

OVERSEAS MILITARY BASES: UNDERSTANDING HOST NATION SUPPORT

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Abstract

Overseas military bases have played a prominent role in support of United States security interests since World War II and particularly during the Cold War. While basing requirements have changed in the wake of the Cold War, it is clear that a forward U.S. defense posture, including overseas bases and security partnerships, will remain essential to exert strategic influence, enable global access and project power when necessary. Globalization, fiscal constraints and the evolving threat landscape all present challenges to maintaining a network of forward bases. While it is important to assess overseas basing options in terms of operational requirements and value, their establishment and utility in times of crisis depend on host nation consent and support. Therefore, understanding host nation interests and concerns when it comes to the presence of U.S. forces is critically important. Prompted by observations of the globalization phenomenon and an operational experience that highlighted the complexity of base hosting decisions, this study seeks greater awareness of the determinants of host nation hospitality. By examining overseas bases in Ecuador and Saudi Arabia that were ultimately rejected by those host nations and a third installation facing sharp opposition in Japan, the complex nature and relevance of host nation perspective is brought to light. These insights may inform future basing strategies as well as the diplomatic, military and economic engagement on which they depend. The investigation shows that economics can play an influential role in host nation decision-making. Moreover, it finds that the greatest threat to establishing and maintaining overseas bases may be U.S. policies and deliberate or unsanctioned behavior as interpreted within the political context of host nations.

Introduction

The United States depends on overseas military bases for its national security and that of its allies. In the wake of the Second World War, the number of U.S. bases abroad increased substantially in conjunction with post-war reconstruction efforts and a new understanding of the nation's security interests, promptly magnified by the Cold War.¹ There is no question that basing requirements, including number, distribution and size, have changed considerably since the Cold War. However, it is clear that a forward defense posture, which includes a network of overseas bases, will continue to be essential to U.S. security interests.² These global footholds serve numerous purposes, most notably the regional strategic influence, multi-dimensional access to the "global commons," and operational flexibility they provide.³ As such, their value depends on strategic placement and collective effect as well as operational utility in times of crisis. Maintaining an overseas base makes a clear statement that the U.S. is prepared to act, certainly more resolute than assurances conveyed by treaties and other comparatively vague statements of support.⁴

Concerns regarding emerging rivals, regional stability and free flow of commerce logically dictate the most preferred base locations. However, it is important to keep in mind that their placement is not simply a function of U.S. strategic and operational interests. Overseas bases depend on host nation acceptance of the sovereign imposition they involve and the political liabilities they entail. Therefore, accommodating the presence of U.S. forces represents a strong statement by the host nation as well. In addition, overseas base effectiveness, particularly in times of crisis, requires a functional relationship at multiple levels in order to manage the persistent and diverse issues that arise from an arrangement with political, military, economic and cross-cultural dimensions.

The Cold War made partnering with the U.S. appealing to many nations, but associated security incentives now carry less influence. Globalization, which enhances the influence of economics and empowers the smallest nations – and even individuals – in its latest wave, has transformed the international relations and security environment.⁵ It is no coincidence that the importance of economic strength, as the "wellspring of American power," is emphasized in the current national security strategy and latest defense strategic guidance.⁶ Rapid globalization is expanding regional competition among emerging powers for influence and access, leaving the U.S. to contend with less support abroad for its overseas bases.⁷ At the same time, the empowerment of individuals is profoundly changing the political dynamic within nations, reflected in the Arab Spring and even U.S. domestic politics, forcing governments to be increasingly responsive to compellingly voiced interests that may conflict with previous national security policies. Combining these dynamics with resource constraints and force protection concerns inherent to stationing U.S. forces abroad, it appears that maintaining an essential network of overseas bases will be increasingly difficult in the future.⁸

Based on these observations and takeaways from a recent operational experience during which basing was in the spotlight, I concluded that host nation economic interests and political interpretation of U.S. policies and behavior have become paramount in the decision-making on which our overseas bases depend. Rather than attempting to quantify the costs and benefits of hosting a U.S. base, this investigation aims to provide pragmatic insights into situations where U.S. bases lost essential host nation support. Such insights may help clarify the sustainability of current overseas bases and the viability of those that future strategies propose. They may also inform associated diplomatic efforts, theater security cooperation initiatives, and essential synergy between them.

Background

After summarizing the operational experience that led to my thesis and some recent basing strategy initiatives, this inquiry will examine two cases in which host nations rejected the presence of U.S. military forces in conjunction with basing arrangements established after the

Cold War, including Manta Air Base in Ecuador and Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia. Beyond being a case of rejection, Manta Air Base fits the “forward operating site” model associated with recently proposed basing strategies.⁹ Futenma Marine Corps Air Station in Okinawa, Japan is the current focus of bilateral talks amidst a contentious hosting relationship. As such, it will inform and add relevance to the study. Taken together, these three bases represent a broad cross-section in terms of size and geographic distribution, though there are other bases that have encountered or currently face host nation opposition. Given the difficulty in assessing what is determinant in U.S. national security decision-making, precisely identifying decisive criteria in each of these cases is not a realistic objective. However, it is reasonable to expect that a critical look will point to the most influential factors.

Impetus for Thesis and Inquiry

My last P-3 squadron deployment included operations in U.S. Africa Command’s area of responsibility (AOR), and a temporary basing arrangement during that period highlighted the complex nature of host nation interests. Camp Lemonier, a combined joint base leased by the U.S. from the Government of Djibouti, encompasses the primary maritime patrol airfield in the region.¹⁰ However, during the early months of the deployment it was necessary to temporarily operate from elsewhere in the AOR. The Republic of Seychelles, which has hosted small contingents of U.S. forces since 1963, provided a suitable alternative and agreed to support a P-3 detachment in addition to U.S. and coalition forces already in place.¹¹

Surging regional piracy was adversely impacting the vital Seychelles’ tourism industry, and so its willingness to accommodate a maritime patrol detachment that counted counter-piracy among its primary missions was understandable.¹² Hosting the detachment provided the government with a visible means of demonstrating its commitment to combating piracy, supporting similarly affected regional partners, aiding Seychellois with businesses hit by ebbing tourism, and reassuring tourists. In short, economic and political values were intertwined. Although the detachment was agreed upon at diplomatic and combatant commander levels, making it work for all involved – the execution – required extensive coordination between squadron leadership, the country team and host nation officials, particularly with the Seychelles Airport Authority (SCAA). The airport’s importance to the Seychelles’ tourist-based economy, as the arrival and departure point for many of its visitors, understandably influenced the approach of the politically connected airfield manager. He carefully balanced support of the detachment with management of its impact on SCAA efficiency.

Throughout the detachment it was difficult to overlook the significance of our host nation’s economic interests and the political context. The Seychelles’ decision to welcome U.S. forces supporting counter-piracy operations made sense. It seemed that the government sought to reduce the adverse impact of piracy on its tourism industry directly by supporting coalition counter-piracy efforts and by reassuring various concerned constituencies. When it came to rubber meeting the runway, economic and political concerns plainly influenced SCAA management. Although the operational effectiveness of the detachment coincided with broader interests of the Seychelles, it was also important that it be executed in a manner that minimized adverse impact to daily SCAA operations, requiring us to accept some inefficiency while meeting our assigned mission. In short, both generous hospitality and support limitations linked to economic and political concerns.

Prior to relocating back to Djibouti, we took deliberate steps to enable a “graceful exit” from the Seychelles, in addition to other community relations initiatives over the course of the detachment. We considered these efforts consistent with our mutually supportive relationship, recognizing that it was not without bounds. U.S. forces would continue to depend on the country’s hospitality, cooperation and strategic location, which should not be taken for granted. Concurrent with the deployment in question our squadron was in the midst of a homeport change driven by the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission process. Department of Defense (DOD) base consolidation aimed at saving long term infrastructure costs

necessitated closure of the base from which we deployed.¹³ Being the last operational unit to depart, we became particularly aware of economic concerns and impassioned political views at the local, state and national levels. I have no illusions that economic interests and political dynamics associated with overseas bases are analogous to those surrounding domestic bases, but there are strikingly similar aspects that helped to discern our operational situation.

Rethinking Overseas Basing Requirements

Since the end of the Cold War and particularly within the last decade, the U.S. has taken steps to evaluate the appropriateness of existing overseas bases and develop a basing strategy aligned with future national security interests. The September 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review Report recommended a more flexible permanent basing system that would depend on temporary access to facilities in foreign countries for training and operations, specifically postured to address critical regions.¹⁴ President George W. Bush announced such an initiative in August 2004. Known as the Integrated Global Presence and Basing Strategy (“Global Posture Review”) by DOD, it aimed to significantly change the distribution of overseas bases. Aside from retaining some large “main operating bases,” the strategy called for a network of minimally equipped and manned bases known as “forward operating sites,” with less costly short term personnel assignments and deployments. It also cited “cooperative security locations” run by host nation personnel and dependent on off-shore logistical support, to which U.S. personnel could surge in response to regional crises.¹⁵ The subsequent August 2005 Commission on the Review of Overseas Military Facility Structure of the U.S. (“Overseas Basing Commission”) mandated by Congress countered the Bush Administration’s proposal, citing concerns pertaining to implementation timeline, level of inter-agency and international coordination, military logistical consequences, impact on service member quality of life, and net costs.¹⁶

Differing views on basing strategy and costs persist. Since these reports were published, protracted wars in Iraq and Afghanistan combined with momentous economic challenges have influenced public opinion and arguments regarding costs and national security implications of various basing strategies.¹⁷ “Forward presence,” clearly emphasized in the latest national military strategy, will nevertheless remain essential to U.S. national security.¹⁸ It is also fundamental to the Joint Operational Access Concept, which includes the nested Air-Sea Battle concept and focuses on overcoming regional anti-access and area-denial challenges.¹⁹

Case Studies

Analyzing the endurance and effectiveness of hosting arrangements initiated after the Cold War is particularly relevant to emergent strategies that call for new overseas bases in a global environment characterized by new threats, evolving alliances, and greater social and economic interconnectedness. Both Manta Air Base in Ecuador and Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia provide unique opportunities to examine bases established since the Berlin Wall came down, yet ultimately rejected by each host nation. On the other hand, Okinawa – central to U.S. security interests in a vital region – hosts multiple large bases established in the wake of World War II, but staunch opposition from the local populace is prompting adjustments to preserve continued flexible access and the relationship on which it depends.²⁰

Manta Air Base, Ecuador

The former U.S. Air Base in Manta, Ecuador was established via a rent-free ten year lease agreement between the U.S. and Ecuador in 1999, after U.S. negotiations with the Government of Panama over the use of Howard Air Force Base failed to produce an agreement.²¹ Sharing a common runway with Eloy Alfaro International Airport, Manta provided the U.S. military with a forward operating location used in its efforts to combat illegal cocaine trafficking in the South American “source zone,” which includes Colombia, Peru and Bolivia.²² Previous Ecuadorian president and conservative Jamil Mahuad signed the lease under circumstances of political duress and economic austerity, apparently seeking to reassure foreign

investors, but was toppled weeks later in an indigenous coup.²³ The U.S. turned the base back over in 2009, after Ecuador refused to renew the lease.²⁴

Many Ecuadorians viewed the unpopular base as an imposition on their sovereignty, and some considered the arrangement unconstitutional.²⁵ In March 2007 more than 400 activists protested the base in conjunction with the first International Conference for the Abolition of Foreign Military Bases in Manta.²⁶ While campaigning in 2006, Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa highlighted his intent to obtain a more acceptable basing arrangement, but the U.S. was unwilling to meet Correa's demands. He subsequently offered the base to Chinese business interests, effective when the U.S. lease expired in 2009.²⁷ What seemed to push the Ecuadorian leader over the edge were suspicions that the U.S. had played a role in the 1 March 2008 Colombian military incursion into Ecuador that attacked leftist Colombian guerillas.²⁸ The incident aggravated Correa's concerns about ties between Ecuadorian military officials and U.S. intelligence agencies. As a result, he purged his defense minister, army chief of intelligence, and army and air force joint chiefs.²⁹ The Colombian incursion also gave Correa leverage needed to ensure the Ecuadorian National Assembly did not renew the lease.³⁰ Strategic Forecasting, Incorporated (STRATFOR) theorized that Correa's offer to China was aimed at maintaining his domestic support, gaining preferential trade access to U.S. markets, and obtaining Chinese capital that would help secure Manta's future role as the prominent Sino-Latin American trade hub on the west coast of South America.³¹

Beyond accusing senior military officials of sharing intelligence with Colombia and collaborating with the U.S. in matters other than counter-drug operations, Correa demonstrated a willingness to confront the military unlike past Ecuadorian presidents.³² Betting on increased institutional ability to balance the military's political and economic power in a historically coup-prone country, the popular left-leaning leader pursued greater control of Ecuador's petroleum and mining industries, while the military maintained substantial economic influence.³³ He also wanted to decrease the military's reliance on U.S. training and assistance in favor of closer ties with regional counterparts.³⁴ Beyond the appeal of strengthening regional ties, Correa apparently took advantage of anti-American sentiments associated with U.S. efforts in Iraq. He urged Ecuador to overcome its habit of relying excessively on military relations with the U.S. and suggested that the "little regard" shown by President Bush "for borders or sovereignty" presented an "ideological contagion" that it should avoid.³⁵

Reasons for ending the U.S. presence included domestic irritation associated with the unfavorable 1999 lease, U.S. reluctance to adjust its terms, alleged inappropriate involvement by Manta-based U.S. forces with the Colombian military (including support of the March 2008 border incursion – denied by the U.S. and never proven), and alleged U.S. infiltration of Ecuadorian military and intelligence forces.³⁶ In terms of local politics, the base was popular in the town of Manta itself thanks to the good jobs it provided and other economic benefits.³⁷ However, among the broader populace it had a chafing effect, perceived as a challenge to the nation's sovereignty so much that many Ecuadorians wanted the constitution changed in order to preclude future foreign bases.³⁸ Since Correa was also vying for expanded influence among Ecuadorian institutions, political tensions surrounding Manta presented an opportunity for domestic leverage.³⁹ Internationally, Correa showed interest in developing stronger regional ties and renounced U.S. policies elsewhere in the world. The rent-free lease symbolized a missed opportunity, while Correa conveyed a broad economic vision for the base that did not depend on U.S. support.⁴⁰

It is apparent that economic considerations factored substantively into the determination by Ecuador's leadership to allow the U.S. lease to expire. Perhaps more influential, however, was pronounced domestic political opposition to continued U.S. presence – increasingly viewed as an unwelcome sovereign imposition – and perceived meddling amidst the Ecuadorian political trend. Therefore, it seems that U.S. policies and behavior, as viewed by Ecuadorians, made renewal of the lease politically untenable.

Facing expiration of the lease in Manta, the U.S. signed an agreement with Columbia in 2009 involving multiple military bases in that country.⁴¹ Although the U.S. found alternatives in the region, maintaining a relationship with Ecuador permitting contingency access may have been strategically beneficial in the long term. This might have been achieved by adjusting terms of the lease and diplomatic engagement, while adhering to broader U.S. policies.

Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia

Prior to departing in the fall of 2003, U.S. military personnel had been stationed at Prince Sultan Air Base (PSAB) in Saudi Arabia since 1990, when Saudi leaders asked the U.S. to establish a military presence following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.⁴² In the 1991 Persian Gulf War, PSAB served as the main staging area for U.S. forces, and enabled power projection in the region for more than a decade.⁴³ During that time, however, U.S. foreign policy, tensions on both sides associated with the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks (15 of 19 hijackers were citizens of Saudi Arabia), and U.S. initiation of a second war with Iraq became politically problematic for the Saudi royal family.⁴⁴ Tensions were elevated by a reported al Qaeda attempt in 2002 to shoot down a U.S. aircraft originating from PSAB.⁴⁵ In addition, Osama Bin Laden persistently leveraged the U.S. presence to substantiate his opposition to the Saudi royal family, and the Saudis increasingly restricted U.S. sorties originating from the air base with its state-of-the-art command center that constituted a substantial U.S. investment.⁴⁶

As a result of growing tensions and uncertainty regarding PSAB's future role in regional military operations, the U.S. proceeded in 2002 with plans to build Al Udeid Air Base as an alternate operating base and command center in relatively secular Qatar.⁴⁷ Leading up to the Iraq war and subsequent April 2003 announcement that the U.S. mission in Saudi Arabia would conclude by that summer, there was considerable debate by both sides over whether the U.S. would be permitted to maintain an effective presence and choose to do so.⁴⁸ The Saudis walked a fine line between the royal family's desire to support the U.S. and surging anti-Americanism within Saudi Arabia and the broader Arab world, and the U.S. wrestled with the strategic vulnerability that the restricted and uncertain PSAB operating situation created.⁴⁹ After transferring control of regional U.S. air operations to Qatar, begun in late April 2003 as part of the U.S. withdrawal that continued through the summer, remaining U.S. combat troops left PSAB in September.⁵⁰

Comparing perspectives helps to appreciate how the situation unfolded. Restrictions on U.S. flights, disappointing efforts to target Islamic militants, and other public stances taken by Saudi leaders suggested a level of support below what many in the U.S. felt they were entitled after the September 11th attacks.⁵¹ Within Saudi Arabia, however, there was a sense that the U.S. had overstayed its welcome and its continued presence represented an affront to Saudi sovereignty.⁵² The continued presence of U.S. forces engaged in another war against a Muslim nation exacerbated domestic and broader Arabic resentment, while seemingly validating Osama bin Laden's vilification of the royal family for hosting U.S. troops.⁵³ Finally, the potential for an attack by al Qaeda on U.S. forces within Saudi Arabia presented a political vulnerability for both nations.

Surveying statements made by U.S. and Saudi officials between September 2001 and April 2003 reveals that comments aimed at appeasing constituencies within one nation usually had the opposite effect in the other, despite efforts by leaders of both nations to sustain a functional relationship. An underlying mutual commitment to this relationship showed in the seemingly coordinated characterization of the 2003 withdrawal. The departure was framed as a logical step following completion of the Iraq war and toppling of Saddam Hussein's government, ultimately fulfilling the intent of Saudi Arabia's original invitation while transitioning to a less conspicuous cooperative posture.⁵⁴

During my research I had the opportunity to discuss PSAB with an officer in the Royal Saudi Air Force. He indicated that in 1990 the U.S. was invited in to counter the Iraqi threat, develop PSAB infrastructure with U.S. technology, and enhance the military training

relationship.⁵⁵ According to him, the U.S. was asked to leave due to political discontent and increasingly intense opposition within Saudi Arabia. The Saudi officer explained that the conduct of some Americans associated with the base contributed to domestic repudiation, and that leaders of the opposition leveraged this by invoking instances of bad behavior at other overseas bases, such as the 1995 rape by U.S. Marines of an Okinawa school girl, to fuel anti-American sentiment.⁵⁶ When asked about pressure from the broader Arabic world, he did not consider it a significant influence.

Unlike the situation in Ecuador, where economics surely factored into the political calculus, hosting U.S. forces had little direct economic consequence for Saudi Arabia. In addition, uncertainty within Saudi Arabia over what would become of Iraq and the potential for Iran to assert more influence in the region did not – as security matters – provide sufficient sway for the Saudis to retain U.S. deterrent and defensive capabilities at PSAB.⁵⁷ Rather, political pressure exerted on Saudi leadership, fueled by conduct of some U.S. service members abroad and policy in the region, seems primarily responsible for the choreographed exit, despite mutual commitment to the bilateral relationship.⁵⁸ Though it promised to strain relations, not doing so posed a worrisome political liability. Presented with a plausible basis for the departure, the royal family was apparently unwilling to test its political capital any further.⁵⁹

Futenma Marine Corps Air Station, Okinawa, Japan

Futenma Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) on the island of Okinawa is part of a larger basing relationship that entails complex political, economic, cultural and national security dimensions, dating back to World War II. U.S. military forces in Okinawa have faced significant opposition over the years, particularly among inhabitants of Okinawa, which hosts more than half of the 50,000 U.S. troops stationed in Japan and concedes about 10 percent of its landmass to nearly 40 U.S. bases and facilities.⁶⁰ The future of this “main operating base,” considered vital to U.S. and allied interests in the Western Pacific, is far from certain amidst a political stalemate over relocation.⁶¹ Unlike the first two cases, the basing situation in Okinawa has garnered considerable expert analysis that will contribute to this study.

In *Base Politics: Democratic Change and the U.S. Military Overseas*, Alexander Cooley examined the politics of U.S. military bases abroad.⁶² His thorough treatment of Okinawa captured the complex political arrangement involving a triangular relationship between local officials on Okinawa, the Government of Japan (GOJ) and the U.S., upon which one can draw informed conclusions about domestic opposition to the presence of U.S. military forces there.⁶³ Many in Okinawa may not ultimately seek a substantive U.S. military exodus due to the economic consequences associated with losing GOJ economic compensation and U.S. military spending, although there is a deep sense of unequal treatment and irritation among Okinawans who feel they have shouldered a disproportionate share of Japan’s security arrangement with the U.S., and Okinawa’s political leaders have insisted on moving Futenma off the island.⁶⁴ Periodic incidents associated with U.S. military operations and some off-duty conduct with associated friction over accountability fuel ongoing debate within Japan and between the two countries regarding relocation plans.⁶⁵ The U.S. prefers moving it to another part of the island, thus preserving a strategically important base in the region.⁶⁶ The U.S. and GOJ have been negotiating a plan to relocate the base since 1996, the year after three Marines gang-raped a 12-year old Okinawa school girl.⁶⁷

Differing views regarding the way ahead for Futenma are reflected in tensions between prominent local and national Japanese political leaders, among prominent Japanese political parties, and by aggressive U.S. diplomacy, all against the backdrop of security provided by U.S. forces and associated economic dividends for Japan.⁶⁸ However, clinging to a contentious 2006 agreement, that includes the departure of 8,000 Marines and on-island relocation of the base by 2014, risks diminishing the broader U.S.-Japanese alliance as domestic politics in Japan over the issue become increasingly contentious.⁶⁹ In early February 2012 the two countries agreed

to move forward with transferring several thousand Marines to Guam, despite the stalemate over Futenma's relocation.⁷⁰

Economics are undoubtedly a factor in the debate over Futenma. The GOJ and some Okinawans recognize the economic benefits of the base, while others argue that it would be more beneficial and just if the land was returned to locals.⁷¹ However, the substantial U.S. presence that entails an increasingly irritating sovereign imposition, disruptive operations and instances of bad behavior seems to be the primary source of political opposition. In this regard, the challenge to maintaining Futenma MCAS on Okinawa is similar to the previous cases, despite the context of a long standing security partnership.

Conclusion

Based on observations of globalization's effects and takeaways from an operational experience highlighting the intricacies of basing agreements, I concluded that host nation economic considerations and political interpretation of U.S. policies and behavior have become the principal factors in determining foreign support for U.S. bases. Considering the situations analyzed here, it appears that economic interests can apply significant pressure in some cases, though not necessarily overriding influence on nations wrestling with the sovereign imposition that comes with base sponsorship. What all three cases do suggest is that the aggregate impact of U.S. presence, policies and conduct – as it resonates in the political context unique to each host nation – prevails in cases where opposition amasses to the point of threatening a previously agreeable hosting relationship tied to national security, economic or other objectives. Economic prospects undoubtedly prompted Ecuadorian interest in an alternative lease arrangement. However, U.S. unwillingness to negotiate more agreeable terms and perceived U.S. meddling encouraged anti-American sentiment that necessitated lease termination. For reasons not explored here, the U.S. did not negotiate a provision of rent acceptable to Ecuadorians, and it is not clear if doing so would have prevented or lessened anti-American sentiment, facilitating extension of the lease.

In Saudi Arabia, intense anti-American sentiment tied to U.S. policies and behaviors fueled domestic political opposition that eclipsed the national security value of hosting U.S. forces as well as near term consequences for the relationship. The royal family's political sense eventually required the departure of U.S. personnel. After the 1990 Saudi invitation to host U.S. forces provided a strategically useful base to counter Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, PSAB was further developed. Its future operational viability, particularly in the event of war with another Muslim nation in the region, encompassed a degree risk for this investment.

While inhabitants of Okinawa and the GOJ express economic concerns pertaining to the future of Futenma, local opposition seems to stem primarily from resentment of the prolonged and disproportionate U.S. presence that involves various operational impacts and occasional behavioral incidents. This has fostered a degree of anti-Americanism on Okinawa that is likely to grow if not addressed, and increasing tensions may jeopardize the larger U.S.-Japan alliance. The recent agreement to move several thousand Marines off the island despite an impasse over relocation of the base is likely intended to avert that costly outcome.

As the U.S. adapts its basing posture in line with national security objectives and realities of the global neighborhood, numerous factors – perhaps none greater than the profound impact that a foreign military presence has on host nation politics – will define the context for establishing and preserving essential overseas bases. U.S. bases have a range of political, economic, security, cultural and other meanings. Within each host nation they mean different things to various groups, which have become more empowered by the causes and consequences of globalization. As circumstances change, hospitality toward U.S. military forces will vary. Despite mutual security value in the face of common threats at the outset of a basing relationship, overseas bases can become a source of controversy within host nations to

the point that associated political costs exceed their security value. Identifying ways to avoid this outcome is crucial to U.S. security interests.

Recommendations

This inquiry underscores the importance of seeking the fullest possible contextual understanding of current and prospective host nations, suggesting that another nation's willingness to host U.S. forces should not be taken for granted. With this in mind and the presumption that maintaining a significant forward presence is critical to U.S. interests, several recommendations bear consideration. Decisions to close overseas bases in good standing with their hosts as a near term cost savings mechanism should not be taken lightly. Nor should a base be hastily established and built up at great expense without fully considering its ability to pay national security dividends under anticipated circumstances, especially those that may require resilient host nation support.

Though not a new initiative, it is clear that finding ways to minimize the perceived presence associated with U.S. overseas bases and conveying respect for host nation sovereignty will be increasingly important in the future. This includes prudently dealing with incidents when they occur. It also entails reducing the impact of routine operations and even reevaluating what routine operations are essential to readiness and mission accomplishment compared to preserving the strategic viability of the base. In addition, pursuing a range of less substantive basing arrangements that leverage host nation infrastructure and cooperation may contribute to forward presence and theater security cooperation objectives while accounting for the interests and sensitivities of partner nations. Finally, careful consideration should be given to those forces that are inherently capable of providing a significant and persistent forward presence with modest and flexible basing support.

Given increasing challenges to maintaining a forward posture, persistently finding ways to synchronize U.S. and host nation objectives within an evolving context reflecting both nations' perspectives is essential. Theater security cooperation initiatives need to be vigorously pursued and thoroughly coordinated, using all available instruments of national power.⁷² Deployed and overseas units instinctively invest untold hours in fostering productive relationships with host nation partners. These efforts could be more effectively coordinated and incorporated into strategic communications efforts, leading to stronger partnerships, valuable diplomatic points of departure, and a counterpoint to undesirable incidents when they occur. In addition, the value of bilateral and multilateral military exercises need to be maximized through synchronization with diplomatic efforts and other initiatives to ensure they are not routine or isolated endeavors. Some of these recommendations reflect initiatives already underway, and none of them are easily accomplished. They require a high level of internal coordination and external cooperation based on an understanding of host nation politics, security and the region. Moreover, they require a profound appreciation of the sensitivities and complexity that characterize basing relationships. In an increasingly competitive and globalized world, success in these efforts is essential to the forward presence on which U.S. national security depends.

Biography

Commander Jeffrey J. Draeger, an Ohio native, graduated with distinction from the United States Naval Academy in 1993 with a bachelor's degree in mathematics. Prior to naval flight officer training he earned a master's degree in operations research from The George Washington University. His operational tours include Patrol Squadrons Five, Eight and Twenty-Six as well as disassociated sea assignments to Cruiser-Destroyer Group Twelve, Carrier Group Six and Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa. Operations he supported include Noble Anvil, Allied Force, Deliberate Forge, Enduring Freedom – Philippines and Unified Assistance. His shore assignments include instructor duty at the P-3 fleet replacement squadron and Director, White House and Congressional Liaison Office for the Secretary of the

Navy. He assumed command of VP-26 in 2010 while deployed in support of U.S. Africa, Central, European and Southern Commands. The squadron completed a homeport change and supported Operation Odyssey Dawn before he relinquished command in 2011 and reported to the Air War College.

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