The list of military construction projects the Trump administration is defunding to pay for its controversial border wall includes more than $770 million from an initiative started by the Obama administration to shore up European defense after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2014.

The cuts, which include upgrades to airfields in Slovakia, ammunition storage in Poland and Special Operations Forces facilities in Estonia, come at a time when the Trump administration is also withholding $250 million in military assistance to Ukraine as it reviews whether to continue the funding program at current levels.

After reviewing the Pentagon’s list of projects being targeted, Jim Townsend, who spent eight years as deputy assistant secretary of defense for European and NATO Policy, said the European military construction projects slated to lose funding include serious “military muscle.”

“There was a school in there and a headquarters upgrade but most of the list is muscle we need,” he told Just Security.

For example, a construction project at an ammunition storage facility in Poland will lose $52 million in funding.

“To delay ammo facilities in Poland is nuts,” Townsend said. “The DOD budget is pretty big — they could have picked from a lot of other places. This is not a barber shop; this is the frontline.”

The money is being taken from the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), which was previously named the European Reassurance Initiative (EDI) under the Obama administration. With countering Russian aggression in mind, it was designed to fund U.S. troop deployments in Europe, training and exercises with allies, the prepositioning of U.S. military assets in European countries, and improving U.S. bases and building partner capacity.

In 2019, Congress approved $6.5 billion for the effort, and in its fiscal year 2020 budget request, the Pentagon asked for $5.9 billion.

On Wednesday, the Pentagon released a list of the projects that would be defunded to provide Trump with money for his wall, a campaign promise he has been unable to execute due to push back from Congress. The list of military construction projects totaled $3.6 billion, including the $770 million for EDI funding.

“At close to a $1 billion, this isn’t salami slicing, there’s a purpose to this, as this affects U.S. service capabilities, NATO functionality, and our ability to partner with allied nations,” a former U.S. Army Europe commander told Just Security. These kinds of cuts send a signal to U.S. allies and Russia, Townsend said.

The cuts could be seen as the U.S. telling its European partners that they’re being punished for not doing enough. A recurring theme for Trump when it comes to foreign policy is that the U.S. is shouldering far too much of the cost of defending the West’s interests around the globe, and he is constantly pushing U.S. partners to spend more.

On Thursday, Defense Secretary Mark Esper confirmed that this is, in fact, the intended signal. “Part of the message is burden sharing, ‘Maybe pick up that tab,’” Esper told reporters in London.

With these cuts, the Trump administration seems to be saying, “This is a cow to take funding from,” Townsend said. But in his experience, there is not a lot of fat in this part of the defense budget. “If European Command says they need that, I believe them,” he said. “If anything, it is trying to dig itself out of a hole.”

Meanwhile, the message to Russia could be interpreted as: The U.S. is not as nervous as before about the threat it poses. This isn’t the first time the administration has sent this kind of signal. There is Trump’s inexplicably cozy relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, the president’s slow walking of Russian sanctions, and most recently, his freeze on military assistance to Ukraine as the administration reviews the program.

But at the same time, U.S. strategy documents developed by the administration focus on “great power competition” between the U.S. and Russia and China, and military leaders repeatedly tell Congress that Russia is one of the top threats faced by the U.S. and its partners.

“Once again, it appears that this administration is talking out of two sides of its mouth,” said Evelyn Farkas, senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States and former deputy assistant secretary of defense for Russia/Ukraine/Eurasia.

Trump likes to say he’s been tougher on Russia than any other U.S. president and members of his Cabinet have backed him up. In May, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told CNBC that it’s “absolutely crazy talk” to say the Trump administration hasn’t been tough on Russia. He pointed to increases in the U.S. defense budget as evidence of the administration’s strong stance.

“Vladimir Putin can’t possibly think that’s a good thing for him,” Pompeo said. But these latest funding moves, plus Trump’s recent suggestion that he could invite Putin to the G-7 meeting in the United States next year, do not send a message that the administration is particularly interested in checking Russian military aggression.

Taking the money from deterrence aimed at Russia is not making the U.S. more secure, it’s making it weaker, Farkas said. The European construction projects are also taking a hit because they don’t have a built-in congressional constituency willing to fight for it. On Wednesday, when the Defense Department released its list, it quickly became clear that domestic political impact played a big role in deciding which projects to include.

Half of the money ($1.8 billion) will be taken from overseas projects, for which there will be far less political outcry. As for domestic projects, Puerto Rico and Guam will take the hardest hit, noted Todd Harrison, a defense budget expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Both U.S. territories have non-voting delegates in Congress.

The Pentagon told reporters Wednesday that projects were chosen, “largely either because they were upgrades or replacements to existing facilities.”

Trump has been eyeing the defense budget to find the money for his wall ever since it became clear that he wouldn’t be able to convince Congress, even under Republican leadership, to go along with funding it.

On March 24, 2018, he tweeted that the “Military is again rich,” and that because border is security is part of national defense, it was time to “Build WALL through M!,” and he didn’t mean Mexico, but the military.

Over a year later, he finally seems to be getting what he wants, with Esper agreeing to cancel the $3.6 billion in military construction projects, including the ones in Europe.

“It’s foolish to shortchange our deterrence posture against Russia to fund a border wall that will do little, if anything, to stem illegal immigration since much of it comes through existing ports of entry anyhow,” said Michael Carpenter, who previously served in the Pentagon as deputy assistant secretary of defense with responsibility for Russia and Ukraine. “Trump lied about getting Mexico to fund the wall, and now he’s pressing this pet project at the expense of facilities needed to maintain an effective deterrent against Russian aggression in Eastern Europe.”