SUPPORTERS ARGUE
It is unnecessary for the United States to have so many troops deployed overseas. Congress must cut military spending, close bases abroad, and begin bringing troops home. Such a move would save the government a significant amount of money and would reduce animosity toward the United States throughout the world.

OPPONENTS ARGUE
The United States must maintain its status as an international superpower; the best way to do that is to keep large numbers of troops stationed overseas. Maintaining a strong military presence prevents unfriendly countries from posing a threat to U.S. interests, helps to foster democracy, and acts as a deterrent to terrorism by foreign militants.

After World War II (1939–45), the U.S. military greatly expanded its global presence, establishing satellite bases in several European countries.
throughout the Pacific and in other regions. Over the next 60 years, the U.S. retained many of those bases, despite shifting international alliances and the absence of an all-encompassing global conflict. Today, the U.S. has troops in more than 150 countries, stationed over six continents. Continuing widespread troop deployment has sparked concern that the U.S. military is overstretched and has generated anti-American sentiment in several host countries.

From 1950 to 2005, an average of 23% of active duty forces—about 535,000 U.S. military personnel—were deployed in foreign countries each year. Most troop deployments in the decades following World War II were to countries, such as South Korea and Japan, in close proximity to (and, perhaps, even threatened by) communist countries. Such nations were considered strategically important to U.S. interests during the Cold War, an ideological rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union that lasted from the close of World War II until the breakup of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.

More recently, troop levels in Asia have declined as more U.S. forces have been deployed to Central Asia and the Middle East to fight a U.S.-led "war on terror." Indeed, the U.S. has been embroiled in ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001 and 2003, respectively. The administration of President George W. Bush (2001–09) depicted both wars as being in response to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the U.S.

In 2004, Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld unveiled sweeping plans to restructure the U.S. military presence abroad by shuttering about a third of overseas bases, and moving approximately 70,000 troops back to U.S. soil. The Bush administration argued that the current distribution of bases overseas was outdated, and with the Cold War over, the money and personnel needed to maintain bases in countries that had been strategically important during that conflict would be better applied to presently restive regions, such as the Middle East and North Africa. Concerns over the costs of closing and relocating bases, however, derailed the plans to reduce the U.S. military presence abroad, and most bases remained active. Over the past decade, the U.S. has added and expanded bases in Central Asia and the Middle East.

As of 2009, approximately one-third of U.S. military personnel were stationed overseas, either at bases in foreign countries or aboard naval vessels in international waters. Most scholars estimate that the U.S. has approximately 1,000 bases and military installations around the globe, giving it by far a wider military reach than any other country in the world. According to an estimate by Foreign Policy in Focus (FPIF), a Washington, D.C., think tank, the U.S. government spends about $250 billion every year to maintain bases, troops and equipment abroad. [See The Costs of the U.S. Military Presence Overseas (sidebar)]

Although the U.S. has strong alliances with most host countries, some local populations have expressed resentment at the presence of large bases within their borders. Catherine Lutz, a professor of anthropology at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, has chronicled a growing activist movement against U.S. military bases abroad in her book *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle Against U.S. Military Posts.* She writes, "Bases are the literal and symbolic anchors, and the most visible centerpieces, of the U.S. military presence overseas. To understand where those bases are and how they are being used is essential for understanding the United States' relationship with the rest of the world." Extensive troop deployment abroad has fueled a debate over the limits of U.S. power and, more broadly, over U.S. foreign policy as a whole and the military's role in U.S. relations with other countries around the globe. [See Military Families Overseas (sidebar)]

Should the U.S. withdraw substantial numbers of those troops and reduce its military presence overseas? Or should it maintain troops in as many countries as it does?

Supporters of reducing the number of U.S. troops throughout the world argue that the U.S. is neither capable of nor responsible for policing the entire world. Keeping troops stationed throughout the globe as it does, advocates say, causes the U.S. to be constantly at war, making enemies and serving as a destabilizing force in various regions.

Advocates of withdrawing troops from foreign locations argue that policy makers have entangled the U.S. in a series of costly operations for which there is no end in sight; the political and economic costs of such missions, they say, will rise astronomically as time passes. Political activist Tom Hayden writes for the *Los Angeles Times* that U.S. military officials have embraced a world view in which the country is involved in a "long war" against terrorism that could last between 50 and 80 years. Hayden writes, "An 80-year undeclared war would entangle 20 future presidential terms stretching far into the future of voters not yet born.... And if the American armed forces are stretched thin today, try to conceive of seven more decades of combat."

Supporters of contracting U.S. foreign troops argue that, with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq each having lasted for most of the first decade of the 21st century, the U.S. has slowly become embroiled in a state of perpetual conflict. History professor Andrew Bacevich of Boston University in Massachusetts writes, "As the fighting drags on from one year to the next, the engagement of US forces in armed nation-building projects in distant lands will become the new normalcy.... That 'keeping Americans safe' obliges the United States to seek, maintain, and exploit unambiguous military supremacy will become utterly uncontroversial."

Indeed, supporters of limiting troop numbers abroad argue that the unstated purpose of a large military deployment is to indulge an unrealistic desire for the U.S. to control a large portion of the world's oil supply, not to protect Americans—as those who oppose troop withdrawal insist. That consideration, withdrawal supporters say, is not worth the lives or the money it entails.

Critics of reducing the number of U.S. troops stationed throughout the world, meanwhile, argue that the U.S. needs to protect its status as the world's only superpower. It is in the nation's best interest, they say, to have troops in many different countries, fostering democracy and preemptively countering any threats from unfriendly regimes.

Critics of diminishing America's presence abroad insist that strongly defending U.S. interests overseas will enable the country to flourish. The conservative think tank the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) argues in its statement of principles that the U.S. requires "a military that is strong and ready to meet both present and future challenges; a foreign policy that boldly and purposefully promotes American principles abroad; and national
leadership that accepts the United States' global responsibilities."

PNAC has argued that the U.S. must "accept responsibility for America's unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, our prosperity, and our principles." Indeed, the organization was instrumental in promoting the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Many of the members of PNAC held prominent roles in the Bush administration—including Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld—and argued that the U.S. must persuade other nations to embrace democracy, even if it has to do so by force. PNAC writes that the U.S. needs "to strengthen our ties to democratic allies and to challenge regimes hostile to our interests and values."

Other critics of reducing troop levels overseas stress the ongoing threat of terrorism; if the U.S. backs down from its military responsibilities abroad, they say, it will become much easier for forces hostile to American interests to plan attacks against the U.S. Indeed, they say, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, in 2001 and 2003, respectively, must be thought of as, according to James Carafano of the conservative think tank the Heritage Foundation, "relatively brief flashpoints of action in a long, sustained struggle."

Although the U.S. has troops stationed in over 150 countries and territories worldwide, some of those military deployments are more contentious than others. Indeed, the U.S. military presence in the Middle East and Central Asia is especially controversial, with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan both already having lasted longer than World War II, and the U.S. keeping expensive bases in Turkey and Kuwait to support those efforts. U.S. troop deployments in the South Pacific—especially Japan and South Korea—have also been heavily criticized. The following sections examine the U.S. military presence in those countries.

### Afghanistan Overview

In 2001, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, overthrowing the country's Taliban regime. The invasion marked the beginning of an extended U.S. military presence in the country, as various insurgent groups battled for control of Afghanistan after the Taliban's ouster.

The U.S. first became embroiled in an extensive military conflict in Afghanistan in the 1980s, when it provided support to the country to counter an invasion by the communist Soviet Union. The Soviets had been attempting to bolster a communist regime in the country, but were met with stiff resistance by the mujahideen—a coalition of Islamic militants dedicated to keeping the Soviets from controlling Afghanistan. So-called proxy wars between the U.S. and Soviet Union, in which the U.S. would support one side in a regional conflict and the Soviets would support the other, were relatively common during the Cold War.

Intent on keeping the Soviets from gaining ground in Afghanistan, the U.S. began backing the mujahideen, providing them with weapons as well as strategic and financial assistance. The Soviet invasion lasted for roughly a decade, before the Soviets finally withdrew from the country in 1989. Afghanistan fell into disarray shortly thereafter, with various warlords battling for control of the country.

In 1996, after years of turmoil in Afghanistan, the radical Islamist Taliban government took control of the country. Despite being widely criticized throughout the world for its human rights violations, the Taliban provided a degree of security and stability to Afghanistan that the country had not had for decades.

On September 11, 2001, members of the terrorist organization Al Qaeda, which had been given a safe haven by the Taliban, orchestrated the deadliest terrorist attacks ever to take place against the U.S. The group hijacked four airplanes, crashing two of them into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, in New York City, and a third into the Pentagon, near Washington, D.C. The fourth plane, which the terrorists apparently intended to crash into Washington's Capitol building, crash-landed in a vacant field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, after the plane's passengers overpowered the terrorists. In all, more than 3,000 Americans were killed in the attacks.

President Bush immediately declared a "war on terror," and vowed that the U.S. would capture or kill Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden had had close relations with the Taliban government for years, and had been allowed to operate freely in Afghanistan. Shortly after the September 11 attacks, Bush demanded that the Taliban hand over bin Laden to the U.S. The Taliban refused, and in October 2001, the U.S. led a large international coalition into Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban. The Taliban fell quickly, and the U.S.-led coalition soon installed a new government, led by Afghan tribal leader Hamid Karzai.
Afghanistan’s new government was threatened from the start, however, by a military insurgency led by forces loyal to the Taliban. For years, coalition
troops battled the anti-American insurgency as Afghanistan became increasingly unstable.

In 2003, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a military alliance comprised of most North American and European countries, assumed
control of the coalition forces. In elections the following year, Karzai became the first democratically elected leader in Afghanistan’s history.

Afghanistan remained troubled, however. Many of the former warlords who had ruled the country prior to the Taliban’s emergence in the mid-1990s had
returned to power, winning positions in Afghanistan’s parliament. Many observers noted that the country’s government was rife with corruption.
Additionally, Taliban insurgents continued to attack U.S. interests in Afghanistan, conducting military strikes against U.S. troops and gaining influence
with the new Afghan government.

As the situation in Afghanistan grew increasingly complicated, many observers argued that President Bush was neglecting the Afghanistan conflict in
favor of the war he had started in Iraq in 2003. One of those critics was then Senator Barack Obama (D, Illinois), who made a greater focus on the war in
Afghanistan a key part of his foreign policy platform during his successful 2008 bid for the U.S. presidency.

After entering the White House in 2009, Obama announced he would send additional troops to Afghanistan. He has noted that, under the Bush
administration, “Commanders in Afghanistan repeatedly asked for support to deal with the reemergence of the Taliban, but these reinforcements did not
arrive.” After conferring with General Stanley McChrystal, the U.S. commander of the coalition of NATO troops in Afghanistan, Obama announced that
he would send an additional 30,000 troops to the country to help the Afghan government restore stability. In making that announcement, he asserted,
“We must deny al Qaeda a safe haven. We must reverse the Taliban’s momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government. And we must
strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan’s security forces and government so that they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan’s future.”

At the same time, however, Obama announced that the surge in troop levels would be temporary, and that U.S. troops would begin to withdraw from
Afghanistan in August 2011. The troop withdrawal deadline was controversial, with critics insisting that there was little point in elevating troop levels only
to withdraw all forces shortly afterward. [See Troop Withdrawal Deadlines ]

In August 2009, Karzai won reelection, though his victory was widely criticized as tainted, amid allegations of stuffed ballot boxes, voter intimidation and
other forms of electoral fraud. Indeed, many observers have become increasingly skeptical of Karzai’s ability to maintain stability in Afghanistan, in light
of corruption charges leveled against him. During a surprise visit to Afghanistan in March 2010, Obama was reported to have chastised the Afghan leader
for allowing corruption to run rampant in the government. [See President Obama’s Remarks to U.S. Troops in Afghanistan ]

The first major Afghanistan offensive employing the additional U.S. troops, meanwhile, occurred in early 2010, as U.S.-led forces stormed the town of
Marja, which had a significant Taliban presence. U.S. forces faced considerable resistance; New York Times reporters Thom Shanker, Helene Cooper and
Richard Oppel noted that, according to officials, “the Taliban have in some ways retaken the momentum there.”

In April, the coalition began executing an offensive into Kandahar, the largest city in southern Afghanistan and a Taliban stronghold. U.S. commanders
hope to kill key Taliban leaders in the city, thus striking a major blow against the insurgency and allowing Afghanistan’s central government to retake
control of the area. Shanker, Cooper and Oppel, noting that the offensive will be the "make-or-break offensive of the eight-and-half-year war," contend
that U.S. forces in Afghanistan must "overcome a culture built on distrust of outsiders, including foreign forces and even neighboring tribes.”

Supporters of Withdrawing Troops Say Afghanistan War Is Unwinnable

Advocates of withdrawing U.S. troops from Afghanistan argue that the war there has continued for almost 10 years with little or no progress. A military
victory, they say, is likely unattainable, while the project of nation-building—helping a struggling country form a stable government—is equally untenable.

In April 2010, Boston University's Professor Bacevich told journalist Bill Moyers, "We could find any number of quotations from [U.S. commanders General David Petraeus and McChrystal] in which they say that there is no military solution in Afghanistan, that we will not win a military victory, that the only solution to be gained, if there is one, is through bringing to success this project of armed nation-building." The U.S. strategy to build a democracy in Afghanistan, Bacevich argues, is similar to one that failed during the Vietnam War (1959–75), in which tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers died after the U.S. intervened in the Vietnamese civil war. [See Nation Building]

Supporters of pulling out of Afghanistan argue that having U.S. troops in the country has elevated anti-American sentiments throughout the Islamic world. An editorial in the Nation argues, "[M]ore US forces will not bring stability. We are losing the war not because we have had too few troops but because our presence has turned the Afghan people against us, swelling the ranks of the Taliban."

Indeed, supporters note that scores of Afghan civilians have been killed accidentally by U.S. airstrikes intended to attack suspected insurgents. Such actions have a negative impact on the way the U.S. is viewed in Afghanistan and throughout the Islamic world, advocates of reducing troop levels say. Bacevich notes that one of the "core principles" of Obama's Afghanistan surge strategy was "that we would act in ways that would demonstrate our benign intentions. We're supposed to be protecting the population. And when it turns out that U.S. forces are killing non-combatants, and there are repeated incidents that have occurred, I think it calls into question the sincerity, the seriousness of the strategy." [See Civilian Casualties During Wartime]

Advocates of withdrawing U.S. troops from Afghanistan argue that the U.S. embarked on a war that has dragged on for years without any end—or achievable goals—in sight. Salon blogger Glenn Greenwald, in referring to the New York Times's description of the 2010 battle for Kandahar as a "make-or-break offensive," notes that "there never is any such thing as 'make-or-break' because we never leave no matter how completely our war and occupation efforts fail."

Supporters of reducing troop levels in Afghanistan concede that a troop surge may indeed provide a brief respite from the violence in the country, but they argue that the turmoil will resume as soon as the troops withdraw. U.S. soldiers, they say, cannot stay in Afghanistan forever. The Nation argues that adding additional troops "might be enough to keep the government from failing in the short term, but it will not be nearly enough to wage the kind of counterinsurgency some Obama advisers advocate."

Those calling for a troop reduction in Afghanistan argue that Karzai's government is hopelessly corrupt, and that by dealing with Karzai, the U.S. is repeating many of the same mistakes it has made in the past—namely, supporting a corrupt leader merely because it is convenient. Such endeavors, they say, almost never benefit the U.S. in the long term. Bacevich contends, "[W]e don't learn from history. And there is this persistent, and I think almost
inexplicable belief that the use of military force in some godforsaken country on the far side of the planet will not only yield some kind of purposeful result, but by extension, will produce significant benefits for the United States.” Bacevich goes on to argue that the struggle in Afghanistan “is a war for which there is no end in sight. And to my mind, it is a war that is utterly devoid of strategic purpose.”

U.S. Must Stay in Afghanistan Until Country Is Stable, Critics Insist

Critics of removing troops from Afghanistan insist that a U.S. military presence is required in the country to ensure the domestic security of the U.S. If the Taliban takes control of Afghanistan, they say, it will once again allow Al Qaeda to use the country as a base of operations. Indeed, critics argue, U.S. troops must keep Afghanistan stable while the country rebuilds. Marin Strmecki, who worked in the Defense Department under George W. Bush, writes for the National Review that "the persistent presence of forces at the local level" is required "to protect the population from attacks and intimidation by the Taliban and to facilitate intelligence cooperation, establishment of effective governance, and promotion of local economic development to give the people a stake in the new order."

Conservative opponents of withdrawing troops from Afghanistan argue that Obama’s surge is not large enough. Strmecki contends, "Success in war seldom comes from plans to provide just enough force and no more. The wiser course is to identify what would be the decisive force needed to succeed."

Critics argue that, in general, U.S. military interventions have failed to achieve their goals because of a lack of commitment to the tasks at hand. Fouad Ajami, a fellow at the conservative think tank the Hoover Institution at Stanford University in California, argues that "we blow in and out of these engagements, generally not staying long enough to assure our friends and frighten our enemies."

Opponents such as Ajami argue that withdrawing troops from Afghanistan would be signaling to the world that the U.S. is not the global superpower it once was. Showing signs of weakness in that part of the world, they say, would embolden other regional powers, such as Iran, that are hostile to U.S. interests. Ajami argues that the U.S. operation in Afghanistan "plays out under the gaze of an Islamic world that is coming to a consensus that a discernible American retreat in the region is in the works. America’s enemies are increasingly brazen, its friends unnerved....The shadow of American power is receding; the rogues are emboldened."

Other critics have argued that Obama’s troop withdrawal deadline gives valuable information to anti-American forces by revealing when the U.S. intends to leave the battlefield. Senator John McCain (R, Arizona) argues that a withdrawal deadline presents an "arbitrary date...which our enemies can exploit to weaken and intimidate our friends."

Critics of withdrawal also contend that Obama’s Afghanistan troop surge is accomplishing its purpose of reducing violence in the country. The U.S. must stay in Afghanistan long enough to allow Afghans to establish a stronger democracy. Journalist Con Coughlin writes in the Wall Street Journal that removing troops before that occurs would "seriously undermine the counterinsurgency strategy currently implemented by [McChrystal]." Indeed, Coughlin argues, Afghanistan is attempting to muster "the ability and confidence to protect itself against determined foes such as the Taliban. And this delicate process could be compromised if Mr. Obama withdraws American troops before the job is properly done."

Iraq and Kuwait Overview

Dispute over Kuwait Destroys Uneasy U.S.–Iraqi Alliance

The U.S. has been deeply involved in the affairs of Iraq and Kuwait for decades. The U.S. had a tumultuous relationship with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, ultimately leading to the 2003 invasion that removed him from power. Kuwait, meanwhile, has housed a number of crucial U.S. military facilities; its invasion by Iraq led to the 1991 Gulf War.
At the fortified Green Zone in Baghdad, Iraq, in April 2009, Iraqi Major General Qassem Atta al-Mussawi (left) and Brigadier General David Perkins address the media.

AHMAD AL-RUBAYE/AFP/Getty Images

The U.S. became significantly involved with Iraq in the 1980s, after Hussein launched an invasion of neighboring Iran, in 1980. Iran had just experienced a cultural upheaval known as the Islamic Revolution, in which the country's ruler, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, was overthrown in favor of an Islamic fundamentalist government. Hussein, believing that Iran was vulnerable, sent his military into the country. A history of the Iran-Iraq war from the National Security Archive at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., notes that Hussein attacked Iran "in the mistaken belief that Iranian political disarray would guarantee a quick victory." Retaliation from Iran was stronger than expected, and the war dragged on for most of the decade.

The U.S., meanwhile, had hostile relations with Iran. In 1979, in the midst of the overthrow of the U.S.-backed Shah, Islamic radicals stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehran and took 66 American hostages. The majority of the hostages were not released until January 20, 1981; the so-called Iran hostage crisis turned Iran, according to National Public Radio (NPR) diplomatic correspondent Mike Shuster, "into the US's greatest enemy in the Persian Gulf." The U.S. was therefore eager to back Hussein in his war with Iran. Shuster notes that the administration of President Ronald Reagan (R, 1981–89) "concluded that Iraq's defeat in the war would be contrary to US interests in the Persian Gulf." Although the U.S. officially maintained a neutral posture in the war, it began providing secret support for Iraq in the early 1980s. The U.S. gave Iraq hundreds of millions of dollars in food credits, so that Iraq would be able to spend more money on its war effort. The U.S. also provided Iraq with some weapons technology and strategic intelligence gleaned from American spy satellites. In 1983, Reagan sent Donald Rumsfeld, who had served as secretary of defense under President Gerald Ford (R, 1974–77) to Iraq as a special emissary to strengthen U.S.-Iraqi relations. Shuster notes that "the United States chose Iraq, led by Saddam Hussein, to be its surrogate for policy in the Persian Gulf region." According to Shuster, U.S. aid to Hussein throughout the war with Iran totaled more than $1 billion, an investment which, experts maintain, prolonged the war; Shuster notes that Hussein "[might] have been defeated by the Iranians had it not been for the key military support of the United States."

The U.S. support for Iraq was controversial; Hussein was widely viewed as a dictator and was criticized in the international community for using unconventional warfare—including internationally banned chemical weapons—against Iranian troops, as well as against civilians in Iranian towns and villages. The U.S. denied having provided Hussein with any of those weapons, though a congressional committee investigating the matter in 1994 found that the U.S. had, according to committee head Senator Donald Riegle (D, Michigan), provided samples of viruses to Hussein that could have been used to create biological weapons. Riegle said at the time, "They seemed to give him anything he wanted. It's right out of a science fiction movie as to why we would send this kind of stuff to anybody." Shuster, meanwhile, notes, "There's evidence that the battlefield intelligence provided to Iraq helped the Iraqis better calibrate their gas attacks against the Iranians."

The Iran-Iraq War ended in a stalemate in 1988. Although little changed diplomatically between the two countries as a result of the war, Iraqi victories toward the war's conclusion left Iraq the region’s most powerful nation. The U.S. Memory Project at the Library of Congress states that, after the war, "Iraq was unchallenged as the most powerful military presence in the gulf area."

The U.S. continued to bolster Hussein's regime until August 1990, when Iraq invaded Kuwait. The two countries had had border disputes for years, and Hussein at times argued that Kuwait rightfully belonged to Iraq. Hussein also complained that Kuwait had been siphoning oil from Iraq’s portion of an oil field that the two countries shared.

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait changed U.S. officials' perception of Hussein. Whereas they had previously considered him an ally against Iran, American policy-makers came to realize that Hussein's ambitions in the Persian Gulf posed a threat to U.S. interests, especially if he could control Kuwait's oil supply. [See U.S. Troops and Kuwait (sidebar)]
Hussein had sent about 120,000 soldiers and approximately 2,000 tanks to Kuwait. The attack was a surprise, and Iraqi forces were able to occupy Kuwait with minimal resistance. Several days later, President George H. W. Bush (R, 1989–93) stated that the invasion "will not stand," and the U.S. military began planning an offensive to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi forces. In November 1990, the U.N. Security Council authorized the use of "all means necessary" to oust Iraqi forces from Kuwait; in January 1991, Congress also authorized the use of force for that purpose. That month, the U.S. joined an international coalition which began bombing Iraqi targets in Kuwait. In late February 1991, ground forces began an offensive to drive out Iraqi troops. On February 28, Hussein withdrew all his forces from Kuwait and a cease-fire took effect.

'War on Terror' Leads to Iraq Invasion

Relations between the U.S. and Iraq remained frigid in the wake of the so-called Gulf War. After the war's conclusion, the U.S. continued to maintain a significantly elevated military presence in Kuwait, essentially protecting both that country and U.S. interests there.

Meanwhile, on September 11, 2001, members of the terrorist organization Al Qaeda carried out a series of terrorist attacks on U.S. soil, killing over 3,000 Americans. The U.S. invaded Afghanistan—which had been harboring Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden—in October 2001. Not long after, speculation began that the U.S. was planning to invade Iraq as the next step in its war on terror.

Senior officials in the administration of President George W. Bush soon began to argue that removing Hussein from power was essential for creating stability in the Middle East. Hussein, Bush argued, posed an imminent threat to U.S. interests. On many occasions, Bush administration officials argued that Hussein likely possessed biological, chemical and nuclear weapons—known as weapons of mass destruction (WMD)—and had to be stopped before he could either use them or sell them to terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda. Supporters of invading Iraq also stressed that Hussein was a brutal dictator who had killed thousands of his own people and needed to be deposed.

On March 19, 2003, U.S. forces, using Kuwait as a base of operations, began bombing targets in Iraq; the U.S. described the campaign as "shock and awe." Hussein's government crumbled quickly in the face of the attacks. In May, Bush appeared on the deck of the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln, clad in an Air Force flight suit, declaring that "major combat operations in Iraq have ended." Hussein, who had fled Baghdad, the Iraqi capital, amid the bombing, was captured by U.S. forces in December 2003.

In April 2003, shortly after removing Hussein from power, the U.S. installed a transitional government in Iraq, headed by former U.S. Army General Jay Garner. Soon afterward, the Bush administration abruptly replaced Garner with Paul Bremer, a former U.S. diplomat. Under Bremer's leadership, the U.S. administration in Iraq made a series of decisions that came to be widely viewed as mistakes—including maintaining too small a U.S. troop presence and disbanding the Iraqi army—that led to a lapse in security throughout the country. In the months that followed, an anti-American insurgency began coordinating attacks on U.S. troops.

Most of the Bush administration's stated reasons for the invasion were discredited in the months after Hussein was toppled from power. No WMDs were ever found, and many of Bush's specific claims about Hussein's attempts to secure such weapons were proven false. Additionally, no concrete ties between Hussein and Al Qaeda were verified.

In 2004, meanwhile, reports began to surface of the mistreatment by U.S. soldiers of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, an Iraqi prison. The troops allegedly had tortured, raped and, in some cases, murdered prisoners, many of whom were thought to have been innocent of any crimes. Several low-ranking U.S. soldiers were tried and imprisoned for their role in the prisoner abuses, but many critics argued that there had been accounts of abuses elsewhere in Iraq by U.S. forces and speculated that responsibility for the abuses ultimately rested with individuals high up in the U.S. chain of command.
In 2005, a permanent Iraqi government was elected to replace the interim administration. By then, however, Iraq had been gripped by ethnic strife, as warring religious factions—primarily Sunni and Shiite Muslims—battled for control of Iraq. The tensions between those groups had largely been contained under the harsh rule of Hussein—who, as a Sunni, belonged to the majority group in Iraq—but exploded after his ouster, with many Shiites—the majority throughout the rest of the Middle East—seeking revenge for atrocities committed under Hussein’s rule. Many observers argued that the conflict was a civil war, and estimates of civilian casualties reached as high as 600,000. Hussein, meanwhile, had been tried and found guilty of human rights abuses committed during his regime; he was executed in December 2006.

The invasion of Iraq was broadly supported in the U.S. when it was launched in 2003, but support for the war fell as violence in Iraq increased throughout 2005 and 2006. In January 2007, Bush announced that he would be sending roughly 20,000 additional troops to Iraq to help contain the violence there. Critics of the so-called troop surge argued that, even if U.S. troops could quell the violence in Iraq, true reconciliation between the warring factions was unlikely. Supporters of the move insisted that the security provided by the additional troops would allow the fledgling Iraqi government to wrest control of the country from militants and negotiate a lasting peace that would not require U.S. troops to remain in the country.

The U.S. troop surge was widely credited with reducing much of the widespread violence plaguing Iraq. Tensions remained high, however, and violence still prevailed in many areas of the country. The issue of how and when to withdraw troops from Iraq remained controversial; supporters of a quick withdrawal insisted that the U.S. could not and should not maintain a prolonged troop presence in the country, while critics of that view insisted that the U.S. had to stay the course in Iraq until the country was a fully stable democracy.

In January 2009, President Obama (D) entered office and began fulfilling a campaign pledge to withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq. In September 2009, he reduced the number of troops to 90,000, from 124,000. Obama has announced plans to remove 40,000 more troops by August 2010, leaving 50,000 U.S. troops in Iraq as advisers to the Iraqi military.

In March 2010, Iraq held parliamentary elections to determine which party would run the country. The party of Ayad Allawi, who, according to the New York Times, is seen by many Iraqis as “an American puppet,” won the elections in what the Times described as “a wafer-thin victory.” The results were challenged by Iraq’s Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, whose party came in second in the elections. Al-Maliki, who had been prime minister since 2005, argued that the elections had been rife with fraud. The disputed results raised tensions and speculation that conditions in Iraq could easily deteriorate and grow violent again, which, according to some observers, would mean that U.S. troops might have to stay in the country longer than expected.
The U.S.’s military relationship with Iraq—and, by extension, Kuwait—remains controversial. Was the 2003 invasion worth it? Should the U.S. remove its forces from Iraq and Kuwait, or is it important to maintain a military presence there?

U.S. Troops Must Leave Iraq and Kuwait Immediately, Withdrawal Advocates Say

Some supporters of withdrawing troops from Iraq say the U.S. should do so immediately. The invasion of Iraq, they say, was based on lies and misconceptions, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians and thousands of U.S. troops. Nation journalist John Tirman notes, "By any sensible measure, it would be difficult to describe this as a victory of any kind. It speaks volumes about the repair work we must do for Iraqis, and it should caution us against the savage wars we are prone to."

Advocates of removing U.S. troops from Iraq right away insist that the war was nothing but a power grab that was more about controlling the world’s oil supply—Iraq possesses the world’s second-largest oil reserves—than about removing a tyrant from power or establishing an Iraqi democracy. Journalist Robert Dreyfuss writes for Mother Jones that the Persian Gulf "is crucial not simply for its share of the U.S. oil supply...but because it would allow the United States to maintain a lock on the world’s energy lifeline and potentially deny access to its global competitors."

The U.S. cannot afford to keep a permanent military presence in Iraq, supporters of withdrawing from the country say; the future of Iraq must be left to Iraqis. In his February 2009 speech announcing U.S. withdrawal from the country, Obama said:

We cannot sustain indefinitely a commitment that has put a strain on our military, and will cost the American people nearly a trillion dollars. America's men and women in uniform have fought block by block, province by province, year after year, to give the Iraqis this chance to choose a better future. Now, we must ask the Iraqi people to seize it.

Supporters of ending the U.S. military presence in Iraq insist that soldiers must first be removed from neighboring Kuwait. Lawrence Korb, assistant secretary of defense under President Reagan, argues, "The most effective strategy for removing American troops from Iraq involves gradually withdrawing forces from the outer geographic sectors first, with the goal of reducing our military footprint."

Others note that the U.S. military presence in Iraq remains unpopular among Iraqis, and has harmed the image of the U.S. internationally since the initial 2003 invasion. Juan Cole, a history professor at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, writes, "The US occupation of Iraq has profoundly harmed its image in the Muslim world, and the only hope of mending relations with Arab peoples in particular is for a complete US withdrawal."

Cole additionally notes that the U.S. troop surge has not been as successful as its supporters claim. One of the primary reasons for the reduction in violence in Iraq, Cole says, is that almost 1 million Sunnis were killed in Iraq ‘under the nose of US troops while the troop escalation, or ‘surge,’ was being implemented.’ Indeed, the cessation of violence in Iraq, Cole argues, is largely the result of a disproportionate number of Sunni deaths in the country’s civil war. Cole argues, "This sort of micro-level political and demographic struggle is likely to continue for some time in Iraq, but it will unfold whether US..."
troops are there or not."

U.S. Must See Iraq War Through, Critics Say

Supporters of keeping U.S. troops in Iraq argue that the 2003 invasion was justified and will be judged by history as an important step toward fostering democracy in the Middle East. U.S. troops, they say, must continue to help oversee that transition to democracy. Journalists Babak Dehghanpisheh, John Barry and Christopher Dickey write for Newsweek that, as the invasion began, Bush argued, "Iraqi democracy will succeed," and, "The establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event in the global democratic revolution." His claims, they say, have belatedly come to fruition:

[I]t has to be said and it should be understood...that something that looks mighty like democracy is emerging in Iraq. And while it may not be a beacon of inspiration to the region, it most certainly is a watershed event that could come to represent a whole new era in the history of the massively undemocratic Middle East.

Indeed, Dehghanpisheh, Barry and Dickey argue that because of the U.S.'s Iraq policy, the violence that plagued the country for years has given way to a burgeoning democracy. They write that leaders who were once organizing violent power struggles "have come to see themselves as part of the same club, where hardball political debate has supplanted civil war and legislation is hammered out, however slowly and painfully, through compromises."

Advocates of keeping U.S. troops in Iraq argue that Bush's 2007 troop surge represented a turning point in the nation's history. The National Review opines, "President Bush's decision to champion a new counterinsurgency strategy, including sending 30,000 additional troops to Iraq when most Americans were bone­weary of the war, will be seen as one of the most impressive and important acts of political courage in our lifetime."

U.S. forces must stay in Iraq, critics of withdrawal say, to ensure further stability. President Obama's call to withdraw troops, they insist, is merely a result of his desire not to renege on his campaign promises. A Wall Street Journal editorial argues, "Too much blood and treasure have been spent there to make the mission hostage to the political calendar. The nature of America's engagement will change in Iraq, but it needs to be sustained and robust."

Many supporters of the Iraq war insist that it is in the U.S.'s own interest to stay in Iraq for a prolonged period of time. The Wall Street Journal describes a "free Iraq" as "a great U.S. strategic opportunity." The paper also notes that the current Iranian regime is hostile to U.S. interests; bolstering Iraq, it insists, will help contain any threats from Iran. The paper writes that as "Iran pushes for regional hegemony, Iraq can now become a strong U.S. ally in the region if we don't abandon the field. A strong presence in Iraq gives the U.S. important leverage against a rogue regime in Tehran bent on acquiring a nuclear weapon."

Japan Overview

The U.S. military's presence in Japan dates back to 1945, when the U.S. occupied the defeated country after World War II. In 1951, the U.S. and Japan signed the San Francisco Peace Treaty, formally ending the U.S. occupation of Japan. The same year, the two powers created a security alliance; Japan agreed to allow U.S. military bases in the country in exchange for a U.S. pledge to meet Japan's security needs. Over the next 50 years, the U.S. military used Japan as a launching point for key operations, including during the Korean War (1950–53) and the Vietnam War (1959–75). Military strategists at the time saw U.S. bases in Japan as essential to countering the communist threat from nearby China, the Soviet Union and North Korea.

Most of the U.S. military personnel in Japan are located on the island of Okinawa, at the southern tip of the country. The U.S. administered Okinawa between the end of World War II and 1972, when the territory was legally transferred to Japan.
Japan, in contrast to most other countries that host U.S. military bases, pays many of the expenses required to maintain the bases, totaling about $4 billion a year. Over the past two decades, however, Okinawa residents have complained about hosting thousands of U.S. troops. According to the Congressional Research Service, "Although the host cities are economically dependent on the bases, residents' grievances include noise, petty and occasionally violent crime, and environmental degradation stemming from the U.S. presence." The public outcry was aggravated in 1995, when three U.S. servicemen were accused of raping a Japanese schoolgirl, and in 2004, when a U.S. military helicopter crashed onto a university campus. Those and other such incidents have prompted protests, in Okinawa and throughout Japan, demanding a smaller U.S. military presence in the country. [See Military Bases Abroad Spark Environmental Concerns (sidebar)]

In 2006, after years of negotiations, the U.S. agreed to relocate Futenma Marine Corps Air Station, located in a densely populated area of Okinawa, to Nago, a less populated region in the north of the island, and move about 8,000 U.S. Marines from Japan to the U.S. territory of Guam by 2014. For years, Okinawa residents had protested the presence of the bases, but the U.S. military had insisted that it was imperative to keep the station close to other Marine bases on the island to facilitate coordination of military exercises. Under the deal, the Japanese government agreed to pay most of the relocation expenses, which, it is estimated, will run to $26 billion. [See U.S. Military Presence in Guam (sidebar)]

In August 2009 parliamentary elections, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) ousted the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which had been the ruling party for more than 50 years, in a landslide. The DPJ had run on a platform of establishing a more equal alliance with the U.S., and had accused the LDP of weakening Japan's sovereignty by leaving foreign policy decisions up to the U.S. Many observers have noted that since the electoral upset, Japanese officials appear more willing to question U.S. policy and openly challenge U.S. officials, altering the tenor of U.S.–Japanese relations.

In September 2009, DPJ leader Yukio Hatoyama was sworn in as Japan’s prime minister. During his campaign, Hatoyama had pledged to remove the Futenma base from Okinawa, and perhaps even completely out of Japan. The new government demanded that the U.S. reopen negotiations on the 2006 Futenma deal, but the Obama administration insisted that Japan adhere to the 2006 agreement. The Futenma issue became a source of tension between the U.S. and Japan, and anti-base protests in Okinawa continued. In early 2010, Hatoyama pledged to resolve the Futenma issue by May, leading to speculation that he would resign if he failed to resolve the dispute.
In February 2010, voters in Nago elected a new mayor, Susumu Inamine, who was a vocal critic of the proposed new base. Inamine defeated the incumbent mayor, who had supported the 2006 Futenma plan. Environmentalists, both American and Japanese, have also joined the movement to block a new military base in Nago by filing a lawsuit to protect endangered species in the area from the harmful effects of construction.

Despite the controversy over military bases in Okinawa, officials in the Obama administration have maintained that the U.S.–Japanese alliance is still essential to U.S. strategy in the Pacific. John Feffer, the co-director of Foreign Policy in Focus, writes:

After six decades of saying yes to everything the United States has demanded, Japan finally seems on the verge of saying no to something that matters greatly to Washington, and the relationship that [President] Dwight D. Eisenhower [R, 1953–61] once called an "indestructible alliance" is displaying ever more hairline fractures.

The debate over military bases has formed the crux of tension between the U.S. and Japan. U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates called Hatoyama's efforts to reopen negotiations on Futenma "counterproductive," adding that proposed alternatives were "politically untenable." Obama, however, has publicly agreed that U.S.–Japanese relations should be more equal, rather than a "senior-vs-junior partnership."

As prime minister, Hatoyama has also forged closer relations with China, and proposed the formation of an East Asian Community, which would ostensibly lessen Japan's reliance on the U.S. in security matters. Some observers have suggested that tension between the U.S. and Japan over military bases is representative of a larger shift in international relations. Financial Times editor David Pilling writes that there is "a nagging suspicion that something bigger is afoot. That is the possibility—remote, but real—that the base squabble is an early warning of a strategic realignment as Japan grapples with the fact of China's rise and an erosion of U.S. influence in East Asia."

On May 23, 2010, Hatoyama announced that, contrary to his campaign promises, Japan would honor the 2006 agreement to move the U.S. Futenma Air Station to northern Okinawa, rather than completely off the island. Crowds in Okinawa protested the decision. Hatoyama offered a "heartfelt apology" to Okinawans but said that since taking power, he had come to appreciate more fully the strategic importance of having U.S. Marine bases on the island. Facing huge demonstrations and a drop in approval ratings, Hatoyama announced on June 2 that he would resign as prime minister, becoming the fourth Japanese prime minister to resign in four years.

Military Presence Strains U.S. and Japanese Alliance, Supporters Say

Supporters of reducing the U.S. military presence in Japan argue that a serious misperception has contributed to the recent strain on U.S.–Japanese relations. Morihiro Hosokawa, a former prime minister of Japan, writes in Foreign Affairs, "Many Americans see the presence of U.S. troops in Japan as a gracious favor meant to underpin Japan's security. Most Japanese, while fond of the alliance with the United States, would like to see fewer U.S. troops on their soil." Hosokawa argues that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the strengthening of the Japanese military have alleviated the need for a U.S. military presence in Japan.

Supporters contend that the grievances Japanese residents have against nearby bases are numerous and justified. According to an FPIF report, "Okinawans resent U.S. forces for occupying precious farm land, staging dangerous and noisy military exercises, contaminating the environment and committing thousands of crimes and sexual assaults on civilians."
In addition to imposing daily burdens on the Japanese people, military bases in Japan have posed serious environmental threats, supporters contend. FPIF columnist Christine Ahn and contributor Gwyn Kirk write, "The natural environment is at risk through military contamination and through the high military use of oil, an important factor in climate change." Other supporters note that the more than 30 bases on Okinawa have threatened endangered species and ruined the island’s natural beauty. [See Military Bases Abroad Spark Environmental Concerns (sidebar)]

The U.S. needs to adapt to the new government in Japan, supporters of troop reduction maintain. Charles Kupchan, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, writes:

While a cold response to [Hatoyama’s] more assertive foreign policy is predictable—Tokyo since World War II has constantly deferred to its U.S. protector—it is sorely misguided. In questioning the location of the Okinawa bases...the new government is not attempting to demote Japan’s alliance with the United States. On the contrary it is seeking to update the alliance to the new political and strategic environment in the region.

Supporters contend that the U.S. military’s refusal to renegotiate the 2006 base accord jeopardizes the country’s alliance with Japan, potentially derailing U.S. strategy in the Pacific. Michael O’Hanlon, a senior fellow at the Washington, D.C., think tank the Brookings Institution, writes, "Okinawans have long felt unfairly burdened by the U.S. military presence in Japan.... If the Okinawa problem spreads to the rest of Japan, it could undermine national support for the alliance."

Responding to complaints against the massive U.S. military presence in Japan is the only way to preserve a healthy partnership with Japan, which continues to be an important military and economic ally. Japanese Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada told the British newspaper the Daily Telegraph, "The only way this presence can be sustained in the long term is to make sure that the burden on the Okinawans is decreased in some way. Only by accomplishing these goals will we be able to ensure that the U.S.–Japanese alliance will be sustainable."

U.S. Military Presence in Japan Preserves Regional Stability, Critics Argue

Critics of reducing troop levels in Japan argue that a U.S. military presence there and in the larger Pacific region is still a strategic necessity. Joseph Nye Jr., an international relations professor at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and a former assistant U.S. secretary of defense, writes in the New York Times, "[O]ur alliance, rather than representing a cold war relic, [is] the basis for stability and prosperity in the region.... The two countries will miss a major opportunity if they let the base controversy lead to bitter feelings or the further reduction of American forces in Japan."

Japan should not underestimate the value of U.S. military protection, critics maintain. According to a New York Times editorial, "A half-century of American protection remains a bargain for the Japanese. In much of Asia, it’s seen as an essential balance against a rising China and a defense, if needed, against North Korea." Japan spends only about 1% of its gross domestic product (GDP, the total amount of goods and services produced by a country) on
its military, while the U.S. spends more than four times that, critics note.

Critics argue that North Korea, a potentially unstable, dictatorial and nuclear-armed state, poses a security threat to the Pacific region, making a U.S. military presence in Japan essential. John Roos, the U.S. ambassador to Japan, says, “A North Korea that falls into internal disarray would pose monumental security challenges to this region. The forward deployment of U.S. forces [such as in nearby Japan] puts us in a position to react immediately to emerging threats and serves as a tangible symbol of our commitment.”

Furthermore, the proximity of Japan to China, which has modernized its military in recent decades, is another reason Japan should want a U.S. military presence on its territory, critics maintain. Richard Bush, a senior fellow and Asian policies expert at the Brookings Institution, says, “China...has gradually developed a full spectrum of capabilities, including nuclear weapons. Although we can hope that China will not seek to dominate East Asia at the U.S. and Japan’s expense, we can’t be sure of their intentions either. Hope is not a policy.” Critics contend that Japan should seriously assess potential threats in the region before demanding that the U.S. reduce its military presence.

Indeed, shrinking U.S. troop levels would require Japan to increase its own defense capabilities dramatically, critics point out. That would pose a perhaps insurmountable challenge for the country, critics say. Pilling writes:

> Without the absolute protection of the US and its nuclear umbrella, Japan would either have to develop an independent nuclear capability or forge a new kind of partnership with China. The former is extremely unlikely given Japan’s deep nuclear taboo. The latter is almost unthinkable so long as China remains a one-party Communist state and Japan continues to be uncertain of its military intentions.

Critics warn that withdrawing from Okinawa could trigger more anti-base movements across the world. Feffer writes, "[F]rom the Pentagon’s perspective, Japan’s resistance might prove infectious—one major reason why the United States is putting its alliance on the line over the closing of a single antiquated military base and the building of another of dubious strategic value."

**South Korea Overview**

From 1910 to 1945, Japan occupied Korea, ruling it as a protectorate. After Japan’s defeat in World War II, the U.S. and the Soviet Union divided Korea along the 38th parallel; the U.S. administered the southern part and the Soviet Union administered the northern part. By 1948, the regions had solidified into two separate countries—the communist Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the north, and the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the south.

In 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea, sparking the Korean War (1950–53). U.S. armed forces backed South Korea, while the Soviet Union and China backed North Korea in the struggle, which is often considered one of many proxy wars fought during the Cold War. Fighting ceased when North and South Korea signed an armistice in 1953. That same year, the U.S. signed a military alliance agreement, known as the ROK–U.S. Mutual Security Agreement, with South Korea. The U.S., however, has never signed a formal peace agreement with North Korea. Since 1953, the U.S. military has retained tens of thousands of troops at bases in South Korea. South Korea and North Korea are separated by a stretch of territory known as the demilitarized zone, or the DMZ, where no weapons are allowed. [See Issues and Controversies in American History: Korean War]

After decades of unstable autocratic rule, South Korea developed into a democracy with a thriving economy, electing its first civilian president in 1993. North Korea, by contrast, remains an impoverished dictatorship. It, however, has a large military, and some analysts warn that its leader, Kim Jong II, who is often described as being paranoid and erratic, may one day launch an assault against South Korea or another country in the region. Furthermore, North Korea has embarked upon a nuclear weapons program despite international condemnation and sanctions, and is known to have tested several nuclear weapons.

In recent years, however, South Korea has pursued a warmer relationship with North Korea. In 2000, South Korean President Kim Dae Jung met with North Korea’s Kim Jong II, marking the first meeting between heads of the two countries since the breakup of Korea. Kim Dae Jung also initiated the “sunshine policy” to encourage a more open relationship between the two countries. Some South Korean politicians have expressed concern that the presence of the U.S. military in their country could impede the formation of a better relationship with North Korea.

During the presidency of George W. Bush, relations between the U.S. and South Korea deteriorated, partly over the military-bases issue. Bush pursued a hard-line policy against North Korea because of its nuclear weapons program, frustrating South Korean leaders who were attempting reconciliation with their neighbor. While South Korean officials also denounced North Korea’s nuclear program, they expressed concern that a preemptive U.S. strike on North Korea could drag South Korea into an unwanted war. [See The Bush Presidency]

Opposition to U.S. military personnel intensified in South Korea in June 2002, when two U.S. soldiers driving an armored vehicle accidentally ran over two teenage South Korean girls. The soldiers were later acquitted in U.S. military courts, but their exoneration sparked protests from local residents, who argued that U.S. soldiers accused of crimes should have to face charges in South Korean courts. The incident triggered demonstrations demanding that U.S. troops leave South Korea.

In December 2002, South Koreans elected a new president, Roh Moo Hyun, who demanded that the U.S. and South Korea restructure their alliance to put the two countries on a more equal footing. During Bush’s second term, the U.S. agreed to hand over command of joint U.S.–Korean forces to South Korea by 2012, to return some bases to the South Korean military, and to gradually decrease the number of U.S. troops in South Korea.

Observers also note that South Korea’s changing demographics have contributed to the country’s anti-American sentiment. Most South Koreans alive today were born after the Korean War, and they therefore have no memories of that conflict and only dim memories of the U.S.–South Korean alliance...
The Cold War. Hence, neither the war nor the Cold War alliance holds much significance for the younger generation.

Despite disagreements, South Korea’s alliance with the U.S. remains strong, and South Korea has contributed significant numbers of troops to the U.S.-led military effort in Iraq. In December 2007, South Koreans elected as president Lee Myung Bak, who had campaigned on repairing the U.S.—South Korean alliance. In April 2008, an agreement between Lee and Bush set the maximum U.S. troop deployment in South Korea at 28,500, from 38,000 in 2005.

As of spring 2010, about 25,000 U.S. active duty service members are stationed in South Korea. Supporters of further reducing the U.S. military presence contend that South Korea has developed into a prosperous democracy capable of providing its own security, and that a large U.S. military presence in South Korea is no longer justified in a post–Cold War geopolitical environment. Critics say that the main reason for U.S. troops staying in South Korea—the threat of North Korean aggression posed by the increasingly erratic leadership of Kim Jong Il—is still real, and a strong U.S.—South Korean military alliance is essential for stability in the region.

In March 2010, a South Korean warship exploded and sank. After South Korean officials investigated the explosion, they accused North Korea of deliberately torpedoing the ship. Although North Korea denied the charge, Lee announced on May 24 that South Korea would cease trading with North Korea in retaliation for the attack. North Korea responded by severing all ties with the South. As tensions built, President Obama backed South Korea’s move, and issued an order to U.S. military personnel to work with South Korean commanders to “insure readiness and deter aggression.” In response to the conflict, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton affirmed that U.S. "support for South Korea's defense in unequivocal."

South Korea Can Defend Itself, Supporters Say

Supporters say that deploying U.S. troops to South Korea is an outdated policy that no longer has any usefulness in the post–Cold War world. Doug Bandow, a former special assistant to President Reagan, calls the presence of U.S. troops in South Korea a "cold war artifact." He writes, "The future of America's relations with South Korea is complicated by Washington's unnatural military presence on the Korean peninsula, and no solution is likely until that unnatural presence is removed."

The longer U.S. troops stay in South Korea, the more pervasive anti-American sentiment in the country will become, supporters maintain. Bandow writes that if the U.S. fails to update its policy, "anti-American sentiments will not only spread but will likely grow stronger. Perceived American arrogance adds fuel to the fire."

Indeed, supporters maintain that Americans have outworn their welcome in South Korea. Some South Koreans are refusing to buy U.S. goods, supporters note, and South Korean landowners resent having to sell their lands to make room for U.S. bases. Cho Sun Yeh, a South Korean rice farmer, protested having to sell her farm, telling the Washington Post, "I am thankful for what the U.S. did to save us from the communists back then, but that was a long time ago and we have paid them enough thanks.... It is time for the U.S. to leave us alone."

Supporters of reducing the U.S. military presence in South Korea argue that the country is now a developed, independent nation able to meet its own defense needs. According to a news release from the CATO Institute, a libertarian think tank based in Washington, D.C., "The case for keeping troops in East Asia is...weak.... South Korea has twice the population of communist North Korea and an economy 37 times larger. It does not need to remain dependent on the United States for its defense."

Supporters point out that if North Korean forces did attack, ground troops stationed in South Korea would not provide the best means to counter the assault. Slate writer Fred Kaplan argues:
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North Korea Is an Immediate Threat to South Korea, Critics Argue

Opponents of troop reduction point out that the U.S.–South Korean alliance helped create a stable democracy in an unstable region. Bruce Klinger, a senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, writes, "The U.S. security guarantee has long deterred a North Korean attack against a key U.S. ally while providing the shield behind which South Korea was able to develop its economic strength and institutionalize democratic rule." Critics of reducing the U.S. military presence in South Korea say that the military partnership between U.S. and South Korean forces is essential to deterring North Korean aggression.

Klinger writes that, not only does the military alliance between the U.S. and South Korea help prevent a North Korean attack, but it also discourages an arms race among other Asian countries in the Pacific and promotes stability more generally throughout Asia. He says, "The military alliance is a critical component of the comprehensive bilateral partnership."

Although South Korea has made great strides in military development, critics worry that it would not be prepared for an attack from North Korea. Michael O’Hanlon, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, estimates that in the event of war in Korea, the U.S. would have to deploy about a quarter of its combat forces to that theater. He writes, "War is very unlikely, and would be hugely undesirable—but it is not out of the question."

South Koreans have shown a reluctance to bear the expenses of a more substantial defense budget, critics note. Klinger writes, "An increasingly self-confident South Korea demands recognition and greater status but is...unwilling to bear the costs of greater responsibilities. South Korean progressives chafe at the presence of the U.S. military but fear its departure."

Critics say that North Korea could misinterpret a withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea as evidence of a deterioration in U.S. resolve, or of the U.S.–South Korean partnership. O’Hanlon writes, "The chances for war could increase if North Korea sensed a weakening of the alliance or its military fighting power." Critics maintain that U.S. troops are safeguarding South Korea’s sovereignty, holding the line against the nuclear power to its north. Reducing bases in South Korea, critics argue, would weaken the U.S. military’s ability to defend against a North Korean attack or any other aggression in the Pacific region.

Thanks to the U.S. military’s protection of South Korea, and U.S. financial aid as the country developed into a prosperous democracy, South Korea has become a major regional economic power, critics note. When U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton was a Democratic senator from New York, she said at a 2006 Senate hearing that South Koreans who were demanding U.S. withdrawal were suffering from "historical amnesia" and were forgetting "what [the U.S. has] done over so many decades to provide them the freedom that they have enjoyed."

Critics argue that the majority of South Koreans do indeed support a U.S. military presence. They say that anti-Americanism in South Korea is a fringe phenomenon, and that South Koreans who protest the U.S. military presence in their country are misconstruing U.S. goals. O’Hanlon writes:

Koreans should also remember that, in many ways, they get much more out of this alliance than does the U.S. Americans are sacrificing for an alliance that would defend not them but their Korean friends in a land thousands of miles away. To be sure, we would not do this unless it were in our interest. But South Korea has an even more immediate and pressing interest in the goals of the alliance.

Turkey Overview

For more than 60 years, the U.S. had a strategic partnership with Turkey, a populous democracy located between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, and bordered by Eastern European and Middle Eastern countries. Turkey's population is primarily Muslim, and international relations experts often view the country as a unique bridge between the Middle East and the West because of its geographic location and its close relations with both Islamic governments and secular democracies. After World War II, Turkey forged an alliance with the U.S. instead of the Soviet Union. In 1951, the U.S. began constructing Incirlik Air Base southeast of Ankara, Turkey's capital. Three years later, the U.S. and Turkey signed a joint use agreement for Incirlik, which is now the most important U.S. military base in Turkey. The base has served as the jumping-off point for various U.S. military campaigns and disaster relief efforts in the region for half a century. In addition to its strategic location between East and West, Turkey is a major transfer point for energy resources traveling to the West from fossil-fuel-rich regions in Central Asia.
In 1974, after a military coup ousted the president of Cyprus—a Mediterranean island with Greek and Turkish populations—Turkish troops invaded the island. After Turkey evicted Greek Cypriots from the northern third of the island, it proclaimed that area the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The U.S. condemned the invasion, and suspended all military and economic aid to Turkey the following year. In response to the embargo, Turkey announced that it would transfer all U.S. military bases to Turkish control, allowing only Incirlik and one other base to continue operations solely for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) purposes. After Congress lifted the embargo in 1978, however, U.S.–Turkish military cooperation resumed. In 1980, Turkey and the U.S. signed the Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement, normalizing relations between the two countries. (Cyprus remains divided, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is still recognized only by Turkey.)

During the Gulf War, military bases in Turkey provided key logistical support to the U.S.-led international coalition seeking to liberate Kuwait from invading Iraqi forces. Turkey, which borders northern Iraq, did not contribute forces to the coalition. After the Gulf War, the U.S. continued to use Incirlik Air Base as a hub for military operations. [See Issues and Controversies in American History: Persian Gulf War]

The 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, which toppled Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, strained the U.S.–Turkish alliance. The Turkish people were largely opposed to the invasion, and worried that war would destabilize their country, which borders Iraq. The Turkish parliament refused a U.S. request to let more than 60,000 U.S. troops enter northern Iraq through Turkey, forfeiting billions of dollars in U.S. aid.

After Saddam Hussein’s overthrow, Kurdish nationalists in northern Iraq called for autonomy from the new Iraqi regime, and Turkish officials feared that agitation would spread to the large Kurdish population in southeastern Turkey. The Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK, has launched attacks on Turkey from bases in northern Iraq. Turkish officials complain that U.S. forces have not done enough to crack down on the group, which the U.S. government considers to be a terrorist organization. In 2007, the Turkish military launched attacks against PKK strongholds in southern Turkey, and air strikes on PKK bases in northern Iraq. The following year, Turkish ground forces invaded northern Iraq to strike PKK forces, but withdrew about a week later under pressure from the U.S. Turkey’s Constitutional Court has banned pro-Kurdish parties, including the PKK and the Democratic Society Party (DSP), and critics of Turkey’s human rights record have accused the government of illegally arresting and trying Kurdish nationalist leaders.

Tension between the U.S. and Turkey following the U.S. invasion of Iraq led some observers to wonder whether the Turkish government would continue to allow the U.S. military to maintain bases in Turkey. Despite Turkey’s general disapproval of the Iraqi invasion, however, the U.S. has used both Turkish land and air space to rotate troop supplies to and from Iraq, and about 1,500 service members are currently stationed at Incirlik Air Base.

Another point of contention between the U.S. and Turkey concerns Turkey’s relations with Armenia, which borders Turkey to the east. Beginning in 1915, during World War I (1914–18) and for a short time afterward, the Turkish Ottoman Empire slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Armenians. Most historians say the killings fit the definition of genocide—the systematic killing of a particular religious, racial or ethnic group. The Turkish government, however, maintains that the deaths were the result of forced relocations, disease, and attacks from local tribes as the Ottoman Empire collapsed, and were not an orchestrated campaign of ethnic cleansing. American Armenians have long lobbied for the U.S. to formally recognize the killings as genocide, but Turkish officials have warned that doing so would have serious diplomatic repercussions. [See Armenian Genocide]

Despite ongoing disputes, Turkey and the U.S. remain allies. Turkey is a member of NATO, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and is seeking membership in the European Union. Because of those strategic alliances, international relations experts often describe Turkey as a bridge between West and East, particularly between the U.S. and Europe on the one hand, and the Muslim world on the other. FPIF makes the following assessment: "Once valued as a deterrent to the Soviet threat, Turkey is now considered a key ally in stopping terrorism, drug trafficking, and Islamic fundamentalism from seeping across the Bosporus Strait [the narrow body of water separating Eastern and Western Turkey].”

President Obama has met twice with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in an effort to repair U.S.–Turkish relations, and some analysts have argued that the relationship between the two countries has improved in the first year of Obama’s presidency. Open anti-American sentiment among the Turkish public and media, however, still threatens to undermine that relationship, as well as the continued presence of U.S. bases in Turkey.
Although Obama promised during the 2008 presidential campaign that he would recognize the Armenian genocide when he became president, he has so far refrained from doing so. In March 2010, the House Foreign Affairs Committee voted 23–22 to label the slaughter of Armenians a "genocide" despite warnings from the Obama administration that doing so would put a strain on U.S.–Turkish relations. In response to the committee’s declaration, Turkey recalled its ambassador from the U.S., and warned that the vote "could adversely affect our cooperation on a wide common agenda." Some foreign relations experts warned that if the full House were to debate the resolution, Turkey might renege on its agreement to allow the U.S. military to use Incirlik Air Base—a possibility hinted at by Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu.

U.S. Bases in Turkey Fuel Anti-Americanism, Supporters Argue

The Turkish people do not wholeheartedly support a U.S. military presence in their country, supporters of troop reduction say, and continued deployment threatens to contribute to anti-American sentiment in Turkey and the broader region. Steven Cook, a Middle Eastern studies fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, says that Turkey has a "population that is nationalist by nature, and who are from a very young age reminded of the time after World War I when foreign troops entered the country to dismember it.... There is a certain kind of sensitivity about the presence of foreign troops."

Supporters concede that a strong alliance with Turkey is important to U.S. interests, but argue that the continued presence of the U.S. military in Turkey will strain, rather than strengthen, the U.S.–Turkish relationship. Cook writes, "The relationship between the United States and Turkey—a Western-oriented, democratized Muslim country—is strategically more important than ever.... However, to achieve this level of cooperation, U.S.–Turkey relations must be repaired." Supporters argue that the U.S. must avoid further antagonizing Turkey with a burdensome military presence, thus jeopardizing one of the few sturdy alliances the U.S. has in the region.

Although Turkey has democratized, supporters say, the Turkish government still allegedly backs some repressive policies, such as banning certain political parties and reportedly targeting media outlets critical of the government. Supporters contend that the U.S. cannot protest those actions when it depends on the use of U.S. bases on Turkish territory. The U.S. has to negotiate with Turkey periodically for continued permission to use Incirlik, supporters note. Foreign relations expert Frank Hyland writes, "Incirlik has been and remains a near-constant 'hostage,' used as a policy lever by Turkey because of its key strategic location.... This style of arrangement ensures Turkey that an asset valued highly by the United States is available to Ankara as a bargaining chip of sorts."

Thus, in exchange for the use of bases in Turkey, the U.S. has supplied Turkey with significant military and economic aid, but is still unable to influence Turkey's policies, supporters maintain. Critics of the Turkish government have faulted it not only for banning certain political parties, but also for contributing to the destabilization of northern Iraq by invading and attacking PKK strongholds. According to FPIF, the 1980 pact that allowed a U.S. military presence on Turkish soil in exchange for arms transfers has let Turkey "benefit from a U.S. policy that is long on military assistance and short on constructive criticism.... In reality, Washington has held little sway over Ankara's behavior in such key foreign policy areas as promoting human rights and democracy...[and] preserving regional stability."

Indeed, some supporters say that U.S. fears of a shutdown of its Turkish military bases have undermined the U.S.'s ability to condemn immoral Turkish actions, such as the occupation of Cyprus. Ted Carpenter, the vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, writes:

> It is, of course, not Washington's responsibility to compel Ankara to cease its offensive behavior. But the United States should at least not be Turkey's enabler. Unfortunately, Washington's flagrant double standard encourages Turkish officials' inflated sense of their country's strategic importance and may even encourage them to conclude that they can pursue aggressive measures against neighboring countries with U.S. acquiescence, if not tacit approval.

Furthermore, some supporters argue that Turkey has used U.S. arms to perpetrate human rights abuses, particularly in its campaign against both the PKK and domestic Kurdish nationalists.

Supporters of troop reduction argue that the U.S. military presence in Turkey has prevented the U.S. from recognizing the Armenian genocide, thereby undermining American moral influence over other countries. Representative Howard Berman (D, California) says that although Turkey is "a loyal ally of the United States...nothing justifies Turkey's turning a blind eye to the reality of the Armenian genocide."

U.S. Needs Turkish Bases to Support Troops in Iraq, Critics Say

Critics of reducing the number of troops deployed in Turkey argue that American bases there are crucial to U.S. operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. According to the Washington Post, "[T]he Obama administration needs Turkish cooperation on a number of fronts. Turkey has contributed troops to the coalition in Afghanistan and allowed the use of an air base to supply U.S. forces in Iraq." Withdrawing from Turkey, critics say, would undermine logistical support for U.S. troops in theaters of war, endangering them.

Turkey's unique geographic location makes it a particularly important location for U.S. bases, critics say. According to the New York Times, "It could take months to increase operations in other logistical hubs, including Jordan, Kuwait and at the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr in the northern Persian Gulf." The U.S. cannot risk having to transfer troops to another, most likely less friendly, region with major conflicts ongoing in both Afghanistan and Iraq, critics say. Critics note that the U.S. military presence in Turkey safeguards U.S. access to oil from Central Asia.

If Turkey eliminated its U.S. bases or denied the U.S. access to its air space, critics warn, the U.S. would have to scramble to find new ways to get military supplies into Iraq. Indeed, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates has said that about 70% of military supplies in Iraq come through Turkey, and warned...
that angering Turkey over the genocide issue could have "enormous implications" for U.S. troops in war zones.

According to critics of troop reduction, because the U.S. military presence in Turkey is so important, the U.S. needs to avoid angering Turkey, particularly by repeatedly mentioning the Armenian genocide. Representative Dan Burton (R, Indiana) told the Washington Post that the animosity created by continuing to remind Turkish officials about that incident was not worth the moral benefits of doing so, saying, "[W]e're in the 21st century. We have troops in the field. We run the risk of losing a base of operations in Turkey."

Critics point to the Turkish government as a rare example of a functioning secular democracy in the Muslim world, and they contend that the U.S. should maintain a close alliance, militarily and otherwise, with Turkey. Representative Gerry Connolly (D, Virginia) denounced the Foreign Affairs Committee's decision to label the 1915 massacre of Armenians a genocide, saying it threatened to undermine the U.S. relationship with Turkey, which he called a "secular alternative model for the Muslim world.... The United States has a great deal at stake in the Turkish relationship."

Critics also contend that Incirlik Air Base has been a valuable hub for U.S. military operations for more than half a century, and its current strategic importance should not be underestimated. Incirlik not only enabled the U.S. to counter threats from the Soviet Union during the Cold War more effectively, critics note, but, more recently, has allowed the U.S. military to address conflicts in the region. According to the U.S. Air Force, Incirlik has been essential "in responding to crises in the Middle East." A fact sheet found on the air force Web site notes that Incirlik "has always served as a hub for U.S. support to the Turkish government in the wake of disasters and humanitarian emergencies." The American military presence in Turkey allows the U.S. to provide aid to Turkey amid natural disasters or security threats, critics say, solidifying the important alliance between the countries.

Conclusion: U.S. Unlikely to Reduce Global Military Presence Significantly in Near Future

Despite criticism of the U.S.'s large military budget and broad military presence overseas, it appears unlikely that the U.S. will significantly decrease military spending or diminish its global presence any time soon. Indeed, when unveiling his budget for fiscal year 2011, Obama announced a freeze on all discretionary spending, but insisted that the country's military budget would be untouched. Some critics argued that the U.S. would be able to save a great deal of money if it lowered its military budget by closing some of its overseas bases. [See Freezing Government Spending]

Still, efforts are underway to reduce U.S. troop numbers in certain regions. The Obama administration insists that it will withdraw combat forces from Iraq in the summer of 2010, as planned, despite some observers' speculation that the disputed Iraqi election would push back the planned troop reductions. Additionally, the Obama administration still intends to move about 8,000 U.S. troops to the U.S. territory of Guam by 2014, from Okinawa, Japan. The Obama administration also insists that it will keep its promise to withdraw troops from Afghanistan in 2011, despite the current influx of additional troops.

Even if the U.S. carries out some or all of its current plans to reduce its military presence abroad, it will still have hundreds of thousands of troops stationed throughout the world. It thus appears unlikely that the debate over what kind of global military presence the U.S. should have will diminish any time soon.

Discussion Questions

1) Japan and the U.S. have clashed over a plan to relocate a military base on Okinawa. How do you think the U.S. should try to resolve the dispute?

2) Do you think the U.S. military should retain troops in South Korea? Why or why not? Explain your position.

3) How do you think the U.S. military presence in Turkey helps American interests? How do you think American bases in Turkey might impede U.S. interests?

4) Do you think the Obama administration will meet its deadlines for withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan? Why or why not?

5) Why do you think the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have lasted so long? What would constitute victory in those conflicts?

6) Look at a map of the world. What regions have the greatest U.S. troop presence? Why do you think the U.S. has positioned its troops there? Should it decrease those troop levels? With a group, draw up your own plans for reducing U.S. troop levels abroad. For those areas where you decide troop levels should remain unchanged, explain your reasons.

Bibliography


http://icof.infobaselearning.com/icofprintarticle.aspx?articleId=2424aa&citation=mla


Additional Sources

Additional information about reducing U.S. military presence abroad can be found in the following sources:


Contact Information

Information on how to contact organizations that are either mentioned in the discussion of reducing the U.S. military presence abroad or can provide additional information on the subject is listed below:

Brookings Institution
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Heritage Foundation
http://cof.infobaselearning.com/cofprintarticle.aspx?articleID=2424aa&citation=mla

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Keywords and Points

For further information about the ongoing debate over U.S. military presence abroad, search for the following words and terms in electronic databases and other publications:

Anti-base movements
Futenma Air Station
Incirlik Air Base
Perpetual war
Troop withdrawal deadlines
U.S. foreign policy

Citation Information