

Dilemmas of Global Basing

Final

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US Basing and Host Nation Politics

The most pressing challenge currently facing communities hosting U.S. military bases in the world is two level politics and the type of foreign government structure that ultimately allows the United States military to be based in foreign countries. Time and time again, politics at the local and national level have a very dramatic effect on US military bases. Dictatorships, autocracy and consolidated democracies have been the vein of problems when it comes to US military bases. Various types of governments throughout the world have allowed the United States military to have bases within their countries based upon the approval of a dictator or the a democratic government. There are instances where United States military bases have been successful or not depending on the type of governmental structure. Ultimately, it is the type of government structure that has been the most pressing challenges facing current communities hosting US military bases. When based upon the authority of one person, the United States has seen where a regime change shift questioned the legality of US military bases. Often this type of government structure has only benefited a few and certainly lined the pockets of those in charge. In the same instance, we have seen where the local population opinions have pressured their national leaders enough to kicked out or deny United States military presence. Additionally, the manner in which United States military bases were acquired in foreign countries have created ill will towards United States. The taking of land from indigenous people throughout the world has created legal problems for the United States that has lasted for decades.

In the book called *Embattled Garrisons* by Calder, he gives five hypothesizes where politics can have an impact on bases. He labels these concepts as the Contact, Colonization, Occupation, Regime-Shift, and Dictatorship hypothesis.² In looking at the history of US military basing, his hypotheses are played out in one form or another. The planning of the Iraq war and in

2003 by the Pentagon would be the first-time bases in Turkey and Germany were going to be used for an attack that was not approved by NATO. Both countries were opposed to the Iraq war and could deny access to the United States; major social movements emerged in both Germany and Turkey which were larger than those of the Cold War.³ The United States war planners envisioned unimpeded access from Germany and never considered the fact of being denied access.⁴ In Germany, Chancellor Schroder agreed to allow the United States certain rights for military equipment and personnel. In a legal dispute amongst different parties involved in their government it triggered a constitutional review of the rights of their nation, which ultimately prevented him from allowing United States access. In the case of Turkey, which came down to their national assembly having to vote on passing the resolution, it became a no vote; both of these were a major blow to the war planning efforts of United States. One of the biggest reasons why Turkey did not support the United States was because it did not want to create a Kurdish state. Additionally, social movements in both countries pressured their leaders not to support the United States efforts. In these two cases, it highlights the fact that domestic politics within each country played an important role. In these case studies, Calder points out that two-level politics can have a significant impact involving basing agreements because the decision makers must consider protest groups which can have major support of the local population.⁵

United States planning effort for Operation Enduring Freedom were supposed to use two central Asian countries, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.⁶ The first country, Kyrgyzstan was going to host several thousand troops and special forces. The agreement with this country was to host a coalition base at Manas in which Russia was not happy with because of the proximity to its border. Russia was able to establish its own base in the country as well making it the first country to host Russian and American soldiers. The agreement with this government was going

to have a major economic impact. However, most of these funds flowed to private entities who had close ties to the ruling regime. This is not the first time United States provided economic incentives to ruling elites in order to gain access for military bases. The collapse of President Akayev's regime in Kyrgyzstan created problems for the United States in which the access agreement became questionable. The new ruling regime questioned the legitimacy of the basing contracts and stated that it was not favorable to Kyrgyzstan and wanted to renegotiate. Bakiyev, the new President called for 100% increase in payments. This along with an international shooting incident ultimately had the United States military evicted from the Manas base in Kyrgyzstan.

The second country, Uzbekistan wanted to align with United States Afghanistan efforts. President Karimov was a staunch dictator that used United States for his own political gain and regime survivorship. He essentially used the United States to squash his political opposition of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in an effort to strengthen his dictatorship. This also improved his domestic political capital and improved his international influence. He went against international politics and counted on the United States not say anything about his actions. In an uprising within his own country that used weapons from the United States to fire upon a crowd of domestic protesters, this started an investigation into his actions. Additionally, issues involving Andijon refugees that crossed over into Kyrgyzstan; the Uzbek government wanted them returned for questioning, however they were move to other European countries for political asylum. The United States supported this action and Uzbek government notified the United States that it was implementing its termination clause in the status of forces agreement. This got the United States military evicted from the K2 base in Uzbekistan. Both of these examples show how dictatorship in countries create the most challenges for U.S. military bases abroad. The

regime shift creates problems of legitimacy which have caused the United States to withdraw troops from countries in which the dictatorships fall apart.

The lily pad strategy may be a way in which to mitigate some of the political aspects of communities hosting military bases. By reducing the foot print and minimizing the contact of the local population with US military. When setting up new bases, planners need aware that they can probably mitigate the impact of the locals by having it in an austere location. Additionally, the relationship building that is required when sitting up new locations, US officials need to build strong relationships and sell the US presence of having minimal impact on their sovereignty. The United States used the lily pad concept to expand military operations in Africa by using main operating bases, forward operating sites (FOS) and cooperative security locations (CSL). These operations support a variety of United States' interests on the continent of Africa from oil to combating terrorists' organizations. The textbook notes that Africa had not been a region of importance to the United States however, that has changed over the years. In an article called "*The US Military Is All Over Africa Despite Not Being at War in Africa*" the author points out the following: 7,500 US military personal and 1,000 contractors are deployed in Africa in 53 of 54 countries on the continent.⁷ This supports Cooley's writing on Chapter end 7, which he states that the US has been downsizing post-cold-war facilities; exchanging them for smaller, non-permanent facilities. These facilities are designed to have fewer troops, rely more on contractors for maintenance and try to minimize basing politics.⁸ However, he notes that U.S. planners need to be aware that when pushing democratization and facilitating basing agreements in the same weak governments, the shifts in politics could cause the U.S. to renegotiate or told to leave the country.⁹

The U.S. and Ghana recently signed a basing agreement that outlined the military presence and future construction activities.¹⁰ However, this agreement was met with protests from the local citizens chanting “Ghana First”; the opposition group Ghana First Patriotic Front led a march in the capital. Their concerns were giving the U.S. too much control in the country and stating that an U.S. military presence could attract extremists group that would harm their sovereignty.¹¹ This supports Cooley’s argument that the Trans-Sahara Counter Terror Initiative (TSCTI) for combating terrorism. The agreement was ratified by Ghana’s Parliament and boycotted by opposition lawmakers; stating that it gave the U.S. unimpeded access to Ghana’s airport, radio and telecommunications systems. In turn the U.S. contributed \$20 million to their military for training and equipment.¹²

The lily pad concept as noted by Cooley allows the United States to cover essentially the entire planet where it has interests. The U.S. has troops in Algeria, Burundi, Chad, Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan Tunisia, and Uganda that support AFRICOM missions from drone surveillance, cross-border raids and intelligence gathering.¹³ Interesting note from the article it stated that the Dept. of State, Homeland Security, Agriculture, Energy, Commerce and Justice are agencies that are involved in its operations. From a security aspect, the article states that US special forces are heavily involved in combating terrorist organizations on the continent. This is aligned with the Global Defense Posture Review (GDPR) which states that this is the United States’ method of being in remote regions of the world to provide stabilization and security involving non-state actors.

Whether a base is big or small, it doesn’t alleviate the politics of basing because it is the views of the people. The opposition group Ghana First Patriotic Front is concerned over Ghana’s security, the economic impact in my opinion is small and therefore does not carry much weight.

However, while trying to provide security for the locals, they are concerned their safety is at risk by the presence of the U.S. military being there. Chanting “Ghana First” the locals voiced their opposition over the security and sovereignty of their nation. The local government is definitely in favor of having the U.S. there to assist with combating terrorists’ organizations which the locals may not truly understand the dynamics of the threat. Their concerns over the sovereignty of their nation could certainly be at risk more with expanding terrorists’ organizations than with a small U.S. military presence. Therefore, we see a disconnect between the local population and the government. The article points out that the lily pad strategy employed by the United States is essentially working because it has military personnel and contractors in all but one country, therefore there must be some validity. The bilateral Status of Forces Agreements that America has with many African states, permitted thousands of troops to arrive and depart from their airports and national military installations with flexibility.¹⁴ The lily pad strategy has allowed the United States to do more with less as it projects power from a region to another with less troops and a smaller footprint. The article also points out that while trying to maintain being a great power competitor the United States must stay vigilant at fighting terrorism.¹⁵

In the examples above, dictatorships and two-party politics have caused the greatest challenges to communities that host United States military bases abroad. It has been a point of friction for governments at the national level and local with their population. Regime change shifts have a questioned the legitimacy of basing contracts from one ruling regime to another. Two-party politics have applied enough pressure to their national leaders to caused the United States military to withdraw from their countries. The lily pad strategy may be a to provide hey smaller footprint and less contact with the local population and maybe the answer to mitigate some challenges. Also going forward the United States may want to have partnerships that which

utilize cooperative security locations and have status of forces agreement that are more favorable to the countries in which they are located.



¹ I wish to thank my wife Anika Wilson and Joshua Wilson for their thoughtful comments and suggestions. All errors found herein are my own.

² Calder, Kent E. *Embattled Garrisons: Comparative Base Politics and American Globalism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.

³ Holmes, Amy Austin. *Social Unrest and American Military Bases in Turkey and Germany since 1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Strategic Culture Foundation, "The US Military Is All Over Africa Despite Not Being at War in Africa," There are currently roughly 7,500 US military personnel, including 1,000 contractors, deployed in Africa. For comparison, that figure was only 6,000 just a year ago. August 31st, 2018, <https://www.mintpressnews.com/africom-us-military-africa/248552/>

⁸ Cooley, Alexander. *Base Politics: Democratic Change and the U.S. Military Overseas*. New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Francis Kokutse and Carley Petesh, 'Ghana First:' US military deal leads thousands to protest Associated Press, 29 March 2018, <https://www.foxnews.com/us/ghana-first-us-military-deal-leads-thousands-to-protest#>

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Eric Schewe, Why is the U.S. Military Occupying Bases Across Africa? The U.S. occupation of Africa has become self-justifying. The U.S. military now must stay in Africa to protect the interests of the U.S. military in Africa, 11 April 2018 <https://daily.jstor.org/why-is-the-u-s-military-occupying-bases-across-africa/>

¹⁵ Aaron Mehta, National Defense Strategy released with clear priority: Stay ahead of Russia and China, 19 January 2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/breaking-news/2018/01/19/national-defense-strategy-released-with-clear-priority-stay-ahead-of-russia-and-china/>