



**Testimony before the Commission on the Review of
Overseas Military Facility Structure of the United States**

“OVERSEAS BASING”

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A Statement by

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President and CEO**

I would like to thank my old friend Al Cornella and the other distinguished members of the Commission on Overseas Military Facility Structure of the United States for inviting me to testify before you today. Despite the lack of public debate on the question of how we should posture U.S. forces overseas in the coming decades, it is a central aspect of our foreign and defense policy and an issue to which the next Bush administration will need to give careful consideration. This commission has a critical role to play in helping to ensure that changes to our overseas basing are thoroughly considered, and based on a sound assessment of American national security in this new century. I salute you for taking on this critical issue and I am honored to be asked to offer you a few thoughts.

The current configuration of U.S. forces, at least in Europe, reflects an era that has been gone for over a decade. Though there was a substantial reduction in overall personnel numbers in the early 1990s, for the most part, U.S. forces overseas are based in the same places that they have been since the end of the Second World War and the end of the Korean War. These locations were dictated by the exigencies of America's Cold War strategy to hem in the Soviet Union and protect our allies from communist aggression. But the world has changed radically, not only with the end of the Cold War, fifteen years in the past, but especially after September 11, 2001, and America's invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. There is simply no doubt that we need to adapt our military, including the way it is postured overseas, to address the world we live in today.

The changes to U.S. military presence overseas that the DoD is contemplating are logical and make sense in terms of the military, operational realities of the current global security environment:

- Threats to the security of the United States and our allies are more distributed and more likely than ever to emerge from regions where there is a high risk of failed states, religious extremism, organized crime, drugs, and other sources of instability. To better deal with such threats, our military forces need to get closer to those places where such instability could emerge.
- Our forces also need to be structured around the world so that they can respond rapidly and flexibly to threats. Because our enemies are distributed, we may need to move quickly in small units and strike at short notice. Instead of large numbers of people at sprawling bases in two or three locations, it makes sense to have smaller numbers that can move quickly from a wider variety of locations.
- Another benefit of reorienting the way our forces are based is that it will allow us to solidify and deepen relationships with new allies.

But with those benefits come risks and challenges, both strategic and operational. I want to begin with what I think are the most important—the strategic challenges.

It appears to me that the kinds of changes to U.S. military posture that DoD is contemplating today are driven primarily by operational expediency, rather than strategy. 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; military effectiveness must be a major consideration, but it should not be the primary one. Overseas bases are decades-long propositions—decisions on these matters tend to last for a generation or more—and need to be approached as part of our overall

political, diplomatic, and alliance strategy around the world. So far, I don't believe we have established an enduring framework for the new bases that DoD is contemplating.

The cold war provided an overarching framework. We based our forces the way we did because of a national interest to confront international communism and to do so through formal alliance structures, either multilateral, such as NATO, or bilateral such as Japan. The important factor in that strategic framework is that it incorporated the national interests of host nations, not just the United States. Our military presence in a given country protected them from invasion or hostile action by others – the host country and the United States shared the same risks and the same enemy.

The new concepts for basing U.S. forces overseas would represent a different kind of relationship with host states altogether. While the so-called “global war on terrorism” is the strategic context for the United States, it is not widely shared by other countries. U.S. forces would not be in some of these new countries for the purpose of protecting that host from a hostile neighbor, but rather for the purpose of using those bases to operate elsewhere.

We therefore need to ask ourselves fundamental questions about the nature of our relationships around the world. It could be that we need a major redefinition of what we mean by alliances, and what the respective obligations are of both the United States and the host country. What if a neighbor makes threatening gestures to our new hosts because they have allowed us to be there—what is the nature of our obligation? And what is their obligation to us in terms of using their bases for operations elsewhere?

The most important thing we need to do next is fully integrate our rebasing decisions into an enduring framework that incorporates our long-term national interests and our concept for how we want to work with allies to secure those interests. Without this, I fear we lack an enduring political context to support a major new rebasing of our forces, both at home and abroad.

As with all major transitions, we also need to be thinking about unintended consequences. The change in our posture, designed to deal with new threats, could by itself generate new and unforeseen problems. U.S. forces and facilities are now the target of terrorists worldwide—though future bases may be smaller and more austere, part of the purpose here is to move closer to the flame, with all of the risks that this will entail. And the proposed changes could increase the likelihood that the United States gets dragged into future local and regional conflicts, simply because its forces will already be on the ground.

Before we proceed with any of the changes that DoD is talking about, I think we need to address some of these very fundamental strategic questions that will set the context for the presence of U.S. forces overseas in the next few decades.

The operational challenges are much less dramatic and important, but no less vexing. When we base troops internationally we always try to secure a status of forces agreement (SOFA) that provides legal protection for our troops and clear authorities for our commanders. The current set of SOFA agreements were established in the aftermath of World War II when America was trusted around the world and we lived in a more collaborative time. Those days are gone. So negotiating a whole new set of SOFA agreements will be challenging, indeed impossible until we have reached

an understanding with our new hosts about the nature of our relationship and rights and responsibilities of each party. Indeed, we were not able to negotiate a SOFA with the Interim Iraqi Government.

Second, we have to strike a balance between affordability and operational necessity. There is no money to build large and sophisticated overseas bases, and the Administration does not want to do so. Instead they plan to build very austere facilities for forces that rotate on short notice to the theater. This certainly avoids construction costs, but creates other expenses that register in different ways. I don't believe these details have been fully worked out, but we can anticipate significant expense.

I think the Department recognizes the challenges I have identified to a large degree. A year and a half ago, in the lead-up to Operation Iraqi Freedom, some administration officials made announcements of the changes they were contemplating. At the time, this served to stir up suspicion and uncertainty about why the U.S. was taking these measures; many assumed that these were punishments being meted out to those who did not support us in the Iraq war. Since then, however, there have been an enormous number of consultations with foreign governments and there seems to be a much greater level of understanding and appreciation about why the United States is taking these steps. Moreover, the decisions have not all been made and plans are not final. This will take years.

Finally, I would just observe that changes of the kind DoD is contemplating will be very difficult to carry out while we contend with the major challenges we face around the world. The ongoing war in Iraq is very taxing for our current force structure. There is no surplus in the system to cushion the dislocation of rebasing. Despite record high budgets, the funding situation is tight in the Department. The war in Iraq is consuming nearly a \$1 billion a week, and while supplemental appropriations cover much of that, I believe there is considerable wear and tear on equipment and people that is not funded. As such, the two critical resources for major rebasing—a cushion of personnel and cash—are missing. The consequence is likely to be a much slower and smaller rebasing than was originally envisioned. More troops will likely be pulled back to the U.S. (via Iraq) and our overall overseas presence is likely to be much smaller a decade from now.

The Defense Department in the last four years has made major progress towards adapting our military to the threats and challenges of the twenty-first century, and they deserve our thanks and congratulations for many of the positive changes that they have implemented. Addressing the question of our global military posture was long overdue, and the creative energy that has gone into developing new concepts for U.S. forces abroad is impressive and worthy of our praise. But we now need to connect these concepts to a larger framework that addresses not just where U.S. forces are based, but no less a question than what role the U.S. will play in the world in coming decades.

My sincere thanks once again to Mr. Cornella and his distinguished colleagues on the Commission for inviting me here today.