

Rare Transpartisan Coalition Calls on President Biden to Make US Safer, Save Billions by Closing Military Bases Overseas amid Global Posture Review

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Washington, DC—March 4, more than forty military experts from across the ideological spectrum today release an open letter to the Biden administration arguing for the closure of wasteful, damaging, and unneeded US military bases abroad. In an era of bitter divisions between right and left, consensus is growing about the need to transform a long-overlooked but crucial part of how the United States engages with the world: the 75-year-old strategy of maintaining some 800 US military bases in more than 80 foreign countries.

The open letter was drafted by the transpartisan ***Overseas Base Realignment and Closure Coalition (OBRACC)*** and responds to the Biden administration’s recent announcement that it will conduct an urgently needed and long overdue “Global Posture Review” to ensure that the worldwide distribution of U.S. military forces is “appropriately aligned with our foreign policy and national security priorities.” The Coalition’s efforts reflect growing momentum to close hundreds of unneeded military bases overseas and, counterintuitively to some, make the country safer while saving billions of dollars a year.

In contrast to former President Trump’s reckless attempt to withdraw bases and troops from Syria and his attempt to punish Germany by removing installations there, OBRACC argues the Global Posture Review provides a chance to analyze carefully and strategically where bases are no longer needed or actually contribute to insecurity and thus shutter them, bring American troops home, and simultaneously rebuild U.S. alliances and diplomatic presence worldwide.

The letter’s signatories include Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians, Greens, and Independents. They span retired Army **Major General Dennis Laich** and other retired military officers; former member of Congress **John Tierney**; former Chief of Staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell, **Col. (Ret.) Lawrence Wilkerson**, and other Clinton, Reagan, and George W. Bush administration officials; peace advocates including Codepink Co-Director **Medea Benjamin**; and scholars and think tank analysts from across the ideological spectrum, including **Noam Chomsky, Christopher Preble, Catherine Lutz, Cynthia Enloe, and Ben Friedman**. The letter and full list of signatories are below.

On Wednesday, March 10, 1-2pm EST, the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft will host an online event to discuss the letter and why the Biden administration should close bases abroad and strengthen U.S. national security in the process. Quincy Institute President Andrew

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Bacevich will moderate. Speakers include Christine Ahn (Women Cross the DMZ), John Glaser (Cato Institute), and David Vine (American University). Registration and additional information for “**Taps for America’s Empire of Bases? Reducing the U.S. Global Footprint**” are available at: <https://quincyinst.org/events/>

Col. (Ret.) Lawrence Wilkerson commented about the letter, “It’s encouraging to see experts from across a broad political spectrum finally questioning our Cold War-era overseas basing strategy. That strategy today is wasting billions of dollars, making the US and the world less secure, and inviting constant military responses to threats that rarely concern the vital interests of America.”

Quincy Institute President Andrew Bacevich added, “Persisting in the Cold War policy of stationing vast numbers of US troops in hundreds of bases around the globe is obsolete and counterproductive. We must chart a different course.”

Medea Benjamin, author and cofounder of CODEPINK said, “Biden has an opportunity to totally reformulate US foreign policy, disentangling us from military interventions and focusing instead on multilateralism, cooperation and diplomacy. That would entail shuttering hundreds of overseas bases so we can open the doors to non-military ways of interacting with our neighbors around the world.”

The **Cato Institute’s John Glaser** said, “US overseas basing creates needless cost and danger. A less aggressive strategy requiring fewer overseas bases would greatly reduce both military spending and security dangers to the United States.”

ADDITIONAL MEDIA CONTACTS

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Overseas Base Realignment and Closure Coalition

Transpartisan Letter to President Biden on the U.S. Global Posture Review and Closing Military Bases Abroad to Improve National and International Security

March 4, 2021

Dear President Joseph Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, Members of Congress,

The undersigned represent a broad group of military analysts, veterans, scholars, and advocates from across the political spectrum who agree with President Biden's directive to conduct a thorough global posture review of U.S. forces. This has the potential to be a singularly important initiative in U.S. history. As a result of a long-outdated forward deployment strategy that dates to the first years of the Cold War, the United States today maintains approximately 800 base sites in around 80 foreign countries. Many of these bases should have closed decades ago. Maintaining unnecessary bases abroad wastes tens of millions of tax dollars annually and actively undermines the safety of the country and the world.

This letter's diverse signatories have different ideas about how many bases to close but find broad agreement about the following nine reasons to close foreign bases and improve national and international security in the process:

1. Overseas bases cost taxpayers billions every year. According to the RAND Corporation, it costs an average of \$10,000-\$40,000 more per person per year to station military personnel on overseas bases compared to domestic bases. In total, the country spends an estimated \$51.5 billion annually to build and run bases abroad—at a time when trillions are urgently needed for human and environmental needs including a disease pandemic and a climate crisis.

2. Overseas bases are now largely obsolete thanks to technological advancements. Because of advances in air and sealift and other military technology, rapid response forces can deploy to virtually any region fast enough to be based in the continental United States. The development

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of extremely accurate intermediate- and long-range ballistic missiles also makes overseas bases vulnerable to asymmetric attacks that are very difficult to defend against. In northeast Asia, for example, more than 90 percent of U.S. air facilities are in high-threat areas.

3. Overseas bases entangle the U.S. in wars. Bases dotting the globe fuel hyper-interventionist foreign policy by making war look like an easy solution while offering targets for militants and endangering host nations.

4. Overseas bases increase military tension. Rather than deterring adversaries, U.S. bases can exacerbate security threats by antagonizing other countries into greater military spending and aggression. Russia, for example, justifies its interventions in Georgia and Ukraine by pointing to encroaching U.S. bases in Eastern Europe. China feels encircled by the more than 250 U.S. bases in the region, leading to a more assertive policy in the South China Sea.

5. Overseas bases support dictators and repressive, undemocratic regimes. Scores of U.S. bases are in more than 40 authoritarian and less-than-democratic countries, including Bahrain, Turkey, and Niger. These bases are a sign of support for governments implicated in murder, torture, suppressing democratic rights, oppressing women and minorities, and other human rights abuses. Far from spreading democracy, bases abroad often block democracy's spread.

6. Overseas bases cause blowback. In the Middle East in particular, U.S. bases and troops have provoked terrorist threats, radicalization, and anti-American propaganda. Bases near Muslim holy sites in Saudi Arabia were a major recruiting tool for al-Qaeda.

7. Overseas bases damage the environment. Bases abroad have a long track record of damaging local environments as a result of toxic leaks, accidents, the dumping of hazardous materials, and base construction. The DoD does not hold itself to the environmental protection standards established for domestic bases, and Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA) may prohibit inspections by the host government and/or may relieve the U.S. from clean-up costs.

8. Overseas bases damage America's international reputation and generate protest. Because people tend not to like their land occupied by foreign militaries, it's unsurprising that bases abroad generate some degree of opposition almost everywhere they're found (causing problems for the military). Local citizens are being poisoned by toxic chemicals in their water supplies (see #7) without recourse. Crimes by military personnel, including rapes and murders, and deadly accidents also damage America's reputation and generate protest. Bases in colonized U.S. territories perpetuate their diminished sovereignty and 2nd class citizenship.

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9. Overseas bases are bad for families. Deployments overseas can separate military personnel from their families for months and years, damaging relationships. Even when families enjoy the opportunity to accompany military personnel abroad, frequent moves are disruptive to the careers, schooling, and lives of spouses and children.

Compared to closing domestic bases, closing overseas bases is easy. Presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush closed hundreds of unnecessary bases in Europe and Asia, and the Trump administration closed some bases in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Significantly reducing the U.S. global footprint would bring home thousands of personnel and family members who would contribute to the domestic economy.

In the interest of national, global, and fiscal security, we urge President Biden and Secretary Austin, supported by Congress, to begin a process to close bases overseas and relocate military personnel and families to domestic bases, where there is well-documented excess capacity.

Sincerely,

Gordon Adams, Distinguished Fellow, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft

Christine Ahn, Founder and International Coordinator, Women Cross the DMZ

Andrew Bacevich, President, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft

Medea Benjamin, Co-director, Codepink for Peace

Phyllis Bennis, Director, New Internationalism Project, Institute for Policy Studies; Fellow, Transnational Institute

Déborah Berman Santana, Professor Emeritus, Mills College/Committee for the Rescue & Development of Vieques (Puerto Rico)

Leah Bolger, Commander, US Navy (Ret.); President, World BEYOND War

Noam Chomsky, Laureate Professor of Linguistics, Agnese Nelms Haury Chair, University of Arizona; Professor Emeritus Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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Lindsay Koshgarian, Program Director, National Priorities Project, Institute for Policy Studies

Dennis Laich, Major General, US Army (Ret.); Executive Director, The All-Volunteer Force Forum

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