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, Marshall's, 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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Overseas Base Realignment and Closure Coalition

- 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
- 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


Questions about facts, citations; more information: www.overseasbases.net / vine@american.edu