Soviet edge and compensating for an expected withdrawal of American troops was to speed the development, production, and adoption of sophisticated weapons that did not demand additional troops to replace the departing Americans. Defence officials knew that it would be extremely difficult to get the government and public to agree to increase troop numbers. It was Peter Stafford's informed opinion that, "in the present atmosphere of East-West relations...no alliance member has the political strength to raise additional troops to replace the departing Americans."⁷⁵

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In concert with recommendations of the Euro-group, individual countries also took action to compensate for what they perceived to be the unavoidable threat of American troop withdrawals. The following paragraphs outline how individual countries reacted to this possibility.

Britain

In February of 1971, Britain earmarked an additional \$78-million (on top of its annual military budget) towards various NATO projects. At that time, the government claimed that this was as far as it would go, for Britain had

⁷⁵ Peter Strafford, "European Defense"

done enough-and all it could afford.⁷⁶ The British government also decided to return an additional 4,500 man brigade to West Germany on the possibility of Mansfield's amendment passing. British Defence Minister Denis Healey directly cited Senator Mansfield as being a central factor in the decision of the British government to return the brigade that had been withdrawn in 1968 as a money saving measure.⁷⁷ In making this announcement, Healey stated that "the decision should help demonstrate Europe's determination to take its own defence seriously...this was the best possible argument against the critics of America's present contribution to the alliance."⁷⁸ Seven months later Defence Secretary Lord Carrington announced "the deployment of more R.A.F. Jaguars, a reserve regiment of armoured cars, and H.M.S. Ark Royal to NATO."⁷⁹ This brought British troop numbers in West Germany up to 62,000, an increase of almost 10,000 from the previous year.⁸⁰ Clearly Senator Mansfield's proposal had a widespread impact on British defence policy if it can be directly related to two instances of increased military commitment so soon after the British government claimed it had done enough and could not afford to do any more.

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⁷⁶ "Britain, in Shift, Joins NATO Project" *New York Times* [unsigned article] 18 February 1971, 2.

⁷⁷ Alvin Shuster, "Britain to Return 4,500-Man Brigade to West Germany"

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Henry Stanhope, "Europe's Reluctance to Share NATO's Burden," 10.

⁸⁰ "Britain, in Shift, Joins NATO Project," 2.

France

In the face of troop cuts, France took a very different path when compared to Britain. While the British accepted the fact that they needed to do more to provide for their own defence, France did the opposite. Not being an officially integrated member of NATO, France could say very little about NATO's affairs, but was still sensitive to troop reductions nonetheless. France equated American troop cuts with "a reduction of American willingness to defend the Continent."⁸¹ Before 1971, France had been operating on the assumption that they could not trust the Americans to begin with, and thus America withdrawing its troops had little effect on French overall policies. The quintessential problem of the French was the fact that they did not believe American force in Europe was powerful enough to deter a Soviet attack in the first place.

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Threats of an American withdrawal did nothing to help the situation. As a result, France decided to pursue the opposite policy of most other NATO nations. At a time when Britain and West Germany were striving towards more unity in an effort to show the Americans that they were serious about their own defence, French Defence Minister Michel Debré claimed that there would never be a common European defence, especially not now since "European unity" was a notion that depended entirely on the strong

⁸¹Drew Middleton, "French Forces may get H-Bombs by 1972," *New York Times* 5 August 1970, 2.

commitments of American interests.⁸² In short, Europeans were so diverse that only one overarching (American) interest could possibly be strong enough to influence Europeans in ways that would make them believe that a common defence was in their best interest.

As a result of the Americans threatening to remove their presence, there was no point in continuing to pursue European unity. Debré stated that “it is clear that the European peoples do not and cannot have permanently the same conception of defence.”⁸³ The French Defence Minister proceeded to attack British efforts, claiming that the British could never maintain their security without a strong American power on the continent.⁸⁴ Clearly the Mansfield proposal simply re-enforced the view of the French that the Americans were not to be trusted or relied upon.

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West Germany

West Germany was in a more unique military position than any other European nation. While West Germany technically did maintain one of the largest armies in Europe, it also suffered from an overwhelming manpower shortage. Recruitment efforts in 1970 fell 19,500 men short of the target.⁸⁵ Even if West Germany had the manpower to expand its troops, many other European

⁸² Charles Hargrove, “French Warning on European Defense” *The London Times* 5 December 1972, 7.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Roger Berthoud, “Faded Lure of the German Army”

nations, notably France, had an interest in keeping a tight leash on the military ambitions of Bonn. West German diplomats knew that any addition to West Germany's armed forces could be expected to arouse violent criticism from France.⁸⁶ After examining these factors the Inspector General of the West German armed forces, General Ulrich de Maiziere, publicly stated in late 1971 that "we would not be able to raise the number of German forces in the event that stationed [American] forces were withdrawn from Germany."⁸⁷ The West German government knew it did not have the public support or political capital to expand its own army, and it knew that the balance-of-payments problem was one of the major points in the U.S. pro-withdrawal side. As a result, it decided that the most effective way to provide for its defence was to pay other European nations to serve them and "as a result, Bonn has taken the lead in Europe to help ease the financial burden for the United States."⁸⁸ One of the main reasons that Britain decided to return the 4,500 man brigade that had been removed from West Germany in 1968 was because the Brandt government agreed to offset 80 percent of the cost by buying British military equipment.⁸⁹ All of these efforts mirrored the West German view that it was cheaper and more politically convenient to keep the Americans in

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⁸⁶ Drew Middleton. "NATO Stirred by Hint of U.S. Cutback"

⁸⁷ Drew Middleton. "Bonn Puts Stress on Army Quality"

⁸⁸ Marx Frankel, "U.S. Troops: Security Blanket in a Changing Europe"

⁸⁹ Alvin Shuster, "Britain to Return 4,500-Man Brigade to West Germany"

Europe, rather than struggle to build their own forces in the face of political tensions and waning public support.⁹⁰

Factors which drove change

It is clear that a number of defence policy and political changes were pushed forward as a result of Senator Mansfield's proposal. This debate raises a question of how a failed amendment could have such a profound effect on the defence policies of European nations. Europeans had known of this possibility since at least 1966, so it was hardly a surprise. The Mansfield amendment was not an obscure proposal that was introduced with little to no justification or backing. Europeans knew the factors that were behind the push for troop withdrawals. They knew that the American public, out of war-weariness, was questioning why the United States still had 300,000 troops in Europe twenty-six years after the end of World War II.⁹¹ They knew that American public sentiment was increasingly turning towards isolationism, and the resolving of European problems. Nixon, in his 1972 state of the world report claimed that "Americans consider tensions in international relations abnormal and yearn to see them resolved as quickly as possible."⁹² Europeans also knew that in the face of the declining U.S. economic situation and the balance-of-payments crisis that there was

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⁹⁰ Roger Berthoud, "Independent Community Continues to Depend on US for Military Support," *The London Times*, 19 February 1974, 5.

⁹¹ "Senator Mansfield's Folly," *New York Times*, 16 May 1971, E12.

⁹² "Excerpts From State of World Report," *New York Times*, 10 February 1972, 20.

immense pressure for the American administration to do something that would ease the problem.

These factors simply seemed to re-enforce Nixon's own platform in the 1969 "Nixon Doctrine," which required Americans to put forth a "major effort to rethink U.S. world policy and lower the American profile abroad."⁹³ Any reasonable European would see that all of these issues accumulated to present a strong case that American troop withdrawals had a very good chance of happening. Since they came close in 1971, it was only a matter of time before a revision to the proposal was introduced that would pass a Senate vote. With all this talk of troop withdrawals, European governments were becoming gradually more skeptical of American assurances and uncertain about American intentions.⁹⁴ The governments of Britain, France and West Germany all took a different stance, and pursued a different course of action to prepare for what they thought would be an inevitable American withdrawal.

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Conclusion

The basic idea behind Senator Mansfield's proposal struck a generally receptive chord with many Senators, but the details of the proposal resulted in its defeat. European nations had known for years that the American military would not stay in Europe indefinitely. It was always in the back of their minds that they would one day have to take

⁹³ John Steele, "How Real is Neo-Isolationism?" *Time* 31 May 1971.

⁹⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "America and Europe," *Foreign Affairs* Vol.49, No.1 (October 1970), 17

responsibility for their own defence. After seeing that the majority of American Senators agreed with the basic notion of troop cuts, European governments realized that it would only be a matter of time before the Americans began their inevitable withdrawal. The Mansfield amendment was the tipping point that forced Europeans to begin seriously thinking about their military positions. Although the Mansfield amendment ultimately failed, many of the changes in defence arrangements in Britain, France, and West Germany were claimed by their respective governments and defence ministers to be a direct result of Mansfield's proposal. In the study of Cold War international relations, it is important not to overlook or underestimate the impact that even some failed proposals could have. While the issue of NATO troop levels was (and still is) a contentious issue, when examined in the context of the tense military atmosphere of the early 1970s, it is clear that Senator Mansfield's amendment had an immense effect on the defence policies of key NATO member nations even though it was never ratified.

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