



AUSA BACKGROUND BRIEF



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Army Issue: FORWARD PRESENCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since World War II, American forces have been stationed overseas in areas of importance to the United States and its allies. The United States currently maintains significant forces in Europe, Korea and Panama. The Army represents the largest contingent of these forward based forces. They are large and capable enough to contribute to regional deterrence and effective and survivable enough to fight within or outside the region.

Whereas forward basing (or stationing) involves the presence of organized forces overseas, forward presence incorporates basing with other activities. These activities include prepositioning weapon systems, support equipment and materiel; periodic force deployments and operational training in the region; and combined military exercises and exchanges with allied forces. The national military strategy identifies forward presence as a fundamental requirement of security and deterrence.

The issue confronting the Army today is not **whether** forward presence of the Army is necessary, but **where, when** and in **what** configuration. As forward basing is decreased—particularly in Europe and Korea—forward presence actions overseas will take on renewed importance as a means to enhance the readiness of U.S. forces and signal U.S. commitment and resolve.

The need for forward presence, particularly in areas other than Europe and Korea, is an active issue. The continued presence of U.S. troops in the Sinai, recent Army deployments to Kuwait and Somalia, and the availability of U.S. forces for future UN missions are topics of current debate. In any event, each of these scenarios requires trained and ready troops.

AUSA's position is:

- the forward presence concept is sound and a vital part of the national military strategy;
- continued forward basing is vital, particularly in Europe and Korea where significant ground force elements are the most visible and convincing signal of U.S. resolve;
- an Army corps — the force structure designed for coordinated, independent operations — should be based in Europe as a U.S. commitment to NATO and prepared and available for other intra- and extra-regional contingencies;

- the Army should maintain its present force level in South Korea until the North Korean threat is resolved. This is an important symbol of U.S. resolve in the Pacific where other countries are watching our actions.

ISSUE

To what extent is U.S. military forward presence needed in the execution of our national military strategy and what is the requirement for forward basing?

Our national military strategy assigns great significance to forward presence as a basic requirement for security and deterrence. Forces on the ground are the most effective contributors to deterrence and the most obvious demonstrators of readiness.

BACKGROUND

Forward basing includes the actual stationing of military forces in an overseas area. Forward presence incorporates not only overseas basing of forces, but such other indications of U.S. resolve, such as prepositioning of materiel, periodic deployments, and joint and combined training exercises.

Throughout the post-World War II period, American forces have been stationed overseas in contested areas, at flash points and in areas of strategic importance to the United States and its allies.

War has not been initiated by a potential adversary in any area where significant U.S. forces were on the ground. It cannot be claimed absolutely that these military forces deterred war. However, it can be observed that hundreds of conflicts did occur in areas other than those in which we had troops stationed. Diplomacy, economic sanctions, UN resolutions, public opinion and moral suasion, on many occasions, have not prevented war.

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated in his report, "The Roles and Missions, and Functions of the Armed Forces of the United States," dated February 1993, that continued stationing of U.S. forces overseas is extremely important. He pointed out that it shows commitment, reinforces alliances, brings about stability and facilitates responses to crises. But, because less forces will be stationed overseas in the future, periodic deployments of a joint nature will become even more important.

The Secretary of Defense, in "Defense Strategy for the 1990s: The Regional Defense Strategy," dated January 1993, points out the vital importance of forward presence in the maintenance of the U.S.-allied system of collective defense. He states: "We should plan to continue a wide range of forward presence activities, including not only overseas basing of forces, but prepositioning and periodic deployments, exercises, exchanges or visits of forces. Forward basing of forces and the prepositioning of equipment facilitate rapid reinforcement and enhances the capability to project forces into critical regions."

DISCUSSION

Today, the United States has major forces based in NATO-Europe, Korea, Panama and Cuba. Forces are also deployed to the Middle East and Somalia. All of these commitments are in question, and each is the subject of separate arguments regarding the U.S. national interests at stake.

There appears to be consensus that our forces should remain in NATO-Europe and Korea, albeit force strength, composition and duration remain subject to debate. Budget cost is clearly a consideration. In those cases land forces are essential, both to secure positions for the other military services and to guarantee deterrence.

The Army's only reservations are that the forward deployed forces be large enough to defend themselves and equipped, trained and supported to assure that they will not be outclassed on the battlefield.

The Army does not want another Bataan Peninsula or Wake Island where U.S. forces were expended in the first hours or days of battle. The Army does want a force that would be effective and significant if it were committed. For these reasons, the Army believes that a corps — a force structure designed for coordinated, sustained operations — is needed in Europe and a division, with appropriate supporting forces, is needed in Korea.

The Army sees a continuing need for these forces in Europe until the stability of the countries of Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union are assured. A credible force presence is needed for the United States to maintain its influence in NATO and western European councils. Also, these forward presence forces provide a valuable regional base for future contingency requirements in other regions, particularly the Middle East and North Africa. U.S. land forces are needed in South Korea until the North Korean regime renounces its designs for unification of the peninsula and the issue of their development of a nuclear weapon is resolved.

There are other factors relevant to our continued presence in these areas. The assignment of Americans to positions of command authority in international military coalitions often depends on the relative size of the U.S. military force commitment. Control of nuclear weapons is a factor that demands U.S. presence as long as former Soviet states retain a nuclear threat to the region.

Land forces remain a significant deterrent to foreign adventurism and escalation in several critical areas. The recent deployment of a U.S. Army battalion to Kuwait following the incursion of Iraqi raiding parties is the most recent example. The periodic rotation of Army forces to the Sinai, U.S. forces in Panama, U.S. peacekeeping forces in Somalia, and the several combined military exercises conducted annually with other countries contribute to detrence.

An overarching U.S. concern regarding forward presence is the growing UN interest in stationing UN-controlled forces in deterrent and peacekeeping roles in troubled areas. Unquestionably, the United Nations will want American participation in these efforts and the availability of our forces will be an issue whenever they are requested. For the long term, it is appropriate for U.S. defense planners to start considering now our responses to potential UN requests for U.S. forces, to include:

potential peacekeeping missions in South Africa, Angola or Nicaragua; humanitarian assistance in Uganda or Sudan; or any number of other geographic locations for duties now unspecified.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The forward presence concept is sound and a vital part of the U.S. national military strategy.

There will be less forward basing overseas; but those forces that are based overseas must be credible and capable of sustaining and protecting themselves. As forward basing is decreased, other actions need to be taken to display U.S. commitment and resolve, including repositioning of materiel, practice deployments and combined exercises. Related is sufficient strategic lift to signal our capabilities to respond rapidly in a crisis.

Continued forward basing of forces is essential, particularly in Europe and Korea. Ground forces provide a strong signal of U.S. resolve and are a powerful deterrent.

Army forward basing in Europe should include a corps — with significant military capabilities, trained and in a high state of readiness. This force should be available and prepared for other contingencies. In this regard, European forward presence must include repositioning of equipment and logistics support, with agreements for overflight and overseas basing rights as necessary.

Forward basing in Korea should maintain the present force until the North Korean threat is satisfactorily resolved.

Land forces which are based overseas or based in the United States must be capable of rapid reaction to meet any crisis on a worldwide basis. Success will be greatly dependent on other forward presence arrangements, including overseas repositioning, infrastructure arrangements and predesigned command and control arrangements with other joint and combined forces.

REFERENCES

1. Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Roles, Missions, and Functions of the Armed Forces of the United States," February 1993.
2. Secretary of Defense, "Defense Strategy for the 1990s: The Regional Defense Strategy," January 1993.

(This *Background Brief* was prepared by General Frederick J. Kroesen, USA Ret., an AUSA Senior Fellow, and the Institute of Land Warfare staff.)

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