

Overseas Base Realignment and Closure Coalition

U.S. MILITARY BASES OVERSEAS THE FACTS

NUMBERS

- **750 military base sites** estimated in 80 foreign countries and colonies/territories.
- **75-85%** of the world's foreign military bases; UK=145; Russia = 12-36; China = 8 (plus Tibet).¹

GEOGRAPHY

- **119 base sites** in Germany; 119 in Japan; 73 in South Korea; 44 in Italy.
- **Others** in, e.g., Aruba, Bahrain, Cuba, Djibouti, Estonia, Greece, Honduras, Ireland, Jordan, Kenya, Marshalls, Norway, Oman, Philippines, Qatar, Romania, Spain, Tunisia, UK, US Virgins, Wake Isl.
- **Pentagon figure** of 625 base sites omits bases in Iraq, Syria, Niger, and many other well-known (e.g., Kuwait, Kosovo) and secretive bases (Israel, Saudi Arabia).
- **8 countries** (minimum) where the US military has or recently had troops in combat.²

COSTS

- **\$10,000-\$40,000** avg. additional costs per person per year to station military overseas vs. domestic.
- **\$55 billion/year** (est.) to build and maintain overseas bases.
- **\$80+ billion/year** (est.) in total spending on bases and personnel abroad.
- **Alternatively**, moving half the \$55 billion spent on bases would mean more than 200 million covid tests, 200 million N95 masks, 250,000 infrastructure jobs, and 400,000 vets with VA health care.³

WARS

- **At least 25 times** US bases have been used to launch wars of choice or military interventions in 15 countries in the greater Middle East alone since 1980.
- **Al Qaeda recruitment** has been correlated with a US base, troop presence in the Middle East.
- **Bases have become targets** for militants, as in Afghanistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia.⁴

HARMS

- **Military personnel separated** from family members during unaccompanied deployments; when family can accompany, spouses and children face disruptions to careers, schooling, relationships.
- **38 undemocratic host countries** with authoritarian or other less-than-democratic regimes (e.g., Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Niger, Honduras, and 11 colonies controlled by U.S. or allies).
- **Environmental damage** caused by the disposal, dumping, and use of hazardous, toxic materials, facilitated by base agreements that often exempt the US from responsibility for damage, while the US asserts its own environmental laws do not apply.
- **Crimes and accidents**—including rape, murder, and other crimes and military accidents—anger local communities, incite protest as in Okinawa, and damage the international reputation of the US.
- **Exploitative prostitution** and sex trafficking linked to bases in places such as South Korea.
- **Reckless foreign leaders** can be emboldened by a U.S. base presence to take dangerously aggressive stances against, for example, Russia or China, believing the U.S. military will back them up.
- **18 indigenous and other peoples** displaced by base construction or expansion abroad since WWII.⁵

CLOSURES

- **More than 1,000 overseas bases** closed in Europe, Asia by both Bush presidents and Bill Clinton.
- **No BRAC process needed** to close bases abroad.
- **Local movements** worldwide are demanding base closures or a reduced US military presence.
- **19%** estimated domestic base excess capacity available to returning troops, families.

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- **Rapid deployment from domestic bases** means most US forces can deploy virtually anywhere on earth as fast or nearly as fast as from a base abroad in case of emergency deployment.⁶

POLITICS

- **Global Base Posture Review** announced by Biden administration in 2021.
- **BRAC does not apply** to overseas bases, meaning the Pentagon can close overseas bases without the political challenges of closing domestic bases and the Base Realignment and Closure process.
- **Transpartisan:** Across the political spectrum, experts and politicians are questioning overseas bases.
- **Local economies** would benefit from returning personnel, families.
- **Congressmembers** have few, if any, constituents living in communities around overseas bases.⁷

ALTERNATIVES TO OVERSEAS BASES

- **“Draw Down, Build Up”:** Close bases, boost U.S. diplomatic presence globally to rebuild alliances.
- Maintain a streamlined, powerful, **defensive military** defending U.S. territory.
- **Rapid reaction forces** deploying from domestic bases to defend allies in legitimate emergencies.
- Increased commitment to **diplomacy**, international institutions, economic and cultural engagement, with the **use of military force as a true last resort**.
- **Multinational operations** through multinational organizations if the use of force is necessary.⁸

¹ The definition of a *base* varies, making precise figures impossible. David Vine, *The United States of War: A Global History of America's Endless Conflicts, from Columbus to the Islamic State* (University of California Press, 2020); David Vine, Patterson Deppen, and Leah Bolger, “Drawdown: Improving U.S. and Global Security Through Military Base Closures Abroad,” Quincy Brief no. 16, September 2021, <https://quincyinst.org/report/drawdown-improving-u-s-and-global-security-through-military-base-closures-abroad/>; David Vine, “Lists of U.S. Military Bases Abroad, 1776–2021,” American University, <https://doi.org/10.17606/7em4-hb13>; John Glaser, “Withdrawing from Overseas Bases: Why a Forward-Deployed Military Posture Is Unnecessary, Outdated, and Dangerous,” Policy Analysis 816, Cato Institute, July 18, 2017; Frank Jacobs, “The World’s Five Military Empires,” BigThink.com, July 10, 2017, <http://bigthink.com/strange-maps/the-worlds-five-military-empires>; Damien Sharkov, “Russia’s Military Compared to the U.S.” *Newsweek*, June 8, 2018, <http://www.newsweek.com/russias-military-compared-us-which-country-has-more-military-bases-across-954328>; George Friedman, “Chinese Military Installations in the South China Sea,” Geopolitical Futures, April 3, 2017, <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/chinese-military-installations-south-china-sea/>.

² Vine, et al.; Vine, “[Lists](#)”; Glaser; Department of Defense, “Base Structure Report Fiscal Year 2018 Baseline (A Summary of DOD’s Real Property Inventory),” Washington, DC, 2017; Stephanie Savell, et al., “United States Counterterrorism Operations,” Costs of War Project, February 26, 2021, https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2021/USCounterterrorismOperations2018-2020_CostsofWar.pdf.

³ Michael J. Lostumbo, et al., “Overseas Basing of U.S. Military Forces: An Assessment of Relative Costs and Strategic Benefits,” report, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, April 29, 2013, p. xxv; Vine, et al.; National Priorities Project Trade-Offs tool, <https://www.nationalpriorities.org/interactive-data/trade-offs/>, accessed March 4, 2021.

⁴ Vine, *United States of War*, p. 248; Stephen Glain, “What Actually Motivated Osama bin Laden,” *U.S. News & World Report*, May 3, 2011, <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/stephen-glain/2011/05/03/what-actually-motivated-osama-bin-laden>; Bradley L. Bowman, “After Iraq,” *Washington Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (2008): 85.

⁵ Catherine Lutz, ed., *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle Against U.S. Military Posts* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Vine, *United States of War*, p. 226, 274; David Vine, “Forty-five Blows Against Democracy: How U.S. Military Bases Back Dictators, Autocrats, and Military Regimes,” TomDispatch.com, May 16, 2017, <http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/176281/>; Jon Mitchell, *Poisoning the Pacific* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020); Center for Public Environmental Oversight, www.cpeo.org.

⁶ Department of Defense, “Strengthening U.S. Global Defense Posture, Report to Congress,” Washington, DC, September 17, 2004, 5; Lutz; Andrew Yeo, *Activists, Alliances, and Anti-U.S. Base Protests* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Department of Defense, “Department of Defense Infrastructure Capacity,” report, October 2017, <https://fas.org/man/eprint/infrastructure.pdf>; Lostumbo, et al., p. 38.

⁷ BRAC website, <https://www.acq.osd.mil/brac>.

⁸ See e.g., Vine, et al.; John Feffer, et al., “Just Security: An Alternative Foreign Policy Framework,” report, Institute for Policy Studies, Washington, DC, July 2007; Glaser, pp. 13-19.