

America's Worldwide Military Deployment

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[War Agenda](#)

President Obama may claim he's got to go slow in drawing down U.S. forces fighting in Afghanistan but what's his excuse for keeping open 268 U.S. bases in Germany? Is he expecting an attack by the Red Army? There are folks living well on those 268 bases at public expense as well as the military contractors supplying them.

No other nation begins to operate even a tiny fraction of the 865-plus bases the Pentagon runs overseas to, depending on your viewpoint, (a) protect America from dangerous potential enemies who are lurking everywhere, or (b) to dominate the rest of the world. And since 95% of all overseas bases located in somebody else's country are operated by the USA, millions of people suspect (b) is the answer; indeed, foreigners fear Uncle Sam might subjugate them.

Should Americans care? Only if they don't mind spending \$140 billion a year. That's what it's costing them. The U.S. Conference of Mayors the other day voted to shift Pentagon spending of \$126-billion a year from Middle East wars to our struggling cities. But we'd get an even bigger savings by removing the ring of steel with which the Pentagon has girdled the planet.

Global public opinion polls have revealed foreigners fear the United States more than they do "terrorists." In some polls, even the much-reviled Osama bin Laden finished a poor second to former President George W. Bush as the world's No. 1 devil.

In testimony before Congress on March 6, 2007, Steven Kull, head of the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes, said the opinions of the U.S. held by people around the world had plummeted to abysmal record lows. What's more, the U.S. State Department's own polls about that time confirmed this—saying that favorable views of the U.S. since 1999 plunged from 83% to 56% in the UK; from 78% to 37% in Germany; and from 75% to 30% in Indonesia—in good part due to America's war on Iraq.

Kull told the Congress, "The U.S. military presence in the Middle East is exceedingly unpopular in virtually all countries. On average 69% believe the US military presence there 'provokes more conflict than it prevents' while just 16% see it as a stabilizing force." Kull went on to testify, "In many countries around the world people express strong fears that the U.S. will use military force against them."

As activist author David Swanson writes in "Daybreak," (Seven Stories Press), "If we were to close our bases in other countries, we would still have 6,000 bases in the United States and its 'territories.' We could save perhaps \$140 billion per year..." Swanson goes on to write many Americans are aware of "the anger generated by American military bases in places

like Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, and Afghanistan” but fewer Americans are aware “of the fury with which ordinary people resent our bases in places like Korea and Europe.”

He cites the Pacific island of Guam, “which we have treated as a colony since World War II, turning the majority of the nation’s land into a U.S. military base and denying its people independence or full citizenship rights.” He might have mentioned Okinawa as well, where the local populace overwhelmingly would love to kiss Uncle Sam goodbye. Swanson might also have cited the disgusting example of Diego Garcia, the Indian Ocean island where the U.S. forcibly deported all of its 2,000 residents and gassed their dogs rather than transport them. Once converted into a military base, the island made a dandy runway for warplanes headed to Iraq.

And by banning journalists, the U.S. Navy could perpetrate this crime with virtually no press coverage, said David Vine, an assistant professor of anthropology at American University and author of “Island of Shame: the Secret History of the U.S. Military on Diego Garcia (Princeton University Press).” Vine said in a TV interview, “The Chagossians were put on a boat and taken to Mauritius and the Seychelles, 1,200 miles away, where they were left on the docks, with no money and no housing, to fend for themselves.” He added:

“They were promised jobs that never materialized. They had been living on an island with schools, hospitals, and full employment, sort of like a French coastal village, and they were consigned to a life of abject poverty in exile, unemployment, health problems, and were the poorest of the poor.”

Now for our quiz: do the gangster methods employed by the U.S. Navy on Diego Garcia sound as if (a) they were taken to protect Americans from attack by dangerous potential enemies? or (b) that the U.S. doesn’t give a damn who gets hurt when it’s out to attack a country in a war based on lies?

According to Swanson, the U.S. has 268 bases in Germany, 124 in Japan; 87 in South Korea; 83 in Italy; 45 in Britain; 21 in Portugal and 19 in Turkey. He’d like to see the U.S. bring home the half million troops and 100,000 civilian contractors employed to maintain them and convert them into useful facilities such as “green energy producers and schools.”

Now that the U.S. Conference of Mayors has voted to defund U.S. action in the Middle East maybe it will ask its members to urge President Obama to do as much to liberate the subjugated citizens of our occupied territories, Guam and Okinawa included, and bring our troops home from those military bases, saving U.S. taxpayers another bundle.

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