

CRS Report for Congress

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U.S. Military Overseas Basing: Background and Oversight Issues for Congress

Jon D. Klaus
National Defense Fellow
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

Summary

On August 16, 2004, the Bush Administration announced a proposal to significantly alter the U.S. overseas military basing posture. The proposal would, if implemented, establish new overseas operating sites, and transfer up to 70,000 U.S. troops, plus 100,000 family members and civilians, from Europe and Asia back to the United States. The Administration argues that current U.S. global basing arrangements are a product of World War II and the Korean War. With the end of the Cold War, these basing arrangements need to be updated to ensure that U.S. forces are optimally positioned to respond to potential 21st-Century military threats. The Administration's proposal has received mixed reactions from non-DOD observers. A May 2004 Congressional Budget Office report raises questions concerning the potential cost effectiveness of changing the current Army overseas basing posture. The Administration's proposal raises several potential oversight issues for Congress. This report will be updated as necessary.

Introduction and Issue for Congress

On August 16, 2004, President Bush announced a proposal to significantly alter the U.S. overseas military basing posture. The proposal would establish new overseas operating sites, and transfer up to 70,000 U.S. troops, plus 100,000 family members and civilians, from Europe and Asia back to the continental United States (CONUS). The issue for Congress is whether to approve, modify, or reject the Bush Administration's proposal. Budget and oversight decisions that Congress makes on this issue could have significant political and diplomatic implications. Decisions could also significantly affect U.S. military capabilities, Department of Defense (DOD) funding requirements, and the upcoming 2005 round of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process.¹

¹ For more on the 2005 BRAC round, see CRS Report RS21822, *Military Base Closures: DOD's*
(continued...)

Background

The Administration's Proposal. Implementing the Administration's proposal would bring about the most profound reordering of U.S. military troops overseas in about 50 years. The proposal calls for the transfer of up to 70,000 U.S. troops, plus 100,000 family members and civilians, from a number of overseas main operating bases in Germany, Japan, and South Korea. The Administration would then establish new secondary and tertiary facilities — called forward operating sites and cooperative security locations, respectively — in various new locations around the world. In contrast to main operating bases, which have permanently stationed forces and family support structures, forward operating sites would be maintained by a limited number of military personnel and might have some stored equipment. These sites would host rotational forces and be a focus for bilateral and regional training. Cooperative security locations, would be “bare bones” sites maintained by contractors or host-nation personnel, with little or no permanent U.S. presence. These locations would provide contingency access and be a focal point for regional access. Forward operating sites and cooperative security locations would supplement main operating bases and act as “lily pads” to facilitate the rapid deployment of U.S. forces to various parts of the world.

Examples of main operating bases include Ramstein Air Base Germany and Camp Humphreys in South Korea. Examples of forward operating sites include Soto Cano Air Base in Honduras and Thumrait and Masirah Island air bases in Oman. Examples of cooperative security locations include the air base at Dakar, Senegal, and the airport at Entebbe, Uganda. U.S. officials have reportedly held talks on establishing new operating sites with Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Sao Tome and Principe (off the coast of Africa), Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore.²

At a September 23, 2004, hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said that the proposed transfer of 70,000 troops back to CONUS would be completed over a period of six to eight years. To date, Administration officials have proposed regional plans for Europe, Asia and the Pacific, and the Western Hemisphere and Africa.

Europe. The Administration's proposal would transfer up to 40,000 European-based U.S. troops, mostly from the Army, to CONUS. The U.S. Army Commander in Europe, General B. B. Bell, has stated that he envisions most of the 40,000 troops coming from the 1st Infantry Division and the 1st Armored Division, which are currently based in Germany. Additional troops to be withdrawn would come from Corps and Theater-level support units. Bell stated that he wants to transfer a new Army Stryker brigade to the Army's training center at Grafenwöhr, Germany, where new barracks and family housing are being built. Under the Administration's proposal, U.S. units permanently based in the United States would periodically deploy for training to forward operating sites in Eastern Europe.

¹ (...continued)

2005 *Internal Selection Process*, by Daniel Else and David Lockwood, and CRS Report RL32216, *Military Base Closures: Implementing the 2005 Round*, by David E. Lockwood.

² Robert Burns, “U.S. To Close 35 Percent Of Overseas Bases,” *Associated Press Newswires*, September 23, 2004.

Asia and the Pacific. In addition to consolidating headquarters and facilities in Japan and Korea, the Administration's basing proposal would involve creating new "nodes" for U.S. special operations forces and "multiple access avenues" for deploying U.S. troops in to contingencies in the region. DOD officials have stated that 12,500 troops would be withdrawn from South Korea, with the first 5,000 to be withdrawn by the end of 2004, another 3,000 in 2005, another 2,000 in 2006, and the final 2,500 in 2007-2008.³ Of the 5,000 to be withdrawn this year, 3,700 of the Army troops will come from the 2nd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, which have already been deployed to Iraq. DOD reportedly is also considering transferring additional U.S. military forces to non-CONUS bases in the Pacific region. Navy Admiral Thomas Fargo, chief of U.S. Pacific Command, has proposed that Army Stryker brigades, along with Air Force C-17 transport aircraft and high-speed transport ships, may be transferred to Alaska and Hawaii. He also stated that an aircraft carrier strike group may be transferred forward in the Pacific, as well as, Air Force bombers and Navy submarines being transferred to Guam, which is a U.S. territory.⁴

Western Hemisphere and Africa. DOD's proposal envisions a diverse array of smaller cooperative locations for contingency access. These locations could be important to an increased U.S. presence due to the spread of radical Islam, an AIDS epidemic, a tenuous transition of power in Guinea, and the potential instability in oil-rich Nigeria. In addition to Sao Tome and Principe (off the coast of Africa), potential host nations in Africa that have been mentioned include Gabon, Ghana, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, and Uganda.⁵

Administration Rationale. The Administration's proposal is the result of a review of U.S. global military basing arrangements that began in mid-2001, preceding the attack of September 11. Administration officials say that the global posture review can trace its origins to the 2001 Report of the statutory Quadrennial Defense Review, as well as the National Security Strategy of 2002. Administration officials began the review out of a concern that current U.S. basing arrangements are pre-dominantly a legacy of the U.S. involvement in World War II and the Korean War. They believe these basing arrangements are not optimal for responding to future military challenges in other geographical regions. They further believe that changes that have been made in U.S. global military basing arrangements since the end of the Cold War have simply reduced the numbers of U.S. military forces stationed at principal overseas locations, while not adequately reviewing whether these locations are still appropriate.

Reactions To Administration Proposal. The Administration's proposal has received mixed reactions from Congress and outside observers. Congress has held several hearings to examine the Administration's proposal. Congressional hearings have been held by the House Armed Services Committee, the most recent being held on June 23,

³ Vince Crawley, "Troops Withdraw From South Korea, First of 3 Phases To Be Completed This Year," *Air Force Times*, October 18, 2004, p. 24.

⁴ See, for example, Vince Crawley, "Pentagon Gives Congress Plan For Overseas Basing," *Air Force Times*, October 11, 2004, p. 12.

⁵ DOD In Talks With South, West African Nations About Basing Rights," *Inside the Pentagon*, October 21, 2004, p. 1.

2004, and the Senate Armed Services Committee, the most recent being held on September 23, 2004. Congress also established the Overseas Basing Commission, which has held three meetings thus far, the most recent being held on November 9, 2004.⁶ Though global posture review was not the Commission's intended task, this Commission has held two hearings to discuss the Administration's proposal and its impact on the overseas basing structure. It has become apparent that some analysts agree with the Administration's logic and support the overall proposal, while others have expressed concerns.

Michael O'Hanlon, of the Brookings Institute, expressed some concerns about the proposal, stating that DOD consultations with the State Department, Congress, and U.S. allies have been belated and insufficient, allowing misperceptions about the proposal to grow. He stated that some of the Administration's proposed changes for the basing of Army units, if taken too far, could worsen the current deployment strains being experienced by the Army as it sustains deployments in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. The Administration's proposal, he stated, does not sufficiently reduce Marine Corps forces on Okinawa, where 20,000 Marines are based on a densely populated island — a situation that has led to local political opposition and put the broader U.S. military base network in Japan at some risk. A reduced presence of 5,000 to 7,000 Marines in Okinawa, he said, would be more appropriate.

Lawrence Korb, of the Center for American Progress, stated that developing new global basing arrangements should be part of an overall process for developing a national security strategy. In most cases, he stated, it is less expensive to base troops overseas than in the United States, particularly when host countries underwrite some of the costs involved, and that closing overseas bases will not save money unless the troops serving overseas are demobilized. He also stated that U.S. troops serving overseas as a group act as excellent ambassadors for the values we are trying to promote around the world, and that when closing bases overseas, it is important that it be done in concert with our allies and host nations.

Dr. John Hamre, former Deputy Secretary of Defense and now president of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, stated that the DOD has not adequately studied how realigning the forces abroad can be used to strategically shape the international environment in the coming decades. "It appears to me that the kinds of changes to U.S. military posture that DOD is contemplating today are driven by operational expediency, rather than strategy." He continued his testimony by stating: "The problem with this is that, in order to be sustainable over the long-term, U.S. bases overseas must be part of an overall political, diplomatic, and strategic framework."⁷ Dr.

⁶ The Overseas Basing Commission, formally known as the Commission on the Review of Overseas Military Facility Structure of the United States, was established by the FY2004 Military Construction Appropriations Act (H.R. 2559/P.L. 108-132 of November 22, 2003). The commissioned is tasked to independently assess whether the current overseas basing structure is adequate to execute current missions, and to assess the feasibility of closures, realignments, or establishment of new installations overseas to meet emerging defense requirements. It has been active since May 2004.

⁷ Chris Strohm, "Effort to Realign Military Bases Abroad Seen as Short-Sighted," *GovExec.com*, (continued...)

Hamre also expressed concern that status of forces agreements (SOFAs) can take up to five years to negotiate. He thought these SOFAs would be challenging, especially until the U.S. has reached an understanding with the new hosts on the nature of the relationship and the rights and responsibilities of each party.

Ambassador Hunter, former U.S. Ambassador to NATO, advised the Overseas Basing Commission to examine several criteria in making recommendations on the overseas basing, such as the efficiency and effectiveness of supporting foreign military operations from the U.S., the value of contingency basing overseas, the cost and needs of forces deployed abroad, and the ability of political and military organizations to work together to prevent conflicts. He asked the commission to also evaluate the “total mission” requirements of the U.S., as opposed to the “total force” needs of the military.

CBO Report On Army Overseas Basing. The Congressional Budget Office study, *Options for Changing the Army’s Overseas Basing*, dated May 2004, examined seven alternatives for changing the Army’s overseas basing arrangements in Europe and South Korea. The report concluded the following:

Because the United States has invested heavily over the past 50 years in base infrastructure for its troops stationed overseas, any major shifting of forces — either between overseas locations or to the United States — would require significant spending to provide that infrastructure somewhere else.

There would be limited annual savings to offset the large initial investment needed to restation U.S. forces, unless U.S. presence overseas was greatly reduced. In that case, annual savings could exceed \$1 billion, but the net up-front investment would be substantial — on the order of \$7 billion.

Restationing Army forces would produce, at best, only small improvements in the United States’ ability to respond to far-flung conflicts. The reason is that deploying Army units to many potential trouble spots from the likely locations of new bases would not be significantly faster than deploying them from current bases.

Bringing forces that are permanently stationed in Europe and South Korea back to the continental United States (CONUS) and maintaining a presence in those regions through unit rotations would reduce the need for infrastructure overseas. It would also reduce instability in Army units by lessening the extent to which soldiers come and go, thus potentially enhancing unit cohesion. But maintaining the current level of overseas presence with unit rotations would limit the forces available for other operations — including the occupation of Iraq — and could hurt retention in the Army by increasing family separation.

If large numbers of forces were relocated from overseas, the need for additional basing in CONUS for tens of thousands of personnel could preclude some of the closings that might otherwise occur as part of the 2005 round of base realignments and closures (BRAC).

⁷ (...continued)
November 9, 2004

Potential Oversight Issues for Congress

Potential oversight issues for Congress concerning the Administration's proposal to alter U.S. global military basing arrangements include the following:

Deployment Flexibility. What effect would implementing the Administration's proposal have on the ability of U.S. forces to respond to potential contingencies in various parts of the world? Would the Administration's proposed combination of main consolidated operating bases, forward operating sites, and cooperative security locations improve U.S. military deployment flexibility, reduce it, or result in no net change? Are the Administration's assumptions regarding the locations and utility of some of its proposed new basing locations reasonable?

Cost. How would implementing the Administration's proposal affect DOD costs, both in the near term and long term? Are the Administration's estimates regarding the potential costs of the proposal accurate? Has the Administration adequately taken into account the potential costs for increased airlift and sealift assets that might result from transferring troops from Europe and Asia back to the United States?

2005 BRAC Round. How might implementing the Administration's proposal affect the 2005 round of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process? Would transferring 70,000 troops from Europe and Asia to the continental United States reduce the need for closing domestic U.S. military bases? Is DOD, in identifying candidate domestic bases to be closed or realigned under BRAC, adequately taking into account the potential effect on domestic base capacity requirements of transferring these troops back to the United States?

Army Personnel. How would implementing the Administration's proposal affect the Army's ability to sustain current deployments in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere? Would it reduce current deployment strains on Army personnel, increase them, or produce no net change? What effect might the Administration's proposal have on Army recruiting and retention? Has the Administration adequately taken current Army deployment strains into account in considering the timetable for implementing its proposal?

Relations With Allies. What effect would implementing the Administration's proposals have on relations with allies, particularly Germany and South Korea? To what extent, if any, might allied reaction be influenced by the amount of consultation that DOD conducted with allies before the plan was publicly announced?

Local Legal Arrangements. Would sufficient legal arrangements — such as Status of Forces agreements, cross-servicing agreements, and agreements under the International Criminal Court treaty — be in place for new basing locations that would be established under the Administration's proposal? If these arrangements are not in place, how would this affect the legal status of U.S. forces serving in these locations and the DOD's ability to use these bases?

Arms Control. How is the Administration's proposal affected by the Conventional Forces in Europe arms control treaty, which limits the amount of NATO equipment that can be stationed in Eastern European countries?