

Being “Over There:” Location, Location, Location

By Colonel Daniel Smith, USA (Ret.) | November 11, 2004

History was made on April 2, 2004, as the three ex-Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania formally joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Almost immediately, much to Moscow’s consternation, four Belgian fighter aircraft were positioned in Lithuania from where they will patrol the airspace of the new members.

NATO officials insisted the deployment did not foreshadow new bases or a permanent troop presence on Russia’s frontier. But Kremlin concerns were not eased when Ukraine, which lies between other NATO countries and Russia’s Black Sea coast, agreed to allow NATO forces to transit its territory. Left unsaid was “to where?” Given the geography, the obvious answer is “to countries in the lower Caucasus and Central Asia”—Russia’s frontier.

A few days before and half a world away, on March 31, the U.S. Navy made more history as it officially ended a 60-year presence at Puerto Rico’s Roosevelt Roads Naval Station. Envisioned in World War II as the linchpin in the Caribbean Basin Defense System, in its last years the station supported naval exercises on nearby Vieques Island which ended in May 2003.

These are but two of the latest changes in a worldwide reassessment by the Pentagon of where the U.S. wants air and naval bases and ground force posts, access or basing rights, and transit agreements. Such reviews and re-alignments are not new; since 1988, the Pentagon has conducted four major rounds of base closings or restructurings of its domestic installations and will implement a fifth round in 2005. Foreign bases have undergone only one large restructuring round—after the 1991 Persian Gulf War—but smaller adjustments have been made in response to both political-military circumstances (continually rotating a ground force brigade into Kuwait in the 1990s to deter Saddam Hussein) and demands of host governments (consolidating Marine bases on Okinawa and leaving Navy facilities at Subic Bay in the Philippines).

The Pentagon hopes that its plan, the Global Posture Review, when fully implemented, will allow for rapid, tailored responses to contingencies that could arise from any one of a number of “vital national security interests.” However, two of these circumstances are paramount: countering any new outbreaks (and containing existing ones) in the “global war on terror” (GWOT)—with Afghanistan, Iraq, and the hunt for Osama bin Laden as subsets—and reliable access to energy resources.

The 2003 Defense Department’s “Base Structure Report” lists 702 foreign bases owned or leased by the Pentagon, with about 6,000 more installations in the U.S. and its possessions. As vast as this network seems, the Base Structure Report inexplicably fails to include any locations in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kuwait, Qatar, and Kosovo. And to these must now be added at least fourteen garrisons in Iraq.

Then there is “under-reporting.” In Asia, the ten U.S. Marine Corps facilities on Okinawa, including the sprawling 1,200 acre USMC Futenma Air Station, have only one entry. The array of intelligence gathering and other military installations in Great Britain are nowhere to be found in the report, possibly because they all are technically Royal Air Force facilities. Moreover, while a surface-based “boost-phase” missile defense system to counter North Korean missiles can be deployed on ships in international waters of the Sea of Japan, effective coverage by a surface-based system to counter Iranian missiles would require launch sites in at least Afghanistan and Iraq (and possibly Turkmenistan), according to a Congressional Budget Office study completed in July 2004.

Foreign Policy In Focus (FPIF)



A Bit of History

“Manifest destiny” is common shorthand for the series of wars, purchases, and broken agreements that fueled continental expansion westward by European settlers in the New World and their nineteenth century descendants. It also covers a myriad of motives that led to the annexation of Hawaii (July 7, 1898), declared by a congressional joint resolution, and to the Spanish-American War (March-August 1898), from which the U.S. acquired Puerto Rico, Guam, a “permanent” lease of Cuba’s Guantanamo Bay, and direct political control of Cuba until 1902 and of the Philippines until 1946.

As the twentieth century began, U.S. industrial prowess merged with the country’s traditional reliance on freedom of the seas for unhindered trade to present an alternative power center to those in a Europe heading toward the collapse of the post-Napoleonic “Concert of Europe.” But if war, with its embargoes and exclusion zones, was bad for U.S. commercial interests, so too would be a Europe under a single power that could regulate access to continental trade to the detriment of the United States.

This latter consideration drove two interrelated U.S. policies that, with modifications, remain relevant today. The first is tactical: the acquisition of strategically located bases or basing and port visiting rights for U.S. warships (and now land-based aircraft and ground forces)—“coaling stations” in the vernacular of the day. Although U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups include highly efficient re-supply vessels, being able to count on immediate access to a port for emergencies, shore leave, or swapping crews is prudent diplomacy.

The second, a strategic policy, opposes any attempted hegemony of the Eurasian continent. By coincidence, at the time the U.S. first acquired overseas possessions, Sir Halford Mackinder proposed (December 1904) what became known as the “Heartland Theory”:

- Who rules East Europe commands the heartland;
- Who rules the heartland commands the World Island (Eurasia and Africa);
- Who rules the World Island commands the World.

While Mackinder’s formulation most likely did no more than lend an air of *gravitas* to an already determined policy imperative (if even that), the question of continued access to European markets helped tip the U.S. to oppose Imperial Germany. The same logic can be detected in President Franklin Roosevelt’s support for Great Britain (e.g., Lend-Lease) in the period between the Nazi invasion of Poland (September 1, 1939) and Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941). In a sense, World War II then “morphed” into the Cold War, with the communist Soviet Union and the Peoples Republic of China replacing fascist Germany—at least until the Sino-Soviet split in 1959.

While the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989 and of the USSR itself in 1991 ended the 45 year ideologically-based East-West competition for Europe, Europe itself had steadily been creating its own collective identity—the European Union. Ironically, through the World Trade Organization, the U.S. is encountering resistance to some of its trade, price, and tax policies that, while not doing so physically, psychologically and economically threatens to close access to the Heartland for U.S. business and trade.

Emerging Energy Dependence

As World War II ended, U.S. opposition to a hegemonic Europe was expanded to a new region. In February 1945, President Franklin D. Roosevelt met with the ruler of the modern kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Foreseeing that oil would become increasingly vital to the U.S. across virtually all sectors, Roosevelt struck a bargain: a guarantee of access to Saudi oil in return for a guarantee of U.S. protection. In 1991, after being briefed by U.S. intelligence on Saddam Hussein’s seizure of Kuwait and the dispositions of Iraqi troops along the border areas, the Saudis called on the U.S. to honor Roosevelt’s 1945 promise.

The 1991 war was not the first time that “black gold” was the catalyst of war. Hitler’s need for petroleum for Germany’s military machine and industry lay behind his assault on the Soviet Union, and Roosevelt’s actions to cut Japan’s access to oil contributed to Tokyo’s decision to attack the United States. Now, under the “Bush Doctrine,” oil has become the catalyst for preventive war.

Why this is so is obvious from the vast quantities of petroleum the U.S. economy consumes—26% of global consumption by 5% of the globe’s population. Fourteen of the top 15 foreign sources of crude oil in the first two months of 2004 were countries with direct access to the U.S. (Canada and Mexico) or access to the world’s oceans for direct transport. (The fifteenth, landlocked Chad, whose oil sector first came on-line in late 2003, exports its oil through Cameroon.) Maintaining this immediate access keeps prices low without seriously impeding the profligate “easy rider” mentality of a significant portion of the public.

The Changing U.S. Military Base Blueprint

Before going further, it might be useful to explain the Pentagon’s latest terminology pertaining to overseas bases and describe current basing-related actions.

In an August 16, 2004 joint Defense and State Department background briefing on the Global Posture Review, briefing officers noted that 202 of the 230 major U.S. bases worldwide are in the U.S. or its possessions. But they also pointed out the U.S. military is present in 5,458 “distinct and discreet military installations around the world.” These are broken down into three main categories:

- main operating bases (MOB) with permanently stationed forces and families. Current U.S. bases in Germany fit this category. But when the new Stryker-equipped medium brigade replaces the four heavy brigades now in Germany, it will probably be stationed at the vast Grafenwoehr/Vilseck/Hohenfels training complex—a “forward operating location” (see below). Conversely, Ramstein Air Force base and Spangdahlem (which houses two U.S. F-16 squadrons) will remain

MOBs. Italy will be the home of other MOBs such as the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vicenza, U.S. Navy Europe headquarters in Naples, and two F-16 squadrons at Aviano, and

- forward operating locations (FOL) with “warm” facilities having pre-positioned equipment and a small military support group but no families, and
- cooperative security locations (CSL) with austere facilities occupied only for training, exercises, and other military “interactions.” Locales in Thailand for joint “Cobra Gold” exercises with Thai and other regional partners are examples.

About a month after the joint departmental briefing (September 23, 2004), Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld described for the Senate Armed Services Committee the general strategy behind the Global Posture Review:

“In Asia, our ideas build upon our current ground, air, and naval access to overcome vast distances, while bringing additional naval and air capabilities forward into the region. We envision consolidating facilities and headquarters in Japan and Korea, establishing nodes for special operations forces, and creating multiple access avenues for contingency operations.

“In Europe, we seek lighter and more deployable ground capabilities and strengthened special operations forces—both positioned to deploy more rapidly to other regions as necessary—and advanced training facilities.

“In the broader Middle East, we propose to maintain what we call ‘warm’ facilities for rotational forces and contingency purposes, building on cooperation and access provided by host nations during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

“In Africa and the Western Hemisphere, we envision a diverse array of smaller cooperative security locations for contingency access.”

Partial List of Reported or Proposed Forward Operating Locations and Cooperative Security Locations			
Africa		Southwest Asia	
Dakar, Senegal	Air Force	Afghanistan	
Entebbe, Uganda	Air Force	Kandahar	
Djibouti	USMC and Special Forces	Shindand	
Sao Tome and Principe	Naval Facilities	?	Boost Phase Missile Defense Site
Morocco	Training	Pakistan	
Tunisia	Training	Dalbandin Air Base	Logistics
Cameroon	Training	Jacobabad Air Base	Logistics
Mauritania	Training	Khowst Air Base	Logistics support for Special Operations
Niger	Training	Pasni	
Chad	Training		Central Asia
Eastern Mediterranean/Europe			Kyrgyzstan Manas Air Base
Bulgaria	Sarajovo Air Field	Turkmenistan ?	Boost Phase Missile Defense Site
	Graf Ignatievo Air Field	Uzbekistan Karshi Khanabad	
Romania	Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base		East and Southeast Asia
	Babadag Training Range	Hong Kong	
	Mangalia Naval Facility	Diego Garcia	Airbase and Pre-positioned equipment
Cyprus	Air Force	Australia (34 facilities)	
Bosnia	Camp Bondsteel	Pine Gap	Communications/radar
Middle East Persian Gulf		Nurrungar	Radar
Bahrain Juffar Naval Base	5 th Fleet headquarters	Northwest Cape	Communications
Oman al Musannah Air Base		Delamere Air Range	Access
Qatar		Bradshaw Training Range	Access
Camp Al Sayliyah	CENTCOM Forward headquarters	Shoalwater Bay Training Area	Access
Al Udeid Air Base		Singapore	
Kuwait	Camp Doha	Changi Naval Station	Pier for aircraft carrier
	Ahmed al Jabar Air Base	Paya Lebar Air Base	Landing and refueling
Iraq (17 operational camps)		South Korea Camp Mobile	UAV Control Center
Camp Dogwood	Occupied by UK Black Watch	South and Central America and South Atlantic	
Camp Ramadi	Joint Army-Marine	Ecuador Marita Air Base	Landing and refueling, counter-drug
Camp Liberty		Aruba	Landing and refueling
Camp Honor		Curacao	Landing and refueling
Camp Justice		El Salvador	
Camp Solidarity		Ascension Island	Communications/radar
Camp Freedom			
Camp Independence			
?	Boost Phase Missile Defense Site		
Yemen	Naval facilities Aden		

Sources:

NYT Sept, 22, 2004

CBO Report, "Alternatives to Present Army Basing," May 2004

CBO Report, "Alternatives for Boost-Phase Missile Defense, July 2004

Currently, a congressionally-mandated Overseas Basing Commission is gathering evidence on which it will make recommendations for streamlining the Pentagon's "footprint" abroad. The Commission's final report is now due August 15, 2005. Its work will complement that of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) panel that will begin meeting in 2005 to review domestic military installations and recommend closures, realignments, and consolidations.

Energy Security and U.S. Military Presence

At first glance, an overlay of U.S. military base locations or allied nations and the top fifteen countries from which the U.S. derives its oil shows significant divergence.

Excluding NATO allies Canada, Norway, and Britain, only three of the remaining twelve current main suppliers have basing agreements with the United States—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Ecuador—while one, Iraq, is currently occupied by U.S. military units.

As part of the war to oust the Taliban from power in Afghanistan, the U.S. secured FOLs in Uzbekistan (Khanabad Airfield) and Kyrgyzstan (Manas Airfield near Bishkek) for approximately 1,000-1,200 personnel. These two bases are still active FOLs. In Afghanistan itself, the U.S. seems sure to retain control of Bagram Airfield outside Kabul as well as a FOL outside Kandahar. Moreover, an airbase at Shindand, which lies only ten miles from the Iranian border, is home to some 100 U.S. Special Forces personnel with helicopter support. The Iranians reportedly suspect that Shindand might be converted

into an eavesdropping base or a forward operating base for a future U.S. attack.

That said, the picture changes when non-NATO countries that (1) are the main sources or potential sources of oil for the U.S. market, (2) have the largest petroleum deposits, and (3) have transit facilities vital for moving the oil are compared with countries which have military agreements with the U.S., host a U.S. military presence, or have been identified as a possible host.

Other important bridgeheads in the Persian Gulf include Bahrain and Qatar, both of which host key U.S. facilities; United Arab Emirates; and Oman. In Eastern Europe, following the end of major hostilities in Iraq, 150 U.S. Marines remained at a FOL at the Black Sea port of Constanta, Romania. Conversely, U.S. presence at the airbase at Incirlik, Turkey, has been sharply reduced from 3,000 to 500.

The Challenge of Maintaining Dominance

Dominant military powers have always had to deal with countries not part of their “empire”—whether the empire is formal or informal. This rule still applies in the 21st century despite the U.S. claim to overwhelming “global” power and reach. And a corollary also still applies: the “natural” tendency of those outside the empire is to work together to split off parts of the imperium or even undermine the entire edifice of empire.

As the 21st century began, the two main outsiders were Russia and China. They had had a love-hate relationship during the 20th century, one that, after 1959, included a series of military encounters along their very long and still militarized border. In the 1970s, Richard Nixon played “the China card” against the Soviets by establishing diplomatic relations with China and opening trade.

Main or Potential U.S. Petroleum or Crude Oil Import Sources	Petroleum-Transit Route (or Possible Transit Route) to Atlantic or Pacific Oceans	Actual or Potential U.S. Military Presence, Access, or Transit Agreements	
		In Country	In Adjacent Country
Canada	Not applicable (N/A)		
Saudi Arabia	Persian Gulf, Red Sea	X	Kuwait, Iraq, Bahrain
Iraq	Persian Gulf, Syria, Turkey	X (Occupied)	Kuwait, Turkey
Kuwait	Persian Gulf	X	Saudi Arabia, Iraq
Iran	Persian Gulf		Afghanistan, Iraq
Mexico	N/A		
Venezuela	Pipe Colombian oil past Panama Canal to Pacific for China		Colombia; Aruba, Ecuador
Nigeria	N/A		Sao Tome and Principe
Ecuador	N/A	X	
Russia	Pipelines to Europe and China		Kazakhstan; Bulgaria? Azerbaijan? Georgia
Angola	N/A		Sao Tome and Principe
Algeria	N/A		Italy
Gabon	N/A		Sao Tome and Principe
Equatorial Guinea	N/A		Sao Tome and Principe
Chad	Cameroon		
Potential Significant Sources			
Kazakhstan	Russia (Black Sea); Iran; Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey, China		Afghanistan; Uzbekistan
Turkmenistan	Afghanistan-Pakistan; Iran		
Azerbaijan	Georgia-Turkey		Georgia
Uzbekistan		X	Afghanistan
Colombia	Venezuela for China	X	

But the 21st century brought another challenge to U.S. dominance: the rise of sub-national groups intent on terrorizing whole populations. The initial reaction of the Bush administration following the attacks by al-Qaida on September 11, 2001, seemed oriented to rally the world against terror. Yet within 18 months, the combination of the President's ultimatum to other nations to be "with us or against us" and the U.S. invasion of Iraq allowed unilateralism to triumph. The U.S., mired in Iraq, was arguably much less secure as a result.

Those who reveled in the U.S. "victory" over the Soviet empire, and who came to power in 2001, were oddly blinded to the Cold War lessons of the power of cooperative relationships. They seemed to think that the U.S. was so dominant that it could achieve unilateral security—completely ignoring the basic principle that every action intended to move closer to this goal generates one or more counteractions. The post-major combat phase of the Iraqi adventure finally compelled the administration to reverse its tactics and invite United Nations help—only to lose it and the vital assistance of non-governmental agencies because of the continuing chaos in many parts of Iraq.

There have been other negative consequences of U.S. unilateralism in the struggle to contain and reduce the number of terrorist acts. Washington has attempted to gain support by adding to its list of suspect individuals and groups whoever is named by "allies" in the "war on terror." For example, on April 1, 2004, Ambassador J. Coffey Black, the State Department's counter-terrorism coordinator, appeared before the Subcommittee on International Terrorism of the House International Relations Committee to testify about al-Qaida and the "global war on terror" (GWOT).

On al-Qaida, he asserted that the organization still poses a significant threat despite the loss of its training base in Afghanistan and the arrest or death of 70 percent of its seasoned leaders and more than 3,400 "operatives or associates." On the GWOT, he singled out six terror organizations or locations for particular mention: Ansar al-Islam and the al Zarqawi network,

both in Iraq; the Salafist Group for Call and Combat and the Salafiya Jihadia, both in North Africa; Jemaah Islamiya in East and Southeast Asia; and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. He also referred to "thousands of jihadists around the world who have fought in conflicts in Kosovo, Kashmir, Chechnya and elsewhere."

Some observers believe the mention of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan was a *quid pro quo* for basing access in that country. Yet the Central Asia-western China "terror" scene is confused, to say the least. For years, China had played down the frequent incidents of violence in the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR). But after October 7, 2001, when the first U.S. bombs hit Afghanistan, Beijing started playing them up, attributing them to East Turkestan Islamic "terrorists" who formed part of the international terrorism network and hence should be a legitimate target of the U.S.-led coalition.

At first, Washington resisted Beijing's ploy. After a December 6, 2001 meeting with Chinese Vice Foreign Ministers Li Zhaoxing and Wang Yi, Francis Taylor, the State Department's Counterterrorism Coordinator, said: "The legitimate economic and social issues that confront the people in Western China are not necessarily terrorist issues and should be resolved politically rather than using counterterrorism methods." Eventually, however, opposition turned to ambivalence until finally the East Turkestan group was added to the list.

Another group, Hizb-e Tehrir (HT) or Party of Liberation, claims it has substantial membership across Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Its agenda includes a caliphate that would unite East and West Turkestan (China's XUAR and the Central Asian Republics, respectively). Russian media link them to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which reportedly has adopted HT's vision.¹

Looking Ahead

Where does this leave the future? Clouded, to say the least, until the Overseas Basing Commission finishes its work. But others are examining some options based on criteria laid down by the Pentagon.

In May 2004, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) released a study examining overseas bases and options for realignment ranging from maintaining the status quo through minor consolidation to complete withdrawal of most permanently based forces.

One of the main criteria the CBO considered was the “time needed to deploy a heavy Army brigade combat team (BCT) by sea” to potential conflict zones—one of the administration’s rationales for change. (Secretary Rumsfeld’s “transformation” program envisions meeting a 10-30-30 timeline: 10 days to move forces to any place on the globe, 30 days to defeat an enemy, and 30 days to reconstitute for another war.) CBO looked specifically at Nigeria, Azerbaijan (potentially important future sources of oil), Uganda, and Djibouti (potential staging bases for conducting operations in Africa and the Arabian Peninsula to counter instability and terrorism).

CBO compared times to move a BCT from hypothetical FOBs in Bulgaria, Poland, and Romania with current bases in the Indian Ocean at Diego Garcia (equipment on ships) and in Germany. Azerbaijan is the only destination which could be reached more quickly (six days) from FOBs—and then only from Bulgaria and Romania. In all cases, departures from Poland take as long (or one day longer) as from Germany, while departures from Bulgaria and Romania take one, three, and six days longer than from Diego Garcia to reach Nigeria, Djibouti, and Uganda, respectively.

(Changing the BCT from tank-heavy to the new Stryker configuration would save even more time compared to current times, but this difference rests more on the fact that the Stryker-equipped BCT can be moved by air more efficiently.)

CBO also looked at times required to move combat service and combat service support units that sustain the BCTs. Elapsed time from Germany was equal or quicker than from the U.S. in all cases, but from Qatar, which hosts an entire division’s equipment, Uganda and Djibouti could be reached nine and seven days quicker, respectively, than from Germany.

The CBO study suggests two conclusions. First, relocating bases in Europe does not improve operational response time except to the Caspian region. Nonetheless, the Pentagon seems determined to continue to draw down the biggest troop MOBs outside the United States while increasing the number of FOs and CSLs to enhance its “freedom of action.” The latter two types of bases undoubtedly will multiply in sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, and Southwest Asia.

Second, notwithstanding current consolidations underway in Germany (13 facilities closing) and in South Korea (18 facilities closing), what remains unchallenged in the CBO report is the contention by outside observers that future U.S. base locations in Europe, the Middle East, Southwest and Central Asia will be tied to oil sources and oil transport considerations.

Even with additional closings and consolidations to the 702 overseas “installations” (Army 381, Navy 44, Marine Corps 2, Air Force 275) identified by the CBO, the U.S. will continue to maintain the most extensive foreign basing structure of any country. For the Pentagon, it seems, not only is “location everything,” it’s “everywhere.”

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¹ South Asia Analysis Group Paper 499 July 24, 2002, “US and Terrorism in Xinjiang” <http://www.saag.org/papers5/paper499.html>

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