

## What next for the British Army post 2020 withdrawal from Germany?

### Introduction

The UK has been steadily withdrawing its forces from Germany over the past few decades, having over 55,000 men stationed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, down to 17,000 presently or there about. The point of strategic interest is one surrounding just what the British Army will do after its withdrawal from Germany is complete? Some commentators are concerned that the withdrawal is in effect a political mechanism for reducing the overall headcount of the Army even further. Whilst others view the move as an opportunity to free up existing units for further overseas deployments. Either way, what is certain is that the geo-political landscape was decided some time ago, some suggest the SDSR of 2010 largely influenced the final withdrawal from Germany due to the increasing costs of exchange rates and maintaining such a large garrison in Germany. Others have suggested it is high time the German Government funded its own defence and security, particularly as economically speaking the German economy is booming and the German current accounts are well in surplus. In effect the Germans could afford to fill the gap financially, although it would take time to physically create the units and equipment required.

### Strategic choice vs tactical deployment

The withdrawal from Germany comes at a cost for the UK militarily and to a great extent diplomatically. Britain has had forces stationed in Germany since the end of the second world war and to finally pull out once and for all shouldn't be taken lightly. Whilst some UK politicians do not quite grasp the strategic importance of being able to deploy large numbers of conventional ground forces abroad, its need has never been so great. From a foreign affairs perspective, we have political clout with the Germans just because we take their security so serious. The diplomatic effect of having a division deployed to a country gets the attention of the local government and most definitely gives political sway. Something that some commentators argue the British politicians have forgotten all about. Strategic movement of military forces is actually good for trade, diplomacy and influence in a country and region. Unfortunately, decades of cuts to the defence budget have not helped the situation and regrettably some politicians still do not recognise the value of HM Armed Forces when it comes to the aforementioned benefits.

### Is there a 'Where next'?

Where next for the British Army comes out of a geo-political vacuum being caused by the freeing up of those forces formerly stationed in Germany. Does HM Government now seek a new foreign base for the Army, one of strategic importance, that can support and help bring stability to a nation, let alone a region. If we take the crisis in Syria we can see clearly that there has been a massive destabilising effect on the Kingdom of Jordan, our friend and ally for many decades. Whilst British forces regularly conduct exercises in Jordan, establishing a permanent military base would be a win win for the UK. Not just diplomatically, it would allow the British military to play a stabilising role, a little like what we currently do in Bahrain. Let us not fool ourselves, the Middle East is an almighty mess and there is no doubt that Britain's ability to project and maintain power on the ground would have a major boost to the local country in question. Some commentators argue that the UK government was very slow to react in support of Jordan, during the early years of the conflict in Syria. The British should have deployed regular Army units on exercise along the northern Jordanian border as a show of force, but more importantly a show of unity and support to our friends in Jordan. Even recent news reports from Israel suggest that the Kingdom of Jordan has come under massive strain from the crisis in Syria, not just from the destabilising effect of Islamic terrorism, but that vast numbers of people who have fled from Syria to Jordan for sanctuary.

### What are we talking about in terms of numbers?

The simple fact of the matter is, withdrawal from Germany frees up an Armoured division at least, if not more, for deployment overseas. Said units, assuming all their vehicles are fully operational (but that is a separate maintenance and budgeting matter) should be able to deploy within 48 hours of calling. A permanent basing or deployment of said division to another sovereign nation such as for example the Kingdom of Jordan, assuming agreeable with the Jordanian government, could be based away from population centres in the northern part of the country. With at least a full Armoured division, attack and transport helicopters, backed up by artillery and infantry units. Would not only be an ideal training ground for UK forces, but provide much needed reassurance to the Kingdom at little cost to the UK taxpayer.

### Is Germany the UK's problem?

From a second world war allied forces perspective some would argue yes, it is. But the war ended over 70 years ago, the fact of the matter is, Germany is a modern, democratic nation, whose GDP far exceeds that of the UK and affording defence is more of a political question that military some might argue. Some say, why is the UK pulling out when the USA is staying put? It is a good and valid strategic question; how does it impact NATO? Britain's concerns are financial not military, in that the only motivator appears to be money. This actually raises further questions on Britain's ability to deploy a division in the field for a prolonged period, given the new financial constraints.

### Are we expecting too much?

Given the immediate financial constraints facing UK PLC which are forecast to last up to at least 2025, how can the UK realistically expect to maintain overseas relationships when it is hamstrung financially and unable to deploy military units as a result? Hence the idea of a new permanent base overseas in the likes of Jordan would actually alleviate some of that strategic pressure and allow for the UK to shift its focus to the Middle East where so many of our Strategic allies and interests lay.

### Proposal

A jointly funded British Army base to house at least 4,000 men and equipment in the Kingdom of Jordan for an unspecified, open ended period. Designed to maintain the UK's ability to deploy overseas, ensure we have sufficient assets and training in relevant climates and cultures. But most importantly build upon the soft diplomatic power of having such force in the area. We have seen with Russia, that they have decided to re-open the naval base in Syria for the first time in decades. A new base designed to support thousands of infantry, at least a dozen surface ships, let alone aircraft. The point being the region represents an opportunity for UK PLC to extend our existing partnerships.

### Conclusion

Whilst the Germany withdrawal gathers pace, British Army units remain stationed back home on UK soil. The strategic benefits of deploying Army units for stability, nation building and diplomacy cannot be understated. We see the benefits of Naval ships visiting numerous ports on goodwill visits, just how powerful a diplomatic gesture that is. It is a view that the withdrawal represents an opportunity for the British Army to re-deploy overseas to a new nation like Jordan, demonstrating most of all at a time of need, Britain is there for its friends and allies.