

German army to set up new NATO headquarters

The Bundeswehr is expected to install a new NATO military headquarters in Germany. The move is part of the alliance's strategic upgrade in the face of increased tensions with Russia.



Germany is expected to set up a new NATO planning and control center, possibly near the former capital Bonn, as part of the alliance's upgrade plans in Europe.

The new headquarters is designed to accelerate troop and equipment transport around the continent. Unusually, it will not be integrated into the current NATO command structure.

The offer, made by German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen, has been accepted by other NATO member states, the German news agency dpa reported on Thursday, though the final decision will be made at a summit of NATO defense ministers next week.

The German Defense Ministry refused to confirm the report, saying in a statement only that "the possible installation of a NATO support command center" was

indeed part of NATO's current plans, and that Germany, because of its geographical situation and importance as a NATO partner, would naturally be considered as a location.

Another new NATO headquarters will be set up in the US, tasked with securing air and sea routes between North America and Europe.

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A surprise invasion?

The decision is seen as a reaction to heightened tensions between NATO and Russia in the last few years — a leaked report showed last October that military leaders were concerned that the alliance was not adequately prepared against a surprise Russian attack.

Christian Mölling, NATO analyst at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), said the move was much more than a “political gesture.” “It shows that the commitment that Germany has made will be implemented,” he told DW. The fact that it wasn't going to be integrated into the current NATO command structure meant that it could be used for German missions too.

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“I would guess that the core will consist of German soldiers, but of course if they are planning multinational missions it would make sense to open the possibility of drawing in multinational forces,” he added.

Though few defense analysts expect an all-out war, countries on NATO's eastern border — particularly Baltic nations with a significant Russian minority — say an invasion scenario does not seem far-fetched, particularly following developments in eastern Ukraine and Georgia in the past few years.

“NATO's fundamental problem is that it can't deploy troops to the Baltic region fast enough,” said Mölling. “And of course a commando structure that can plan and implement that is of course one of the building blocks that you need to be able to do that. Another building block is that you need the troops in the first place — that hasn't been planned here, but it will have to be added at some point too. Germany is now providing one part of that.”

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Germany's socialist opposition was less than impressed with the idea. The Left party parliamentarian Alexander Neu, who sits on the Bundestag's defense committee, said the creation of the base would see Germany "putting itself at the head of the saber-rattlers." A much better idea, he added in a statement, would be for Germany to position itself as a mediator between the US and Russia.

This, he argued, would be much more in the country's interests, "because in a real conflict Europe and especially Germany would be the first victims of complete destruction through the use of nuclear weapons."

The fair share question

Several thousand NATO troops have been redeployed to the Baltics and Poland over the past year, and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has long argued that the alliance needs a new command structure to speed up reinforcements if necessary.

Stoltenberg has also called on the European Union and commercial interests to help in the effort — in particular by building up civilian infrastructure such as roads and railways to accommodate military needs.

But the two additional bases in Germany and the US represent only a mild rearmament compared to Cold War levels, when NATO had several dozen bases and active headquarters. According to the alliance's own figures, it currently has seven headquarters, and under 10,000 of its own personnel.

US President Donald Trump has occasionally delighted in chastising NATO partners for not paying what he regards as their fair share of contributions to NATO. Officially, members are supposed to invest 2 percent of GDP into defense. Germany comes in well below this benchmark — recent evaluations say that the country will spend just 1.24 percent of its GDP on defense this year, a small increase on the 1.22 percent of last year. Still, Germany is steadily increasing its defense budget, and is currently aiming to reach €42.4 billion (\$52.3 billion) by 2021.

The French Defense Ministry announced on Thursday that it was planning to increase its own budget by a third by 2025 in order to meet the NATO

requirement. This would put France's defense budget at €44 billion (\$54 billion).

Source: <http://www.dw.com/en/german-army-to-set-up-new-nato-headquarters/a-42499457>

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