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The Enduring Need for an Effective U.S. Landpower Presence in Europe

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Introduction

The United States' modern global power rests on several enduring strategic principles that transcend a constantly shifting geopolitical landscape. U.S. landpower embodies these principles, as well as several new additions for the contemporary era. Collective defense, ally reassurance, crisis response, partnership building and freedom of action are among the fundamental strategic pillars that have made the United States the world's leading power. Moving forward in the 21st century, U.S. landpower continues to underwrite these strategic values even as its roles and missions evolve. Thus America's role in the world remains critical to regional stability, global economic growth and the expansion of democratic principles. In the current political-economic environment, issues such as budgetary pressures, burden-sharing and global force realignment have cast an ominous shadow over U.S. land forces in Europe. However, it is important to recognize the long-standing contributions and value of Europe-based landpower to the United States' strategic superiority. More important, it is imperative to understand the *current* and *future* value of U.S. Army presence in Europe within the context of an evolving security and strategic framework throughout the world. U.S. landpower in Europe represents the U.S. commitment not just to its own security but also to the world's stability and prosperity. Landpower is essential for shaping the international environment, sustaining partnerships and influence, deploying forces quickly during a crisis and resolving conflicts in a manner that serves U.S. values and interests. **Whether the mission calls for compelling or deterring an adversary or for reassuring or supporting an ally, there is no more convincing sign of American commitment than the presence of U.S. Soldiers. Despite dramatic advances in technology in recent years, "boots on the ground" still matter.**

The European landmass has been a major influence in protecting national security interests of the United States throughout the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century. From the expeditionary Army of General John J. Pershing in World War I and its impact on the defeat of Germany to the continuing deployment of Army units from Europe into the Southwest and Central Asia theater, U.S. landpower presence in Europe has signaled U.S. commitment and strategic intent. For example, from 1945 to 1991, the European theater of operations was at the heart of the United States' struggle to contain the Soviet Union and ancillary threats to U.S. vital interests. More recently, recognizing the changed strategic landscape during the past two decades, the United States has significantly altered the focus of its operations in Europe from a narrow, continental approach to a broader, global perspective—a strategic platform.

On the continent, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) remains the single most important security organization and alliance through which the United States can operate with other nations in defense of common interests. It is through the physical presence of U.S. forces and their commanders and staff that the United States

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gives meaning and substance to its commitment. Any degradation to that commitment risks loss of U.S. influence and a degradation of NATO capability and resolve. Past reductions in resources aligned with U.S. landpower in Europe are historically understandable given the changes in the strategic landscape. However, continuing the trend of significant force reductions is going too far in that direction; it places at risk effective U.S. presence on the European continent and ultimately may jeopardize the ability to sustain U.S. global interests. To protect and support U.S. national and strategic interests in the near future, it remains essential for the United States to maintain a robust landpower presence of conventional Army and special operations units deployed in Europe, along with an appropriate operational command and control headquarters for response to contingencies with land forces and a land force theater commander of sufficient authority to ensure the protection of U.S. interests within a coalition environment.

NATO

At over 60 years old, NATO remains the oldest and most significant security alliance for both the United States and Europe. At the November 2010 NATO summit in Lisbon, Portugal, the United States reaffirmed both its dedication to a strong Euro-Atlantic alliance and its commitment to collective security as embodied in the North Atlantic Treaty. Looking toward the future, member states adopted a new strategic concept that focuses on NATO's role in the next decade. The main conclusions drawn from the Lisbon Summit focus on NATO's manifold roles: it remains committed to the core purpose of ensuring collective security and reassuring allies, while also continuing to build partnerships and playing a key role in crisis response. These responsibilities within NATO serve as the basis for U.S. presence in Europe and also guarantee broader European political engagement with the United States. NATO also provides the United States with the essential legitimacy it needs to pursue military action within an international context.

NATO's policies have supported and will continue to support the United States' interest in preserving world stability. In the current shifting geopolitical landscape, NATO is engaged in crisis response in regions where security and stability are linked directly to the security of the United States and its allies. NATO has expanded its roles and missions to adapt to the new, constantly shifting security environment and has become a viable expeditionary partner to the United States. Thus during the Lisbon Summit, member states confirmed that the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan remains its key priority. NATO also remains committed to regional stability in areas closer to its traditional territorial boundaries. This includes maintaining security throughout the Balkans and the continued development of partnerships with Georgia and Ukraine. Active support of Euro-Atlantic aspirations in these regions, through expansion of partnership framework mechanisms, is also important to NATO's collective security commitment.

Mindful of domestic constraints on spending, which have been felt by all NATO members, the Lisbon Summit produced agreement on a new, more affordable NATO command structure. While reducing costs, the command structure will also be leaner and more effective, with an increased focus on a broader range of operations, and will provide visible assurance, including contingencies of collective defense. As these plans indicate, a new command structure will not exempt NATO from any of its regional or global commitments.

History of U.S. Landpower Presence in Europe

The United States has maintained a significant landpower presence on the European continent, in direct support of U.S. national interests and within the context of mutual and shared responsibilities in the NATO alliance. Moreover, the past six decades reflect the U.S. Army's commitment to and execution of enduring strategic principles.

Following a massive demobilization after World War II, the U.S. Army in Europe quickly reinforced the continent as the U.S. relationship with the Soviet Union turned adversarial. The force level remained high, dipping somewhat during the Vietnam War years but rebounding in the late 1970s and 1980s. Throughout this Cold War period, the U.S. Army in Europe functioned as both a direct deterrent to Soviet aggression and an indirect deterrent within the context of nuclear triggers—a "tripwire" force—while supporting Western European stability generated from the NATO alliance. The robust U.S. presence in Europe and the stable, credible NATO alliance that could react to crisis and still stand firm against a significant conventional threat facilitated Western European economic and social recovery and the ultimate demise of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The collapse of the Soviet Union brought a change in strategic alignment from a focus on conventional combat to operations along the full spectrum of combat, to include promoting regional stability, engaging with former adversaries and combating emerging transnational threats. In 1990–1991 U.S. forces from Europe formed the core striking power that expelled Iraq from Kuwait and then provided assistance during the subsequent humanitarian crisis in northern Iraq. From 1992 to 1995 the United States provided significant landpower to the stabilization of the former Yugoslavia, deploying 25,000 Europe-based Soldiers as part of combined NATO operations under the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR, the U.S. general officer who commands both NATO and U.S. forces in Europe); that mission transitioned in 2005 to a European Union command after 13 years of U.S. participation. In 1999, the U.S.-led NATO mission against Serbia relied on forward-deployed U.S. air-, sea- and landpower along with the threat of a large U.S. ground force proximately positioned in Europe. Despite the end of the Cold War, U.S. landpower in Europe fit decisively within the evolving strategic concepts necessary to preserve U.S. security in the new era.

The post-9/11 era has melded the U.S. Europe-based force's traditional role of regional/NATO foundation and the new, expeditionary force role for operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The missions have involved deployment of Europe-based U.S. forces and the use of U.S. facilities in Europe for direct and indirect support of major operations. Moreover, NATO assumed command of the mission in Afghanistan in 2003, highlighting the enduring yet evolving partnership between the United States and Europe. U.S. forces also continue their mission, begun in the 1990s, of engaging former adversaries under NATO's Partnership for Peace program, which is built on incremental engagements and exercises designed to build trust and good will. U.S. landpower in Europe has been critical to the evolving full-spectrum model of operations around the globe throughout its existence; its unique geostrategic and multinational character continues to support U.S. long-term strategic goals throughout the world. The result of these efforts is impressive: 87 percent of the more than 40,000 allied troops serving in Afghanistan alongside Americans are land forces from our European allies. The U.S. Army's engagement in building cohesion with allies in Europe is paying off on the battlefield; every soldier a U.S. ally feels committed enough to send is one less American Soldier who has to deploy.

U.S. Army Landpower in Europe Today

The U.S. Army in Europe has transformed from a static Cold War force into an expeditionary one that executes the national strategic mission in Europe and abroad. Even though the geopolitical landscape has evolved over the past half-century, U.S. Army land forces in Europe continue to support the enduring, common strategic principles that have underwritten U.S. security in the modern era.

At present, the very modest U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) force includes the theater headquarters, a deployable corps headquarters (V Corps) with four brigade combat teams (BCTs) assigned (there is no division headquarters in Europe; all BCTs are independent brigades), a theater signal command, a theater support command, a regional medical command and a few independent enabling brigades (combat aviation, civil affairs, intelligence and military police). These units, comprising fewer than 40,000 Soldiers, are the physical construct for the strategic principles of common defense, ally reassurance, crisis response, partner building and freedom of action. Each element of the current force is essential to projecting U.S. power and sustaining the higher, strategic-level engagement process—a characteristic that makes U.S. landpower in Europe worth more than the sum of its parts.

One of the long-standing, unassailable principles of national security is deterrence. In Europe especially, deterrence has been intimately linked with common defense. In the modern context, USAREUR no longer functions as a direct opposing force in the deterrence framework, but it does still represent U.S. commitment to common defense. In the event of a NATO-driven collective security crisis, the presence of U.S. combat power on the continent represents an undeniable U.S. stake in a potential conflict. The prospect of major war in Europe is exponentially smaller now than at any time since World War II. But 66 years is a short time in history and even this brief spell has witnessed three open conflicts inside Europe (two in the Balkans and one in Georgia); the United States participated in two of them. U.S. Army forces are an essential part of any well-crafted presence intended as a bulwark against further aggression in Europe or beyond reassuring allies old and new that the United States is committed politically and militarily to enduring peace across Europe. USAREUR signals that European stability is an abiding vital

interest of the United States; that concept has been the capstone of U.S. foreign policy for more than half a century. Future U.S. policies must continue to demonstrate that commitment to Europe and to the world in the pursuit of continued progress toward peace.

The past two decades have seen the United States shift from a “big war” emphasis to one of crisis response. Contingency operations in the Gulf, Somalia, the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Philippines and Haiti illustrate the breadth of global operations undertaken in support of strategic stability. As NATO transitions from its role as European defender to that of expeditionary partner, the ability of the United States and NATO to react and deploy to crises is vital.

U.S. forces in Europe are ultimately a cornerstone of both U.S. and NATO strategic functionality and deployability. From a strictly U.S. perspective, V Corps is the deployable command and control element for USAREUR. In the event of a contingency in Europe (or nearby), the corps provides a scalable command, control and logistics capability for any mission. Its presence in Europe shortens response time for strategic, operational and nongovernmental forces to a hemispheric crisis. More than that, though, the USAREUR element is multinational-capable. V Corps has deployed to Iraq as part of the U.S.-led coalition and to Afghanistan as part of NATO’s ISAF, both times as a multinational command element. This is significant because NATO’s operations—Implementation Force (IFOR), Stabilization Force (SFOR), Kosovo Force (KFDR) and ISAF—are enduring and it prefers to establish contingency-based operational headquarters rather than deploy its permanent joint task forces (JTFs) to theaters. Both ISAF and KFOR are nonstandard elements created at the time of need and staffed separately from standing NATO headquarters. Having a U.S. Army multinational-capable corps in Europe available to deploy provides NATO a critical ability to respond to a large-scale contingency in Europe or out of area. Without it, the level of effort, coordination and time for NATO contingency response may become too high and endanger support altogether, thus weakening the credibility and capability of the alliance as a whole and undercutting the very concept of collective action.

A new strategic pillar reaffirmed in the Quadrennial Defense Review and National Security Strategy of 2010 as well as the 2010 NATO Lisbon Summit Declaration is that of building partner and ally capability. Traditionally in Europe the United States’ allies have not needed significant enhancement in capability. However, the prolonged conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have revealed some issues with force commitments, mission and endurance that will need to be addressed. One way to overcome those shortcomings is with more partners—converting new alliance members from security consumers into security producers. Without assistance, many NATO members brought on board in the mid-1990s will be potential security liabilities with little given to the alliance in return. Without quality, multinational training and exposure, both NATO and non-NATO members may become more adverse to sending forces to partner with or support U.S./NATO operations abroad. USAREUR’s enduring partnership with developing European nations is maintaining the viability of NATO as a whole and granting the United States strategic flexibility it would not otherwise enjoy. Enhancing European partner capability is especially critical in an era of shrinking defense budgets. The United States will need to generate participation from more alliance members to counteract lower force commitments from others. To do this, the United States must retain its European leadership role and facilitate the training and development of as many partners as possible to enhance collective security.

A significant aspect of building partnerships rests on the concept of interoperability; that is, the ability of international forces to integrate and function alongside one another in a combat environment with minimal friction. Given the size of Europe and the number of allies with which the United States partners, achieving interoperability is a labor-intensive task. However, this mission is one of the enduring tasks of USAREUR—a task that directly contributes to the readiness, interoperability and deployability of both NATO and non-NATO European allies.

The primary mechanisms for building allied interoperability are the USAREUR Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) and the USAREUR forces’ international training events. JMRC is a unique maneuver training center that prepares international partner nations for deployments with U.S. forces through general, theater-specific and threat-relevant training events. Not only does this provide baseline standards of training for joint missions, it also gives partner nations a chance at training they might not otherwise receive by virtue of being geographically and politically accessible compared with stateside facilities. The United States, NATO and the world cannot afford to wait until multinational units show up in a war zone to begin working together; the linkages must begin in training.

Coupled with the facilities-based approach is the unit-based approach conducted by ground maneuver forces. In addition to the rotations in Afghanistan and Iraq, these units conduct exercises and rehearsals with partner nations both at U.S. Army locations, such as JMRC, and in host nations. Interoperability, familiarity and exposure are enabled by a variety of USAREUR-facilitated training activities: active-duty training events for USAREUR units in train/ready phases, the National Guard State Partnership Program and the Partnership for Peace exchanges with non-NATO members. Another example of the enduring, long-range strategic partnership concept is the establishment of Joint Task Force-East (JTF-E), a training scheme that partners U.S. forces with Bulgarian and Romanian forces for host-nation exercises to build the capabilities and skills of those nations for future NATO deployments. Finally, the interaction and exposure of individual officers from our partner nations through both training events and professional military education exchanges lower the socio-cultural normative barriers to effective cooperation. Smooth operational integration of European officers and senior noncommissioned officers into joint staffs is an understated product of a long-standing partnership mentality and process that is low-cost yet high-payout. The end state of all these activities is, of course, more boots on the ground in critical theaters.

Complementary to the strategic land forces are the enabling and logistical forces in Europe. The support, medical and logistical capabilities designed to operationally support U.S. landpower have a positive strategic effect in the contemporary security environment. The lift facilities, medical establishments, logistical infrastructure and personnel in Europe are used to support the entire variety of missions around the globe; the proximity of Europe to different theaters ensures a continued high demand for these landpower facilities and enabling forces. **A reduction in U.S. land forces and the corresponding reduction in required enabling and support force structure would increase the complexity, difficulty and risk of sustainment and reach-back for current and future dispersed, inter-theater operations in which the United States engages.**

Finally, extra-theater force requirements must also be considered. For example, until 2008 U.S. European Command (EUCOM) was responsible for U.S. interests in Africa. U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) grew directly out of EUCOM and USAREUR, borrowing Europe-based forces, facilities and staffs for its mission in the absence of any permanently assigned maneuver forces to U.S. Army Africa (USARAF). The historical strategic and operational linkages between USAREUR and USARAF, both in Europe and Africa, make Europe-based forces the prime choice for supporting AFRICOM needs. If the U.S. mission in Africa expands or there is a contingency that requires a BCT or an intermediate headquarters, the USAREUR forces are the most strategically available. Forecasting more U.S. involvement in Africa in the coming decades, USAREUR provides strategic value and potential to USARAF as well. Ultimately, USAREUR forces are positioned to support operations in three of the six unified command areas—EUCOM, AFRICOM and U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM)—where the majority of combat operations over the past two decades have taken place. **USAREUR's advantageous geostrategic position ensures that the United States will have forces available to respond to any sort of crisis event in any strategic hotspot, thereby securing U.S. global mobility and access to the global commons while supporting stability and prosperity through partnerships and engagement.**

For the past half-century U.S. forces have been the mainstay of European stability and strategic and operational flexibility. Long-term strategic pillars endure even as the political landscape changes; the United States must remain focused on the actions and commitment that have provided more than five decades of peace and prosperity in Europe. The continued evolution of NATO and the United States in the modern environment will be based on close cooperation, continued exposure and expanded opportunities, all geared toward collective, mutual security and peace—fundamental characteristics of landpower.

The Way Ahead

The U.S. Army in Europe has transformed and evolved along with national strategic priorities over the past two decades, and it has never lost its relevance and criticality in the execution of those priorities. A robust, forward-deployed strategic force coupled with unmatched logistical and support structure flexibly protects American interests around the world.

The post-Cold War force realignment and reductions have altered the means by which the United States can achieve its strategic goals, but the strategic mission has only grown in complexity. The current force of one corps

headquarters and four BCTs plus enablers is adequate but strained as it prosecutes two combat missions plus the partnership mission. The JTF-E mission has already been adjusted to compensate for the operational tempo of Europe-based units. Despite this current strain, further reductions in U.S. Army Europe strength have been identified for future implementation. These planned reductions are couched in the context of periodic reviews of the distribution of forces inside (CONUS) and outside (OCONUS) the continental United States underscored by fiscal pressures. Reducing Army forces in Europe risks undercutting not just U.S. access to Europe and the surrounding area but also the multinational interoperability and capability on which the United States will increasingly rely for future missions. Most important, the reduction of U.S. landpower could be misinterpreted as an ebbing of commitment to the NATO collective-security ideal (on which multinational missions are based) and a devaluation of transatlantic security, jeopardizing international support for future contingencies. The U.S.-European alliance also provides access and leverage, via our European partners, into other global regions where no such strategic partnership or alliance exists and U.S. influence is limited. The political, military and economic linkages formed through the presence of U.S. forces in Europe range beyond Europe itself and must be preserved. For this a land force presence is essential; these are forces that are visible every day to thousands of Europeans. They can also relate—land forces are the largest military force of every European power, the forces where most conscripts serve, where most casualties are taken and the forces they most associate with security. Land forces are invariably the forces the United States needs most when allies commit to work with us.

The continued presence of at least four combat brigades/BCTs, critical support units and a deployable command and control headquarters (corps or division) is vital to U.S. interests now and in the future. At the very least, given the uncertainty in both Iraq and Afghanistan—coupled with expanded multinational efforts in those locations and elsewhere—it is imperative that the reduction in Europe-based landpower be deferred, if not halted outright. This is not only in line with the U.S. theater commander's assessment of necessary force but also a prudent strategic measure until a long-range study on future worldwide force requirements can be completed. Additionally, the ongoing NATO command review and reform will likely result in further reductions in headquarters and command arrangements. Any U.S. force drawdowns must be carefully considered as a part of this process and as part of the overall effectiveness and credibility of NATO and multinational operations as a whole. Coupled with the lack of pressure from either Germany or NATO at large to reduce U.S. presence, the sound strategy is to hold the U.S. force steady while developing the long-range plan for worldwide strategic direction. Finally, the potential downgrading of not only the EUCOM position but all three of the service component commands to three-star positions, while perhaps commensurate with future European realignments, signals a waning U.S. commitment to global leadership and enduring, useful alliances in the contemporary era; the United States must not surrender the physical, strategic and operational access and organization it has taken decades to build.

In a dynamic and unpredictable strategic environment, U.S. landpower provides both a full range of choices to the nation and a shield against uncertainty—an essential national asset. Forward-deployed Army forces are part of the essential strategic framework for global security, providing enhanced interoperability and strengthened capabilities for allies and potential security partners. U.S. landpower stationed in Europe, more so than air or naval power, is the strongest message of commitment the United States can send its allies. It will continue to perform these functions vital to America's security interests, but only if sufficient assets are in place.

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