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## Imperial Reach

by Michael T. Klare

**A**s the Defense Department begins to look beyond the war in Iraq, a major priority will be to commence a systematic realignment of US forces and bases abroad. This massive undertaking will result in a substantial reduction of American forces in Germany and South Korea, and the establishment of new facilities in Eastern Europe, the Caspian Sea basin, Southeast Asia and Africa. Tens of thousands of troops (and their dependents) now stationed abroad will be redeployed to the United States, while fresh contingents will be sent to areas that have never before housed a permanent US military presence. These steps are largely justified in terms of military effectiveness--to eliminate obsolete cold war facilities and ease the transport of American troops to likely scenes of conflict. Underlying the planning, however, is a new approach to combat and a fresh calculus of the nation's geopolitical interests.

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The first big steps in the Pentagon's basing realignment were announced last summer by President Bush during a speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Cincinnati. Up to 70,000 American combat troops will be redeployed from bases in Germany, Japan and South Korea to bases in the United States or to US territories abroad, including Guam. Most of these forces--approximately 40,000 troops from the First Armored Division and the First Infantry Division--will be withdrawn from Germany. At the same time, however, the Army will station one of its Stryker Brigades, built around the Stryker light armored vehicle, at the Grafenwöhr training area

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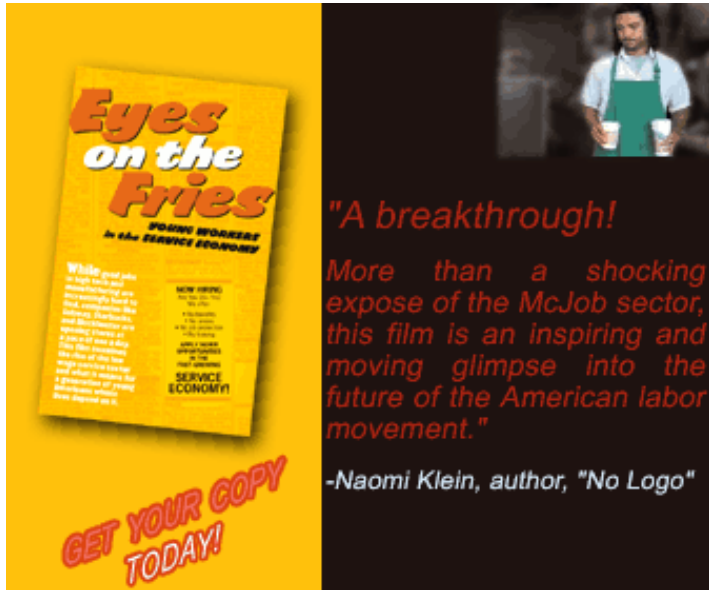
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in what used to be East Germany. Bush also indicated that new basing facilities will be acquired in other countries, in order to facilitate the rapid movement of American troops to likely areas of combat. "We'll move some of our troops and capabilities to new locations," Bush explained, "so they can surge quickly to deal with unexpected threats."

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In conjunction with this announcement, the Defense Department disclosed that it is looking at two new types of basing facilities in areas that at present do not house permanent US military installations. The first type, designated "forward operating sites" or "forward operating locations," will consist of logistical facilities (an airstrip or port complex) plus weapons stockpiles; these installations will house a small permanent crew of US military technicians but no large combat units. The second type, termed "cooperative security locations," will be "bare bones" facilities utilized at times of crisis only; such sites will have no permanent US presence but will be maintained by military contractors and host-country personnel.

In discussing these new facilities, the Defense Department has gone out of its way to avoid using the term "military base." A base, in the Pentagon's lexicon, is a major facility with permanent barracks, armories, recreation facilities, housing for dependents and so on. Such installations typically have been in place for many years and are sanctioned by a formal security partnership with the host country involved. The new types of facilities, on the other hand, will contain no amenities, house no dependents and not be tied to a formal security arrangement. This distinction is necessary, the

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Pentagon explains, to avoid giving the impression that the United States is seeking a permanent, colonial-like presence in the countries it views as possible hosts for such installations.

"We have no plans [for military bases] on a permanent basis in those areas," Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld averred when speaking of Eastern Europe and the Caspian Sea region. "We're trying to find the right phraseology. We know the word 'base' is not right for what we do.... We have bases in Germany and we will continue to. But we also have had things that we call 'Forward Operating Locations' or sites that are not permanent bases: they're not places where you have families; they are not places where you have large numbers of US military on a permanent basis.... [They are places] where you'd locate people in and out or where you use it for refueling--these types of things."

The Defense Department has not publicly stated where it will establish these new, no-frills installations, but Pentagon officials have inspected possible locations in Eastern Europe, the Caspian Sea basin and Africa. Additional sites have been mentioned in Congressional reports and news media. It is possible, then, to identify many of the most likely sites [see sidebar, page 16].

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The decommissioning of older bases in Germany, Japan and South Korea and the acquisition of new facilities in other areas has been described by the White House as "the most comprehensive restructuring of US military forces overseas since the end of the Korean War." In explaining these moves, the Bush Administration emphasizes the issue of utility: Many older installations eat up vast resources but contribute little to overall combat effectiveness, and so should be closed; at the same time, new facilities are needed in areas where few American bases currently exist. But while it is certainly arguable that the closing of obsolete bases in Europe and East Asia will free resources that might be better employed somewhere else, it is also clear that a lot more is going on than mere military utility. Indeed, a close look at Pentagon statements and policy reports suggests that three other factors are at work: a new calculus of America's geopolitical interests; a shift in US strategic orientation from defensive to offensive operations; and concerns about the future reliability of long-term allies, especially those in "Old Europe."

Most significant, overall, is the revised calculation of America's geopolitical interests. During the cold war, when "containment" was the overarching strategic principle, the United States surrounded the Soviet bloc with major bases. With the end of the cold war, however, this template no longer made

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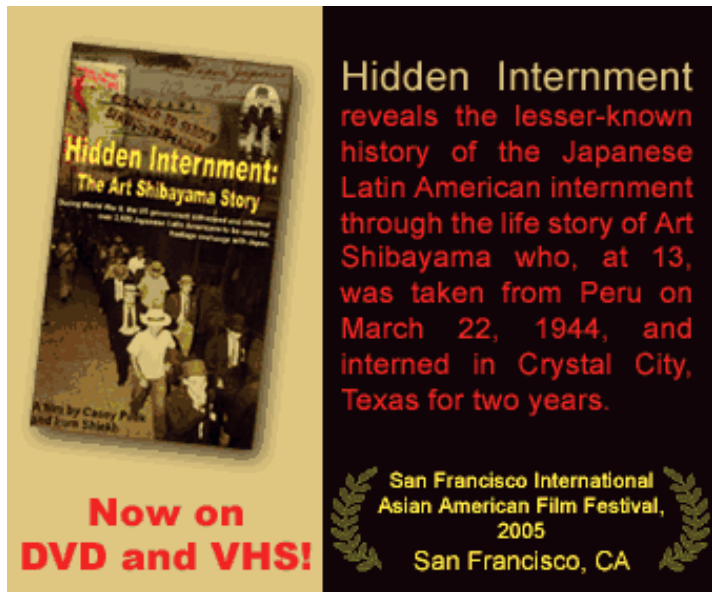
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sense, and many of these bases lost their strategic rationale. Meanwhile, other concerns--terrorism, the pursuit of foreign oil and the rise of China-- have come to preoccupy American strategists. It is these concerns that are largely driving the realignment of US bases and forces.

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There is a remarkable degree of convergence among these concerns, both in practical and geographic terms. Oil and terrorism are linked because many of the most potent terrorist groups, including Al Qaeda, arose in part as a reaction to the West's oil-inspired embrace of entrenched Arab governments, and because the terrorists often attack oil facilities in order to weaken the regimes they abhor. Similarly, oil and China are linked because both Washington and Beijing seek influence in the major oil-producing regions. And the major terrorist groups, the most promising sites of new oil and the focal points of Sino-American energy competition are all located in the same general neighborhoods: Central Asia and the Caspian region, the greater Gulf area and the far reaches of the Sahara. And the United States is establishing new basing facilities precisely in these areas.

In combating the threat posed by terrorist forces, the United States naturally seeks an enhanced military presence where these groups first arose. Moreover, as the older oilfields of the North are gradually exhausted, more and more of the world's oil will have to come from producers in the Global South--especially the Persian Gulf countries plus Africa and Latin America. In 1990, according to the Energy Department, these countries produced 32 million barrels of oil per day, or 46 percent of total world

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output. By 2025, however, they are expected to deliver 77 million barrels, or 61 percent of global output. Over this same thirty-five-year period, the combined production of the United States, Canada, Mexico, Australia and Europe will drop from 29 percent to 19 percent of total world output. With America's domestic production in decline, an ever-increasing share of its oil requirements will have to be satisfied by imports, meaning greater US dependence on oil supplied by countries in the Middle East, Africa and other non-Western areas.

These countries show a high degree of instability, much of it induced by the legacies of colonialism and a preponderance of unrepresentative political institutions. Nigeria, for example, has experienced periodic outbreaks of ethnic disorder in the Niger Delta region, the source of most of its petroleum; both Angola and Azerbaijan harbor ethnic separatist movements; and Saudi Arabia and Iraq have been the repeated targets of attacks on oil facilities and related infrastructure. In none of these countries can the uninterrupted extraction and export of oil be taken for granted, and so the American economy is becoming increasingly exposed to supply disruptions in overseas producing areas.

In the face of this peril, American leaders have placed ever-increasing reliance on the use of military force to protect the global production and transport of oil. This trend began in 1980, when President Jimmy Carter vowed that the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf would be assured "by any means necessary, including military force." The same basic premise was subsequently applied to the Caspian Sea basin by President Clinton, and is now being extended by President Bush to other producing areas, including Africa. All of this entails the increased involvement of US military forces in these areas--and it is to facilitate such involvement that the Defense Department seeks new bases and "operating locations."

Normally, Pentagon officials are reluctant to ascribe US strategic moves to concern over the safe delivery of energy supplies. Nevertheless, in their explanations of the need for new facilities, the oil factor has begun to crop up. "In the Caspian Sea you have large mineral [i.e., petroleum] reserves," observed General Charles Wald, deputy commander of the US European Command (Eucom), in June 2003. "We want to be able to assure the long-term viability of those resources." Wald has also spoken of the need for bases to help protect oil reserves in Africa (which falls under the purview of

the EUCOM). "The estimate is [that] in the next ten years, we will get 25 percent of our oil from there," he declared in *Air Force* magazine. "I can see the United States potentially having a forward operating location in São Tomé," or other sites in Africa.

Of the dozen or so locations mentioned in Pentagon or media accounts of new basing locations, a majority--including Algeria, Azerbaijan, Cameroon, Gabon, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Qatar, Romania, São Tomé and Príncipe, Tunisia--either possess oil themselves or abut major pipelines and supply routes. At the same time, many of these countries house terrorist groups or have been used by them as staging areas. And, from the Pentagon's perspective, the protection of oil and the war against terrorism often amount to one and the same thing. Thus, when asked whether the United States was prepared to help defend Nigeria's oilfields against ethnic violence, General Wald replied, "Wherever there's evil, we want to go there and fight it."

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**E**qually strong geopolitical considerations link the pursuit of foreign oil to American concern over the rise of China. Like the United States, China needs to import vast amounts of petroleum in order to satisfy skyrocketing demand at home. In 2010, the Energy Department predicts, China will have to import 4 million barrels of oil per day; by 2025 it will be importing 9.4 million barrels. China will also be dependent on major producers in the Middle East and Africa, and so it has sought to curry favor with these countries using the same methods long employed by the United States: by forging military ties with friendly regimes, supplying them with weapons and stationing military advisers in them. A conspicuous Chinese presence has been established, for example, in Iran, Sudan and the Central Asian republics. To counter these incursions, the United States has expanded its own military ties with local powers--and this in turn has helped spark the drive for new basing facilities in the Gulf and Caspian regions.

The search for new bases is also being driven by the Pentagon's new strategic outlook. During the cold war era, most overseas US troop deployments were defensive--intended to deter Soviet expansionism in Europe and Asia and to provide the means for effective resistance should deterrence fail. True, some of these bases were also used to support covert operations against pro-Soviet regimes in the Third World and to promote other US interests, but for the most part their role was static and defensive--

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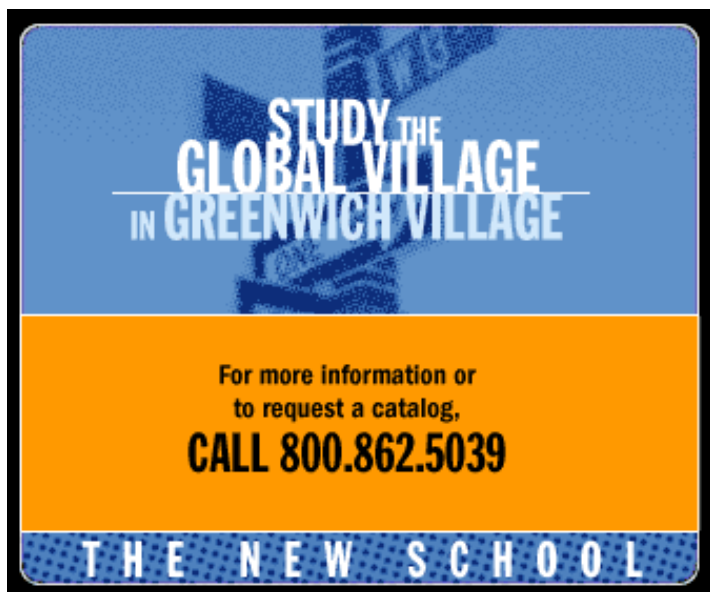
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and it is this passivity that Rumsfeld and his associates seek to do away with. Instead, the Bush Administration and its neocon allies seek to fashion a more assertive, usable combat force. This new outlook is encapsulated in *The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, a report just released by the Defense Department: "Our role in the world depends on effectively projecting and sustaining our forces in distant environments where adversaries may seek to deny US access," the document says. The military doctrine forged by the Bush Administration also envisions pre-emptive military action or, more accurately, preventive strikes intended to cripple an enemy's combat capability before it can be developed to the point of actually posing a threat to American interests.

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Being able to strike first against all conceivable future adversaries translates into two types of military capabilities: a capacity to move forces into combat quickly and seize the battlefield initiative; and an ability to deliver combat power to any corner of the globe, no matter how distant or inhospitable. These necessitate a whole new constellation of overseas bases. Because speed and agility require installations that are geared to logistical efficiency rather than defensive might, older bastions must be replaced by new facilities geared to transiting offensive forces; and because new adversaries could arise in areas far removed from existing US bases, new facilities are needed in any potential site of conflict. Hence the desire for new logistical hubs and "bare bones" facilities in every region of the world.

Finally, the Pentagon's search for new basing facilities is being driven by the

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altered political landscape of the post-cold war era. The installations acquired in Germany, Japan and South Korea during the cold war were primarily intended for the defense of those and neighboring countries, and so were largely welcomed by the governments involved. In most cases, these bases were embedded in an alliance relationship and reflected a shared strategic vision. "The cold war provided an overarching framework," John Hamre of the Center for Strategic and International Studies told the Congressional Overseas Basing Commission in November. "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."

Today, save for South Korea, such facilities are no longer intended to buttress the common defense but rather for use as steppingstones for the deployment of American forces to other areas of the world--often in operations that do not have the support of the host nation, such as the war in Iraq. And the South Koreans have begun to express strong differences with the United States over how best to deal with Pyongyang--with many favoring a strategy of reconciliation instead of confrontation. Even Turkey, a long-term US ally, refused to allow the Pentagon to use its territory as a launching pad for the invasion of Iraq. All of this has led to considerable anxiety at the Pentagon over the possibility that more restrictions will be placed on the use of bases in these countries for what are called "out of area" operations.

In the face of this challenge there is "a purposeful effort to possibly leave places where they may not want us or they are snubbing us," a senior military official told Esther Schrader of the *Los Angeles Times* in May 2003. "The Eastern Bloc countries have reached out to us.... They are looking for a partnership." These more welcoming states, presumably including Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, are not as concerned as some of our older allies over the use of their territory to facilitate US military operations in other countries. And their acquiescence is a major factor in the base-realignment plan.

It is not clear exactly when the Defense Department will complete the reassessment of its overseas basing requirements and complete the actual

redeployment of American forces. Some of the initiatives described above have already begun, while others remain on the drawing board. There is no doubt, however, that a major realignment of American power is under way that entails a seismic shift in the center of gravity of American military capabilities from the western and eastern fringes of Eurasia to its central and southern reaches, and to adjacent areas of Africa and the Middle East. This is certain to involve the United States more deeply in the tangled internal politics of these regions, and to invite resistance from local forces--and there are many of them--that object to current US policies and will resent a conspicuous American military presence in their midst. Far from leading to a reduction in terrorism, as advertised, these moves are certain to provoke more of it.

Finally, the American power shift from outer Eurasia to its troubled interior is certain to arouse concern and antipathy in Russia, China, India and other established or rising powers in the region. Already, Russian leaders have expressed dismay at the presence of American bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan--territories that were once part of the Soviet Union. The recent political upheaval in Kyrgyzstan and the ouster of President Askar Akayev--long considered friendly to Moscow--is certain to exacerbate their concerns. At the same time, Chinese officials have begun to complain about what they view as the "encirclement" of their country. Although reluctant to take on the Americans directly, leaders of Russia and China have talked of a "strategic partnership" between their two countries and have collaborated in the establishment of a new regional security organ, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. None of this is likely to lead soon to the outbreak of hostilities, but the foundation is being set for a great-power geopolitical contest akin to the European rivalries that preceded World Wars I and II.

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