

Overseas Base Realignment and Closure Coalition

U.S. MILITARY BASES OVERSEAS THE FACTS

NUMBERS

- **750–800 military base sites** estimated in ~80 foreign countries and colonies/territories.
- **70–85%** of the world's foreign military bases. China = 16 (plus bases in Tibet); Türkiye, Russia, UK, France, India, and other militaries = 150–300 total.¹

GEOGRAPHY

- **122 base sites** in Germany; 98 in Japan; 80 in South Korea; 47 in Italy according to the Pentagon.
- **Others** in, e.g., Aruba, Bahrain, Cuba, Djibouti, Estonia, Greece, Honduras, Israel, Jordan, Kenya, Lithuania, Marshalls, Norway, Oman, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Spain, Tunisia, UK, Virgins (US), Wake Isl.
- **Pentagon figure of 718 base sites** outside the 50 states and Washington, DC omits many well-known bases, such as those in Kosovo, Iraq, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, among others.²

COSTS

- **\$10,000–\$40,000** avg. additional costs per person per year to station military overseas vs. domestic.
- **\$65 billion/year** (est.) to build and maintain overseas bases.
- **\$94+ billion/year** (est.) in total spending on bases and personnel abroad.
- **\$82–100+ billion** in just military construction spending abroad since 2000.
- **Alternatively**, cutting half the \$65 billion spent on bases could mean providing 800,000 four-year college scholarships OR hiring more than 250,000 nurses OR providing nearly 2 million vets with VA health care.³

WARS

- **At least 29 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

- **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.
- **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.
- **Military personnel separated** from family members during unaccompanied deployments; when family can accompany, spouses and children face disruptions to careers, schooling, relationships.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.

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- **19–22%** estimated domestic base excess capacity available to returning troops, families.
- **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 to the U.S.
- **Congressmembers** have few, if any, constituents living in communities around overseas bases.

ALTERNATIVES TO OVERSEAS BASES

- **“Draw Down, Build Up”:** Close bases, boost U.S. diplomatic presence globally to rebuild alliances.
- **A defensive, powerful military** defending U.S. territory.
- **Rapid reaction forces** deploying from domestic bases to defend allies in legitimate emergencies.
- **Diplomacy**, economic, cultural engagement centered in global relations and **military force a last resort**.
- **Multinational operations** through multinational organizations if the use of force is necessary.⁷

¹ The definition of a base varies, making precise figures impossible. Other estimates are as high as 877 (World Beyond War, “Military Empires: A Visual Guide to Foreign Bases,” interactive map, <https://worldbeyondwar.org/military-empires>). The estimate of 750–800 is conservative and comes from adding new bases built or occupied since 2021 to the prior estimate of 750 in 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/>. For new bases see, David Vine, “Build Back (Much, Much) Worse,” *The Progressive*, August 23, 2023, <https://progressive.org/magazine/build-back-much-much-worse-vine-20230823/>. See also, 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. Estimates of foreign bases belonging to other countries are equally difficult to track. A few sources include World Beyond War, “Military Empires”; Phil Miller, “UK Military’s Overseas Base Network Involves 145 Sites in 42 Countries,” *Declassified UK*, November 24, 2020, <https://declassifieduk.org/revealed-the-uk-militarys-overseas-base-network-involves-145-sites-in-42-countries>; CSIS, “Chinese Power Projection in the South China Sea,” interactive map, <https://amti.csis.org/chinese-power-projection/>; George Friedman, “Chinese Military Installations in the South China Sea,” *Geopolitical Futures*, April 3, 2017, <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/chinese-military-installations-south-china-sea/>; CSIS China Power Project, “How Is China Expanding its Infrastructure to Project Power Along its Western Borders?,” November 9, 2023, <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-tibet-xinjiang-border-india-military-airport-heliport/>; 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>.

² Department of Defense, “FY2025 Base Structure Report,” 2024, <https://www.acq.osd.mil/eie/imr/rpid/docs/Base-Structure-Report-FY25.xlsx>; Vine, et al.; Glaser.

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., p. 5, updated for 2025 with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator; trade-offs calculated using National Priorities Project Trade-Offs tool, <https://www.nationalpriorities.org/interactive-data/trade-offs/>.

⁴ Updating 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), 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 UP, 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* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020); Center for Public Environmental Oversight, www.cpeo.org.

⁶ Department of Defense, “Strengthening U.S. Global Defense Posture, Report to Congress,” September 17, 2004, 5; Lutz; Andrew Yeo, *Activists, Alliances, and Anti-U.S. Base Protests* (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 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.