

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 12, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Secretary Hegseth,

We write to express our deep concern regarding public reports that the Department of Defense plans to significantly reduce U.S. contributions to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) operations in Europe and to reiterate the alliance's crucial role in maintaining trans-Atlantic peace and advancing U.S. national security, particularly following the July NATO summit in Türkiye.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, the United States has maintained an increased presence in Central and Eastern Europe to deter Russia's potential aggression against NATO allies. Earlier this summer, however, the United States European Command announced plans to scale back the number of forces committed to NATO, including a 30 percent cut to fighter jets, a decrease in reconnaissance planes, and the withdrawal of aerial refueling tankers.

This decision will severely undermine allied surveillance and intelligence coordination, leaving NATO allies vulnerable as President Vladimir Putin weighs aggression against our NATO allies — whom the United States is legally obligated to defend, if called upon under Article 5. Deterring Russia through strong support for NATO is far less costly than potentially fighting a war with Russia in the future. Yet your planned drawdown threatens to weaken deterrence by creating intelligence gaps, diminishing U.S. global power projection, eroding our credibility as an ally.

Maritime reconnaissance aircraft, for example, are the primary tools for tracking Russian submarines in the Atlantic and North Sea. Without U.S. aircraft for that mission, NATO will have less capacity to monitor Russian naval movements and protect undersea infrastructure, including energy pipelines and telecommunications cables.

The United States also assists with NATO's airborne surveillance, intercepting Russian military communications and detecting Russian missiles and drone launches before they threaten allied airspace — all of which your planned drawdown could impair. Additionally, NATO depends on U.S. logistics to sustain long-range air combat. Withdrawing U.S. refueling tankers will restrict

the operational range of European fighter jets and compromise NATO's ability to maintain control of the airspace.

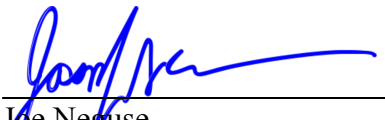
We understand your Department's efforts to ensure Europe pays more for its own defense so the United States can spend more of our own resources deterring China across the Indo-Pacific. This is a long-running and bipartisan priority.

But your planned reduction cuts deep across NATO capabilities and will take effect far earlier than European allies had been preparing for. This decision and its rapid implementation will weaken our shared deterrence posture in Europe by sending a troubling signal — both to our NATO allies and to Putin — about the U.S. commitment to this alliance at precisely the wrong moment. Accordingly, there is strong bipartisan opposition to further troop drawdowns in Europe, as evinced by force posture oversight provisions in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and FY 2027 NDAA text in both chambers.

NATO is the most successful defensive military alliance in history, having served as the cornerstone of trans-Atlantic peace and U.S. national security for over seven decades. Now is the time to recommit to this alliance, particularly as NATO itself expands cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners to address the China challenge — not to pull back and create vulnerabilities that risk implicating the United States.

Accordingly, we urge you to immediately reconsider the planned reduction of resources to NATO. We request you provide our offices with a written description of your plans by August 31, 2026.

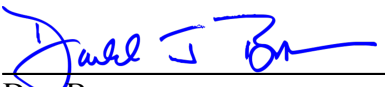
Sincerely,



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Don Bacon
Member of Congress