Power, Projection, Arrogance

Mapping the Global Presence of US Military Bases

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Introduction

The global presence of US military bases is commonly presented as an inevitable condition of international security, framed in the context of defence collaboration, regional security, and shared safety. In this narrative, though, the scope, continuity, and strategic rationale of a system that spans much beyond temporal or defensive solutions are lost. In the contemporary world, US military bases are spread across continents and are ingrained in allied nations, partner states, and lands that are directly or indirectly governed, constituting one of the most massive military networks in modern history.

These bases are interlinked rather than isolated, forming a network that enables continuous military presence, rapid deployment, and sustained intervention capabilities. The geographic location of these creates definite trends: concentration at geopolitical fault lines, at places where important maritime routes pass, and in areas where energy flows around the globe. This network stretches across Europe and East Asia to the Persian Gulf and the Indo-Pacific as part of long-term strategic positioning, rather than short-term reactions to specific threats.

At the same time, these bases have changed in their functions. In addition to the more traditional functions, they are now assisting in surveillance missions, remote wars, and military interactions mediated by technology.

This report analyses the location and operational roles of US military bases around the world, aiming to go beyond descriptive reportage and authoritative narratives. The report aims to illustrate that overseas bases constitute an organized apparatus of power projection, entrenched

in the political structure and often restricting the authority of locals, thereby strengthening the military's long-term presence.

This way, the report poses very important questions regarding sovereignty, regional stability, and the broader implications of a permanent international military infrastructure. Instead of analysing these bases as neutral or strictly defensive, the analysis places them in a broader context of geopolitical rivalry, access to resources, and the normalization of militarization as a key aspect of international relations.

The Global Distribution of US Military Bases

This report does not consider the world web of US military bases as a neutral map of "security cooperation." It treats such a network as a politics of imbalanced power. The distribution of installations is not random, and it is not simply administrative. It discloses the locations where US military planners pursued stable access, logistical profundity, surveillance, and the pressure of power.

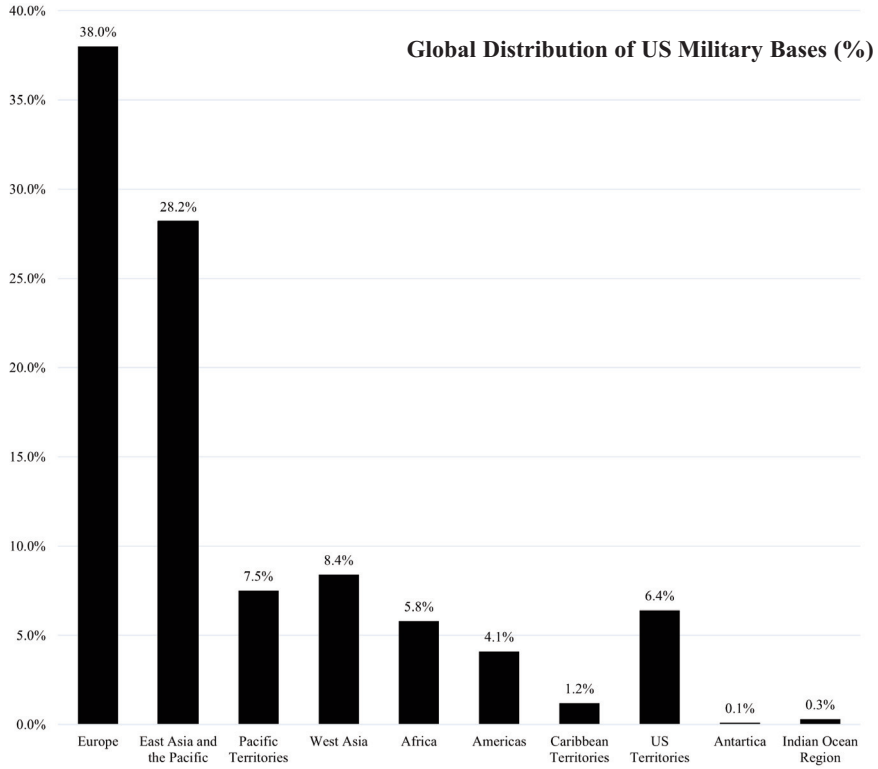
The so-called the Department of Defense (DoD) itself has annual base structure reports, and US combatant command posture statements, that publicly recount the functions of forward presence, access, basing, and regional military reach. By reading this critically, such official documents are not just descriptions of infrastructure; they demonstrate how military space is being structured as a structure of world domination.

The base data and information presented in this report are based solely on research conducted by World BEYOND War, available on an interactive map showing over 860 bases spanning the world in 95 countries and territories. The pattern is highly uneven.

As the graph shows, East Asia and the Pacific account for 243 bases (28.2%), while Europe accounts for 327 (38%). Together, these two regions alone contain 570 of 860 sites, or roughly 66.2% of the entire network. By contrast, the Americas account for 35 sites (4.1%), West Asia for 72 (8.4%), Africa for 50 (5.8%), Pacific Territories for 65 (7.5%), U.S. Territories, including (Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa,) account for 55 bases (6.4%), Caribbean Territories account for 10 bases (1.2%), Indian Ocean Region, represented by Diego Garcia (British Indian Ocean Territory), which has 3 bases, and finally one base in Antarctica.

This matters analytically. The concentration of a network in Europe, East Asia, and the Pacific can never be described as diffuse or improvised, or as a set of facilities. It is an indication of the centralization of US power in the two areas most important to the post-1945 alliance systems: war logistics and international military projection.

Nevertheless, such concentration can also be viewed as institutional permanence of US military presence in territories where the original



security justification has largely disappeared. The largest base concentrations were constructed to confront the Soviet Union during the Cold War, but they remain in place. For example, Germany, which, despite the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, is still home to one of the largest American military bases, Ramstein Air Base. Scholars such as Chalmers Johnson argue that this persistence suggests the basing system functions less as a temporary defence arrangement and more as a durable infrastructure of geopolitical influence and military reach.

It is even more unsettling at the country level. Three countries: Germany (118 bases), Japan (101 bases), and South Korea (75 bases), total 294 bases, or 34.1% of the total dataset. That is, there are only three countries that account for over one-third of the total number of listed sites. The addition of Guam (52 bases), Italy (45 bases), and Puerto Rico (44 bases) makes the point even more evident: the network is concentrated in a relatively small number of heavily militarized centres rather than evenly distributed across the globe. This concentration of bases raises one

question: why does the United States have more bases, and even the largest bases, in those locations?

This is one of the most significant findings in the dataset. It demonstrates that the global basing system cannot be reduced to a simple list of countries; instead, it is a hierarchy of strategic nodes on which military forces can be prepared, deployed, resupplied, and normalized.

The share in Europe is particularly telling. In its posture statement of 2025, the US European Command specifically declares that "In Europe, our 'Access, Basing and Overflight' agreements give us the ability to intercept threats before they approach the United States, to project US combat power globally, and to deter Russian aggression against NATO."

The report further added that, "the arrangements we have in Europe proved crucial in 2024 for the United States' support of the defense of Israel. USEUCOM directly supported US Central Command's (USCENTCOM) efforts in the Israel-Hamas conflict by providing Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) capable ships to the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as sharing sensor data that enables USCENTCOM BMD protection capabilities."

It is precisely for this reason that Europe should not be treated as a passive alliance region. It serves as a major transregional platform: a logistical and political launchpad for deploying US forces outside the continent. The extremely high total US bases network in Germany should thus be interpreted not as an isolated national fact but as a sign of the continuing European quality of being one of the major land bases of US military influence.

However, the same infrastructure has been criticised as changing the European territory into a staging post for wars far beyond the continent. Bases like the Ramstein Air Base in Germany have been at the centre of facilitating US military operations in the Middle East and Afghanistan, drone missions, and logistical support. This, critics argue, raises serious legal and sovereignty issues, since European territories are being used to support military operations conducted elsewhere. Investigative reporting and scholarly research indicate that Ramstein has been one of the key relays within the US drone program, tying up the command systems in the United States to drone operations in conflict regions.

In East Asia and the Pacific, there is a similar but different concentration. The US Government Accountability Office identified the US military presence in Japan and South Korea as one of the factors in the stability of the region, maintaining the alliance, and projecting power, whereas the 2025 INDOPACOM posture statement emphasizes the importance of extensive forward presence in responding to crises, deterring potential aggression and conducting distributed operations.

These documents, read critically, help explain why Japan, South Korea, and Guam occupy such a large place in the US bases list. They are not marginal locations; they play a key role in the military geography that Washington seeks to control, with the aim of containing regional competitors and maintaining the potential for escalation in the Indo-Pacific. It is the unprecedented concentration in Japan and South Korea that not only indicates the remnants of the old Cold War systems but also a response to present geopolitical competition.

However, the concentration of bases in Japan and South Korea has also led to a pattern of local opposition and social strains, especially in Okinawa, which is populated with a large percentage of the US troops in Japan. The Okinawan inhabitants have protested against the increase of US bases many times, citing environmental degradation, aircraft accidents, and the crimes committed by the military men. The academic literature demonstrates that, even when there are agreements to create national alliances, local societies in highly militarized states tend to be disproportionately affected in the localities that host foreign bases. This has given rise to the ongoing political tussle among the local governments, national governments, and the US military authorities over the further expansion of facilities like Marine Corps Air Station Futenma and the construction of a second facility in Henoko.

West Asia, though smaller in the absolute count of bases than Europe or East Asia, remains a significant zone of militarised concentration. The lines of effort of the command, as outlined in the 2025 posture statement of the CENTCOM commander, entail deterring Iran, supporting Israel, countering violent organisations, and competing strategically in the region.

Even without adopting that language as our own, the statement is revealing because it shows how the US military itself continues to frame this region as a permanent theatre of armed management.

The bases in Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Kuwait, Iraq, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates represent a thick belt of installations, traversing West Asia. It is not merely that such bases exist, but that they maintain a permanent US military presence in one of the most politically unstable and "securitised" areas of the globe.

We argue that the strategic significance of world energy sources and maritime trade routes is closely linked to the concentration of bases in West Asia, rather than merely to counterterrorism or deterrence. The Persian Gulf region is home to approximately one-third of the world's known oil reserves, and the Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's chokepoints for energy transportation. The US military presence in countries like Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar has been proposed by scholars as representing the aim of securing access to energy sources and safeguarding maritime oil routes.

Africa's overall bases total is lower, but the continent should not be read as marginal. According to the 2025 posture statement of AFRICOM, the command is dedicated to the protection of the homeland of the United States against threats posed by African countries. The main place of concentration of troops is East Africa, the Red Sea, is strategic, and Djibouti is the main location of a large installation of the United States in Africa, a few minutes from one of China's few foreign bases.

The argument that the African bases are primarily to protect the US homeland against threats posed by Africa has been strongly opposed. The geographical location of the African continent is far from the United States, and the majority of militant organisations operating in Africa have traditionally focused on local or regional issues rather than attacks on the United States mainland. Critics, therefore, argue that the expansion of AFRICOM and the growth of drone bases in countries such as Niger and Djibouti reflect broader geopolitical competition and the desire to secure strategic access to resources, maritime routes, and surveillance positions across the continent.

The Americas have a different position in the network. The 2025 posture statement of SOUTHCOM associates the region with strategic chokepoints like the Panama Canal, illegal trafficking, and competition with China, and also highlights US security cooperation as creating a permanent US presence in the hemisphere.

However, the history of US military presence in the Americas has also been linked to involvement in and control over regional politics and strategic infrastructure, especially in Central America and the Caribbean. The United States maintained long-term military bases in Panama throughout the twentieth century, controlling the Panama Canal Zone until 1999. According to Latin American politics scholars, US bases in the region have been used to further policies of political influence and intervention, particularly during the Cold War, when US military bases were implicated in suppressing left-wing movements and indirectly backing governments aligned with the US.

A critical reading of the network must also resist the fiction that bases are only technical facilities. Academic literature on overseas basing has repeatedly highlighted the conflicts over sovereignty, justice, land, and political representation arising from these installations.

As Andrew Yeo's work emphasizes, US overseas military presence may also create conflicts over jurisdiction, crime, and local democratic claims. Research on Okinawa shows that residents of areas with large numbers of bases may hold strongly negative views of the US military presence, even in the broader context of US ally politics.

The literature on the larger base network has also argued that the local opposition has shaped the placement of United States bases, pushing them towards colonial or non-sovereign islands such as Guam, Puerto Rico, and Diego Garcia. Such criticisms are necessary since they redirect the argument about infrastructure to power: where the bases are, what types of domination are possible, and what types of resistance they cause.

The main inference from this data is thus simple yet politically meaningful: the US global basing system is not merely global; it is highly concentrated along the major vectors of US military influence.

West Asia

The West Asian presence of the US military is one of the most operationally dynamic and politically intense elements of the American global basing network. In contrast to Europe or East Asia, where past alliances prevail, the bases in this region are directly linked to current conflicts, energy security issues, and permanent military presence.

The table shows that there are 72 US military bases in West Asia, with three of them drone-related. These bases are immediately adjacent to active conflict areas, especially regarding Iran's role in the region, given their geographic location along the Gulf, Iraq, Syria, and Jordan. This posture implies that the basing facility in West Asia is a working system of forward deployment, logistical coordination and operational staging.

The US bases in West Asia cannot be distributed without oil, and Iran is taking the centre stage of the discussion. The concentration of bases in the Gulf, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, is directly on top of the most vital energy-producing region of the world. The Persian Gulf boasts the world's largest petroleum reserve, and the Strait of Hormuz alone accounts for about one-fifth of the world's oil supply; thus, it is one of the most disputed chokepoints. The presence of US bases in almost all of the Gulf states, but absent in Iran itself, suggests an evident geopolitical alignment: these facilities are not an impartial safety net, but a component of a more extensive network of their installation aimed at ensuring access to energy flows and domination over the main sea routes.

This dynamic is not theoretical but explicit due to the current war between the United States, Israel and Iran. The recent events indicate that Iran has interfered with shipping and, in effect, blocked movement through the Strait of Hormuz, causing sudden surges in global oil prices and revealing the vulnerability of energy supply chains. US military policy has been responding by putting a lot of emphasis on preserving or recovering control over this corridor, including talk of military action to reopen the Strait or protection of important oil infrastructure. This shows one of the

Host Territories of the US Bases	Number of Bases	Drone Bases
Bahrain	12	
Iraq	8	
Israel	10	
Jordan	11	
Kuwait	8	1
Oman	7	
Qatar	1	1
Saudi Arabia	10	
Syria	1	
United Arab Emirates	4	1
Total	**72**	**3**

base network's main purposes: not defence, but the military control of global energy flows.

Simultaneously, these bases have become a direct target in the conflict. The Iranian forces and allied groups have been involved in missile and drone attacks against US installations in Iraq and the Gulf, which proves that even the infrastructure that creates fixed points of power creates fixed points of vulnerability. Instead of stabilising the region, the existence of these bases is a factor that encourages a cycle of growth, where military positioning spawns counter-positioning. This dynamic is helped by the network's geographic positioning, with several sides circling around Iran, which makes the bases part of the confrontation rather than external to it.

Inclusion of drone-associated bases indicates that West Asia has been turned into a distributed battle space. These locations, despite their small size, enable surveillance and actions at a distance that push conflict beyond local boundaries and blur the boundaries between war zones and host nations. In this respect, the basing system does not merely relate to the presence of territory but to the establishment of an operational environment in which military action may take place continuously, even at a distance.

Combined, the evidence points to the idea that US bases in West Asia have become an infrastructure that is tightly interconnected with energy security, geopolitical competition with Iran, and the process of continued militarisation of the territory. The fact that they are concentrated in some of the most important oil trafficking routes and are directly engaged in the ongoing hostilities means they are not an inert apparatus within a larger

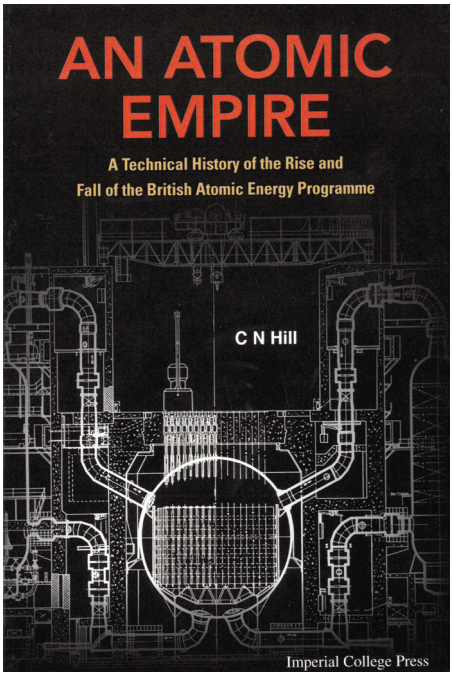
system of manipulation, hostility, and exaltation. This raises some basic questions about whether such a network leads to stability or to the establishment of an eternal strategic tension revolving around oil, access, and power.

The full report can be read at worldbeyondwar.org

Reader Recommends ... *A long-time* Spokesman *subscriber commends this insightful history of Britain's nuclear failures.*

Britain was the first country to exploit atomic energy on a large scale and, at its peak in the mid-1950s, it had generated more electricity from nuclear power than the rest of the world combined. The civil atomic energy programme grew out of the military programme which produced plutonium for atomic weapons.

In 1956, Calder Hall power station was opened by the Queen. The very next year, one of the early Windscale reactors caught fire and the world's first major nuclear accident occurred.



The civil programme ran into further difficulty in the mid-1960s and as a consequence of procrastination in the decision-making process, the programme lost momentum and effectively died... This book presents a study of government papers ... For the first time in history, the research reactor programme is presented in detail, along with a study of the decisions made by the government, the Atomic Energy Authority (AEA), and the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB).

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