American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research

December 2004

National Security Outlook

Rebasing, Revisited

By Thomas Donnelly

One of the key questions for the second term of the Bush administration is how to reposture U.S. military forces both at home and abroad. Fifteen years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, these forces resemble nothing so much as a smaller version of their Cold War selves, in many ways improved but hardly "transformed"—to use Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's mantra—let alone optimized for the missions they face today and are most likely to face in the near future. While the idea of "force posture" includes factors beyond basing, the tyrannies of time and distance still do much to shape the character of war. The value of bases is as the value of other real estate: it all comes down to location, location, location.

The history of the United States is a case study in expansionism. From its origins in a diverse and often squabbling handful of English colonies in the western wilds of the British Empire to its current position of global hegemony, Americans have established the habit of looking outward to solve their security problems. Our "security perimeter" has grown beyond recognition, and it continues to grow. The past century saw the expansion of our perimeter into the air and space; the new century is pushing our interests into cyberspace. There is no immediate reason to expect American expansionism to end.

Accompanying this expansion of the American security perimeter has been a growing network of military facilities, both along the frontier and internally. Installations like Forts Riley and Leavenworth in Kansas were once outposts for Indian fighting, part of Andrew Jackson's "Permanent Indian Frontier" plan, then "hubs" for further force projection. In the 1880s, Fort Leavenworth became the home of the Army staff college; Fort Riley has for some decades been the home of the First Infantry Division, a unit with much service in Germany and in the Persian Gulf. In Germany, Ramstein Air Force base, near the front line during the Cold War, is now a key pillar in the American air "bridge" that makes the U.S. Air Force's boast of "global reach" a reality. The general pattern has been that, when one war ends, the United States fortifies the furthest reaches of the final front lines and, when the next war begins, it builds new facilities to support still farther-flung operations.

Thus it should hardly be a surprise, upon the conclusion of the Cold War and the rise of a new series of threats to U.S. security interests, that the network of American installations should evolve. Had the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq not intervened, the first Bush administration already would have begun to implement its plan for a new "permanent American frontier" and to prepare for the congressional knife fight posed by the next round of the domestic Base Realignment and Closure, or BRAC, process, set to begin next year. Yet even as the reality of the September 11 attacks and the global war on terror has turned the transformation of the Pentagon's global force posture into a strategic imperative of American national security, significant challenges—diplomatic, fiscal, and political—still stand in the way.

Thomas Donnelly (tdonnelly@aei.org) is a resident fellow in defense and security policy studies at AEI and the author of *Operation Iraqi Freedom: A Strategic Assessment* (AEI Press, 2004).

Bridges Not Far Enough

The Bush administration deserves enormous credit for undertaking the overdue work of reposturing U.S. forces overseas; the Clinton administration had little interest in the issue. To be fair, this was primarily a political decision, not one taken in the Pentagon. Andrew Hoehn, recently departed as deputy assistant secretary of defense for strategy and a major architect of the Bush plan, was a long-time defense civil servant through several administrations. But just as President Clinton corrupted the 1995 BRAC process for domestic political gain, he was happy to avoid the diplomatic costs inherent in withdrawing and repositioning U.S. forces stationed in Western Europe or Korea.

Alas, the current administration's rebasing plan, like the rest of its defense program, has partly become captive to the hope that the missions in Afghanistan and Iraq are temporary anomalies. The Bush rebasing plan is bold and ambitious in many ways, but it is still only a first step—as perhaps is inevitable until the issues of the long-term U.S. presence in Afghanistan and Iraq are settled.

Although the administration has yet to fully reveal its plans or much of a timetable, it has thus far made clear that it intends to reduce the garrisons in Germany and Korea significantly, withdrawing at least 25,000 to 30,000 troops from Europe and almost 15,000 from the Korean peninsula. That will leave about 35,000 U.S. soldiers in Germany and about 25,000 in South Korea. Moreover, many of the troops in Korea will be repositioned away from the demilitarized zone to the south, below Seoul. Such a move will not only render U.S. forces less vulnerable to a first strike by Pyongyang, but also facilitate their redeployment in the event of conflicts elsewhere in Asia. The European contingent will likewise be reconfigured, with new "lily-pad" transitory bases built in southeastern Europe, making it easier to support "out-of-area" operations in the Caucasus, the Middle East, and Central Asia.

The Greater Middle East. While the Bush administration's proposed changes to the global force posture are a good start, they are far from complete. Most importantly, it does little to reassure both enemies and allies that the American presence in the Middle East is in proportion to the "long, hard slog" described by Defense Secretary Rumsfeld. U.S. forces in Iraq, for instance, currently operate out of more than a dozen major sites. While continuing success in the counterinsurgency campaign may allow—and fairly soon—for a reduction of the 140,000-plus troops now in Iraq, no military commander counts on a full withdrawal. And even once the counterinsurgency inside Iraq is won, there will still be the matter of regional security. The American commitment to Iraq is growing as the country moves toward democracy.

President Bush has often described Iraq as the "central front" in the war on Middle Eastern terror. Just as it was necessary to defend the front lines in Germany during the Cold War—and the rationale for "forward defense" was political and strategic rather than military and operational—so it will be necessary to defend the front in the Middle East. Clearly, the current Iraqi interim government of Ayad Allawi is in no position to negotiate a long-term status-of-forces agreement—the legal framework that would establish the terms of a continued American military presence in the country—but a legitimately elected Iraqi government will be both able and ready to do so. Iraq's mainstream Shia leaders recognize this fact, and Iraq's Kurdish parties will demand continued American presence.

This need not mean that future U.S. bases must be an in-the-face irritant to Iraqi nationalism; although, indeed, the Kurds would welcome such bases. The backhanded benefit of Saddam Hussein's massive army was that it had plenty of airfields and other facilities stuck out in the desert. These will prove an ideal infrastructure for a continuing training and strategic partnership between the new Iraqi security forces and the United States, and they will generally facilitate long-term U.S. operations. While neither the current American administration nor any future one will be eager for more wars in the region, it is folly not to prepare against the possibility. The operational advantages of U.S. bases in Iraq should be obvious for other power-projection missions in the region. Sites in northern and western Iraq would be key to patrolling the porous Iraqi borders with Syria and Iran. Lesser facilities in the far south would simply be an expansion of other U.S. posts in the Persian Gulf and Kuwait.

A similar logic applies in Afghanistan. The recent election has legitimated the government of Hamid Karzai, and the Afghan president has proven himself remarkably adept at creating consensus while marginalizing rivals and "warlords" who pose a threat to democracy. Yet Kabul's hold on the provinces, never strong, is far from solid. Revived opium agriculture

supplies local leaders with the income to buy weapons and maintain their militias, while Taliban and al Qaeda remnants still lurk, both in Afghanistan and Pakistan's northwest frontier. If Afghanistan is farther along the path toward stability and representative government than Iraq, it is still undeniable that a long-term American presence—happily and hopefully in conjunction with NATO—remains a necessity.

Thus it comes as no surprise that the Karzai government wants to establish a status-of-forces agreement. This is key to growing the fragile Afghan National Army into a force capable of maintaining control by Kabul, but President Karzai also recognizes the larger, regional role the United States must play. There is a willingness to establish a modest network of U.S. bases in Afghanistan, notably in western Afghanistan. In combination with bases in the Persian Gulf and Iraq, such installations would allow the United States to help "contain" and "deter" a nuclear Iran—an increasingly likely eventuality.

The basing implications of the global war on terrorism, or the struggle to transform the greater Middle East, go well beyond the Persian Gulf. They extend inland into Central Asia, thus the operations from airfields in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The Bush administration has also come to accept that the peripheries of the war in Africa necessitate new basing arrangements. Consequently, the Pentagon established in late 2002 its first sub-Saharan garrison in Djibouti, located at the strategic chokepoint between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, where more than 1,000 troops are currently deployed as part of Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa.

In sum, U.S. posture throughout the greater Middle East should be conceived of as a network or web of mutually supporting facilities that will serve three purposes: expressing the American long-term commitment to political change in the region, enabling the deployment of forces to points of crisis, and sustaining an expanding set of partnerships and alliances with friendly—and better yet, free—governments.

The Far East and the Indian Ocean. The situation is much the same in regard to East Asia and maritime South Asia. Since the *2001 Quadrennial Defense Review*, the Pentagon has acknowledged the need to hedge against the growing military power of the People's Republic of China. Unfortunately, U.S. force posture in this vast region remains hobbled by the closure of the major airfield and port facilities in the Philippines—part of the initial post–Cold War reductions in the early 1990s. Essentially, the American security perimeter remains open for several thousand miles from the island of Diego Garcia in the western Indian Ocean to South Korea and Okinawa. Any confrontation with China would thus require U.S. forces first to deploy forward, ceding the initiative to Beijing.

This was made plain during the Taiwan missile "blockades" of 1995 and 1996. In both those years, the Chinese "tested" short-range ballistic missiles by bracketing Taiwan with shots that landed intentionally astride the main shipping channels approaching the island. The demonstration of new Chinese capabilities—and boldness—sent a shiver of panic through the region, and the Clinton administration responded appropriately by dispatching a pair of aircraft-carrier battle groups to waters east of Taiwan. One of the lessons for China was that, in a crisis, it would be two weeks before U.S. forces could influence the situation.

In response, the Pentagon has been improving its facilities on Guam, allowing for B-2 bombers and expanded attack submarine operations. This is a crucial first step, but its value is diluted by the fact that Guam is still thousands of miles distant from the most likely crisis points in the region. The current rebasing plan has considered establishing some position in northern Australia, but while such a location would ease operations in Southeast Asia, it, too, is far distant from Taiwan. Some planners have their eyes on the small island of Palau, but such a move is as much a recognition of the dimension of the loss of the Philippines as of the true value of Palau.

Similarly, the expansion of facilities in Singapore helps to reinforce U.S. presence in the region. By rebuilding part of its port, Singapore now regularly hosts visits by American aircraft carriers, and cooperation between the Singaporean and U.S. navies and air forces is growing. Singapore is clearly a part of the solution to U.S. posture problems in East Asia.

With patience and persistent diplomacy, it might be possible to regain access to the Philippines. In particular, the Pentagon and State Department must work together to counter the strong Filipino nationalism that celebrated the eviction of U.S. forces a decade ago and remains wary of their return. In doing so, the Bush administration should keep in mind that public opinion in Manila remains of two minds, if for no other reason than the

loss of revenue that followed the base closings. The campaign to suppress the Abu Sayyaf terrorists should likewise have reminded Americans and Filipinos alike of the need for strategic cooperation, even aside from the question of China. To be sure, an American military homecoming to the Philippines would require great delicacy on Washington's part and some time to accomplish, but given the operational and strategic value of the Philippines, it is time to begin laying the groundwork.

Moreover, the Bush administration needs to solidify its position with America's two most important traditional allies in Northeast Asia, Japan and Korea. One of the quiet but very great successes of this president's first term was to repair relations with Japan and then to open new possibilities for expanded strategic and military cooperation. It was not simply the need to make up for the bashing of Japanese business practices that marred the early Clinton years, but the need to refocus the relationship on security matters, particularly the nuclear and missile threat from North Korea and the rise of China. Japanese strategists were often more alert to these issues than Americans.

Nevertheless, the question of U.S. bases in Japan is still an open one. The Marines on Okinawa remain an irritant to the local population; this is simply a Japanese domestic political reality. Secondly, while Japanese elites might be comfortable in giving access to U.S. forces operating in Korea or, more importantly, over Taiwan, broader Japanese public opinion would be divided, at best. While this is primarily a challenge for Japanese political leaders—defining an appropriate but acceptable geopolitical role for Japan that acknowledges the legacy of World War II but is not paralyzed by it—it is also a problem for the United States and a potential military weakness.

The situation is far worse in South Korea. If the Japanese are having trouble facing their future, the Koreans seem to be in denial about their present. Even if the immediate challenges of what to do about North Korea can be managed, the U.S. position on the peninsula—which would remain strategically and operationally key even in a post-reunification situation—is increasingly precarious. The governing party in South Korea is driven by an opposing-party mindset and does not seem ready for a useful dialogue about the long-term role of U.S. forces and the centrality of the peninsula to the future strategic balance in East Asia.

But perhaps the biggest challenge for the second-term Bush team is to sort out its thinking on Taiwan in a post-9/11 context. Before the attacks, the Chinese threat to Taiwan was the central concern of the Pentagon, which made great efforts to reconstruct the neglected strategic partnership with Taipei. The administration's attitude was most famously captured by President Bush's pledge to defend the island "whatever it takes." But the administration has all but abandoned, if not entirely reversed, these efforts in order to focus on the Middle East. Beijing, once a nascent strategic competitor, is again a partner in good standing in the war on terror. Arms sales to Taiwan are in limbo, and military-to-military ties remain tightly restrained. And President Chen Shui-bian and the democracy in Taiwan are once again seen as the provocateurs, while Hu Jintao and his fellow autocrats on the mainland are seen as the force for stability.

Meanwhile, the challenges to U.S. forces in operations around Taiwan are growing. China continues to build its missile and air forces assiduously, as well as its submarine fleet. The submarines are meant not only to operate in the Taiwan Strait itself, but beyond Taiwan to the east, the favored waters for a U.S. naval defense of Taiwan. If direct cooperation and American facilities on Taiwan remain too provocative, U.S. force posture in the region must be otherwise optimized to be able to operate around and over Taiwan in times of crisis, even as the Chinese try to deny access. Taiwan is not the only potential point of conflict with China, but it is nonetheless the natural fulcrum around which U.S. forces in the Pacific should be positioned.

The American Nucleus

Taken together, the emerging U.S. military stance abroad is, and should be, less a conglomeration of separate regional bases than a single unified global force posture. At the core of this structure are the military facilities in the United States itself—a core that is also in critical need of reform. And as controversial as it will be to reposture American forces abroad, it may be even harder to accomplish a similar task at home.

The most immediate hurdle is the forthcoming round of the BRAC process. It is also a great opportunity, however, in part because the administration's efforts to call attention to the issue of the military's overseas posture have changed the politics of domestic base closures and realignment. The Pentagon's plans to move forces out of Germany and South Korea and close installations in both places give a greater ratio-

nale for sacrifices at home. At the same time, the chance of providing a base to units withdrawn from overseas posts provides an argument for keeping domestic facilities open.

Moreover, it is unclear whether the BRAC process itself has lost legitimacy. The process worked well initially, principally because the authorizing legislation was built around an "all-or-none" mechanism. According to a plan drafted by former representative Dick Armey, the list of bases to be realigned or closed was to be considered as a total package, leaving Congress bereft of the ability to consider individual cases separately and instead vote yes-or-no on the entire list. But after the losses in the 1994 elections, the Clinton administration manipulated the subsequent round of base closings to permit two Air Force logistics centers in Texas and California—near closely contested districts and in key states—to "partially" close—that is, to remain open. Thus poisoned, the process ground to a halt, with the creation of a "depot caucus" in the House of Representatives adamantly opposed to further closures. It remains to be seen whether the political climate has changed, but the recent public statements of California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, a popular Republican with real claims to have aided President Bush's reelection campaign, suggests that local political imperatives are still strong.

Politics aside, there are important strategic and operational considerations that demand a reposturing of U.S. forces at home as well as abroad. While the need to maintain American garrisons in far-flung corners of the globe is perhaps more crucial than ever, the new locations—the Middle East; Africa; Central, South, and Southeast Asia; even southeastern Europe—are not nearly so suited to the kind of support structures common in western Europe during the Cold War. Iraq is not yet Germany. It may be that, in time, these new bases can accommodate troops' families, military hospitals, and even the golf courses so beloved by officers, but that time is a long time distant. The continental United States is not simply the locus from which American military power is projected abroad; it will increasingly be where almost all American military families live. The pattern of Army and Air Force troop rotations is now more like traditional Navy and Marine Corps duty.

And despite a decade's worth of incremental improvements, it is uncertain whether, as a whole, U.S. installations are capable of sustaining an expanded and extended rotational posture for units abroad. The arithmetic of power projection is much the same for facilities as it is for troops: to maintain a base abroad requires a domestic infrastructure about five times larger. And in fact, the advance of technologies allows many military command and logistics functions to operate at a greater distance, a trend that tends to increase stateside responsibilities and participation in overseas operations. Even some combat functions, such as the operations of long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicles, are now controlled globally from facilities in the United States. Just as the tactical "tooth-to-tail" ratio is changing, with a growing support "tail" for every trigger-pulling "tooth"—a pattern that continues despite the nature of close combat in Iraq and Afghanistan—likewise the support of an expanding base network overseas will place greater demands on domestic installations. The administration wisely plans to better position overseas garrisons to reinforce "laterally" to crisis spots—as units from Europe have operated away from their home stations for years, units in Korea are being repositioned and restructured to do the same—but the core of U.S. power projection remains in the United States.

Another consideration is where to recruit, train, and station a larger force, most importantly a larger ground force. In the post–Cold War drawdown, and through the period of accelerated operations even prior to 9/11 and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the military services made disproportionate cuts in their infrastructure accounts, including spending for training facilities. The Air Force decision to close one of its two primary pilot-training bases created almost immediate problems, and today the Army cannot easily add more than an additional 30,000 soldiers to its roster per year; it simply does not have the facilities to accommodate more. Any decision to expand Army end strength carries with it the need to expand facilities. Part of the rationale behind the reductions of the early 1990s was supposed to be to preserve an "expansible" force, but beyond lip service, no real effort was made to maintain such a capability. The upcoming BRAC process will have to begin to remedy this past neglect.

The potential double whammy of a withdrawal of overseas-stationed forces and an overall expansion in the forces based at home compounds the problems and the expense. Fran Lusier of the Congressional Budget Office has estimated that the withdrawal and restationing of 14,000 soldiers from Korea would entail about $1.2 billion in infrastructure costs at home.[1] On such a

basis, expanding the Army by 30,000 per year would add another $2.5 billion or so per year in such costs—not counting the cost of the manpower itself, or the costs of equipping, training, and operating the larger force.

In sum, the posture of U.S. forces at home and abroad is one grand question; just as a global superpower needs a global strategy, it needs a genuinely global military posture. Getting all the right pieces in the right places will be a long-term effort, constantly constrained by both domestic and international politics. Nevertheless, the second Bush administration must strive to set forth a coherent blueprint that gives some structure to the inevitable horse-trading—particularly in the contentious BRAC process—to come.

Notes

1. Frances Lussier, "Options for Changing the Army's Overseas Basing," Congressional Budget Office (May 2004), available at http://www.cbo.gov/showdoc.cfm?index=5415&sequence=0.