

**Redeployment Reconsidered:  
Rumsfeld, Gates, and the U.S. Presence in Germany<sup>1</sup>**  
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For over half a century the Federal Republic of Germany has been and still is the single most important host nation for the U.S. military in Europe. At any given point during the Cold War, nearly three-fourths of the European-based forces were stationed there, or approximately 250,000 personnel. Germany also hosts the only U.S. Command that is located outside the United States; the city of Stuttgart is home to the headquarters of the European Command (EUCOM), which is responsible for all U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Special Forces activities in more than ninety countries.

Clearly, Germany forms a central node in the global network of American military bases overseas. Yet after George W. Bush announced a major transformation of the overseas force structure in August 2004, including the redeployment of two-thirds of the remaining troops in Germany back to the continental United States (CONUS), it appeared that the Federal Republic may be relegated to a more minor role in the overseas basing network. In November 2007 Defense Secretary Robert Gates backtracked and decided to maintain at least 40,000 troops in Germany and Italy, about twice as many as Donald Rumsfeld had envisioned. What led Gates to reverse or at least reconsider the redeployment plans? The current discussion can be better understood within the context of the transformation of the U.S. presence in Germany since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Since the end of the Cold War there have been two major draw-downs of the U.S. presence in Germany. The first draw-down happened during the 1990s. In 1989, the U.S. military presence in Germany consisted of 213,000 soldiers along with 65,000 civilians stationed at approximately 858 installations. Ten years later, there were 62,000 soldiers and 17,000 civilians located at 265 installations in Germany.<sup>2</sup> While shrinkage was the main tendency throughout the 1990s, with many of the smaller Army posts along the former border to East Germany being closed, some Air Force bases such as Ramstein and Spangdahlem were expanding. Hence, consolidation around major hubs was an important part of the transformation process.

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<sup>2</sup> Bryan van Sweringen: "Stationing Within the State: The U.S. Army Presence in the Rhineland-Palatinate 1947-2007" (paper presented at the conference "Amerikaner in Rheinland-Pfalz" in September, 2007).

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The second draw-down was inaugurated with the return of the Rhein-Main Air Base to the Frankfurt airport and the subsequent expansion of Ramstein. Although the closure of Rhein-Main was completed by 2005, further reductions in the number of installations and troops were scheduled to continue throughout the decade. This second major draw-down was to be part of a larger transformation of the overseas presence globally, which then-Governor Bush had made a campaign issue during the 2000 presidential election. Shortly after becoming Secretary of Defense, Rumsfeld undertook an analysis of the overseas force structure, while at the same time the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) was being prepared. The QDR was published on 30 September 2001 and announced the need for major changes:

“During the latter half of the 20th century, the United States developed a global system of overseas military bases primarily to contain aggression by the Soviet Union. U.S. overseas presence aligned closely with U.S. interests and likely threats to those interests. However, this overseas presence posture, concentrated in Western Europe and Northeast Asia, is inadequate for the new strategic environment, in which U.S. interests are global and potential threats in other areas of the world are emerging.”<sup>3</sup>

After the attacks of 9/11, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder declared “unconditional solidarity” with the United States, and supported the mission in Afghanistan, even surviving a no-confidence vote when members of his own SPD party and the Greens opposed the deployment of *Bundeswehr* soldiers to Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> However, Schröder and his foreign minister Joschka Fischer openly disagreed with the U.S. administration over Iraq, marking the first time that a German administration had opposed Washington on a crucial issue. Kissinger referred to the dispute within NATO as the “gravest crisis in the Atlantic Alliance since its creation five decades ago.”<sup>5</sup> Schröder was reelected in September of 2002 largely due to his defiance of the Bush administration’s Iraq policy. On 15 February 2003, anti-war demonstrations took place around the world, marking a record level of social movement mobilization. Approximately 500,000 people demonstrated in Berlin, the largest protest rally in the history of the Federal Republic.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Quadrennial Defense Review 2001: 25

<http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/qdr2001.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Peter Katzenstein, “Same War, Different Views: Germany, Japan, and the War on Terrorism,” *Current History*, Volume 101, Issue 659 (December 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Ivo Daalder, “The End of Atlanticism,” *Survival*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Summer 2003): 147–166.

<sup>6</sup> “Millionen protestieren in aller Welt gegen den Krieg” in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16 February 2003. See also Dieter Rucht and Stefaan Walgrave (eds), *Protest Politics: Demonstrations against the War on Iraq in the US and Western Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming 2008).

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Despite the fact that only one-fifth of the German population thought that Berlin should support the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, Schröder agreed in November 2002 to allow the U.S. unlimited access to its basing infrastructure in Germany and to protect American installations with *Bundeswehr* soldiers.<sup>7</sup> According to the German news media, which had obtained transcripts of the ten-minute-long telephone conversation, Bush had reminded Schröder of his father's (Bush senior's) achievements during the process of unification and that Kohl had promised him that Americans would continue to enjoy basing access just as they had during the Cold War.<sup>8</sup>

According to a number of observers, because many major installations are located in Germany and because Schröder placed no restrictions on the use of these facilities, Germany in fact did more to support the Iraq War than many other countries who belonged to the "Coalition of the Willing" and officially supported the war.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the public outcry, a number of legal experts argued that any support for a war without UN approval would violate the German constitution that prevented the participation in or preparation for a war of aggression.<sup>10</sup>

All told, Schröder agreed to the provision of basing access, the deployment of AWACS surveillance aircraft to Turkey, and the maintenance of chemical and biological warfare detection vehicles in Kuwait. On May 7, 2008, Germany's highest court ruled that the AWACS deployment in 2003 was unconstitutional, further proof that Schröder was undertaking significant political risks in order to support a war he publicly disagreed with.<sup>11</sup> Yet Rumsfeld did not think it necessary to acknowledge any of this. As a result, relations between the two countries remained less than cordial.<sup>12</sup> The topic was still cause for aggravation in Berlin in 2008, more than five years later.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Forsa, "Meinungen zum Verhalten der Bundesrepublik gegenüber den USA bei einem Irak Krieg" (survey published 30 November 2002). Cited in Szabo 2004: 84.

<sup>8</sup> Andreas Zumach, "Bush verkohlt Kanzler," *Die Tageszeitung*, 13 February 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Philip H. Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro, *Allies at War: America, Europe, and the Crisis over Iraq* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2004): 171.

<sup>10</sup> Gregor Schirmer, "Deutschland ein Aufmarschgebiet der USA für den Krieg gegen den Irak? Eine völkerrechtliche Expertise" U<http://www.uni-kassel.de/fb5/frieden/regionen/irak/schirmer.html>

<sup>11</sup> "Über Krieg und Frieden entscheidet der Bundestag", in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7 May 2008.

<sup>12</sup> See Stephen F. Szabo, *Parting Ways: The Crisis in German-American Relations* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Karsten Voigt, Coordinator for German-American Relations, in the German Foreign Office in January 2008.

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In February 2003, Dr. Frederick W. Kagan, then Associate Professor of Military History at the U.S. Military Academy, testified before Congress:

“If we act now to remove our permanent bases from Germany, or even if we simply announce our intention to begin such a move, it will inevitably appear we are doing so primarily to punish Germany for opposing the President’s policy against Iraq [...] Even if the actual intention of this proposal is not to punish Germany, taking the proposed action will inevitably seem to Germany and other European states to be a retaliation.”<sup>14</sup>

Some in the Bush administration, including Rumsfeld himself, were clearly unconcerned about offending long-standing European allies: distinguishing between “old” and “new” Europe, calling the meeting between Germany, France, Belgium, and Luxemburg in April 2003 a “praline summit,” and comparing Germany to Libya and Cuba are just a few examples of his pointedly undiplomatic diplomacy.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, the plan to pull out large numbers of troops from Europe was facing increasing criticism at home. Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry roundly criticized the Bush-Rumsfeld agenda and former General Wesley Clark called Bush’s plan a “slap in the face of the Europeans.”<sup>16</sup>

In September 2004, the transformation report which outlined the grand strategy of the basing realignment, officially titled “Integrated Global Presence and Basing Strategy” (IGPBS), was published by the Department of Defense (DoD). As this was to be the largest transformation since World War II, Congress appointed an independent and bipartisan Overseas Basing Commission (OBC) to undertake the task of reviewing the plan and providing an independent assessment. The six commissioners included four high-ranking retired military officers as well as two civilian analysts. The report of the Commission was submitted to Congress in May 2005. Although praising some aspects of the planned transformation, it was highly critical of others, including the plan to drastically cut the U.S. presence in Europe and Asia. The report of the Overseas Basing Commission further warned that:

- A “full dialogue” on the impact on U.S. security of the IGPBS had not taken place among the concerned government agencies, although the new basing strategy would have a wide-ranging effect on international alliances.

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<sup>14</sup> Frederick W. Kagan, Statement before the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, House Armed Services Committee, 26 February 2003. Cited in van Sweringen 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Philip H. Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro, *Allies at War: America, Europe, and the Crisis over Iraq* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Jürgen Koar, “Kerry furchtet bei Truppenabzug um Sicherheit der USA,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 19 August 2004.

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- Realignment during two major combat operations was unrealistic.
- The strain placed on recruits would be “beyond the degree they should be asked to accept,” which could become a problem for reenlistment.
- The cost of the restructuring was severely underestimated; instead of the \$4 billion estimated by IGPBS, the Commission estimated that the price tag could be as much as \$20 billion.
- While the last great transformation that followed the 1947 National Security Act brought together the best minds in the country, the recent transformation has been almost singled-handedly managed by the DoD.
- For all of the above reasons, the OCB recommended that Congress should have oversight and exercise it “fully and vigorously.”<sup>17</sup>

In terms of the impact on Germany, the Commission further cautioned that once troops are moved out of Europe, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to move them back in if needed. Furthermore, while the DoD was not concerned that the troop reduction would also mean a reduction in American influence within NATO, the Commission was more skeptical and warned about the possibility that an EU military force may become a potential rival to NATO. According to John Pike, director of [globalsecurity.org](http://globalsecurity.org), the report is “about as explicit a rebuke of the DoD as you can get and still be printed.”<sup>18</sup> Rumsfeld called the Commission’s report “unhelpful” and complained that it contained classified information, such as the plan to create new facilities in Romania and Bulgaria, although this was widely reported in the news media. As a result, the Commission pulled the report from its website for more than a month. The final version was finally published on 15 August 2005; the objectionable data was placed in a classified appendix, but the Commissioners did not budge in their critical assessment.<sup>19</sup> Even those aspects of the IGPBS which the Commission supported, such as the general trend toward an expeditionary force and the creation of forward operating locations (FOLs) and cooperative security locations (CSLs) in areas which were previously outside the U.S. sphere of influence, have, however, been viewed by some analysts with a degree of skepticism.

Two scholarly publications have come out just within the last year that both grapple with the question of the U.S. overseas presence. Although the two books have different geographical focuses, both express certain precautions against moving into uncharted territory and establishing bases on political quicksand. In his book *Base Politics*, Alexander Cooley, Professor of Political Science at Columbia University, analyzes a number of countries including Uzbekistan, which

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<sup>17</sup> Commission on Review of Overseas Military Facility Structure of the United States. The August 15 report can be found on their website: [Uhttp://fido.gov/obc/reports.asp](http://fido.gov/obc/reports.asp)

<sup>18</sup> Cited in David Isenberg, “Tangle over US Bases,” *Asia Times*, 1 June 2005.

<sup>19</sup> James Kitfield, “Over There: An Independent Commission Raised Questions About a Pentagon Plan to Move Troops Based Overseas to the United States. Was Anyone Listening?” *National Journal*, Volume 37, Issue 43 (22 October 2005).

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was in many ways a test case of the new strategy.<sup>20</sup> Islam Karimov, the Uzbek dictator, had invited U.S. forces into the country shortly after 9/11 and offered the use of the Khanabad air strip for operations in Afghanistan, which became known as the K2 base. In August 2005, he then handed the U.S. an eviction notice after the Department of State demanded an investigation into the death of 173 dissidents. The U.S. had 180 days to leave, half the time that de Gaulle allowed U.S. troops to relocate from France in 1966. In his recent publication entitled *Embattled Garrisons*, Kent Calder, Professor at the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at Johns Hopkins University, analyzes how even friendly environments can turn sour as a result of incidents involving U.S. military personnel, such as the tragic death of two school girls in South Korea in 2002 who were crushed by a military vehicle.<sup>21</sup>

How does Germany fit into all of this? After Bush announced the plan for further troop reductions in August 2004, major German newspapers ran stories with titles like “Every American that leaves, is a friend that leaves” and “Ami – stay here.”<sup>22</sup> Defense Minister Peter Struck (SPD) called the withdrawal a “major loss” for some regions, and the trade union Ver.di worried that as many as 70,000 jobs could be lost. Compared to the less-than-welcoming situation in other parts of the world, this should have been music to Rumsfeld’s ears.

Of course, Rumsfeld did not lose his job because of the IGPBS, but because of Iraq. Encouragingly, his successor has not been immune to advice from independent analysts and military officers on the ground. Gate’s decision to halt the withdrawal from Europe was perhaps also influenced by advice he received from two of the highest-ranking generals in Europe: General John Craddock, the commander of American forces in Europe, and General David D. McKiernan, Commander of the Army. Staying on the continent will allow the U.S. to continue to engage with its NATO allies and conduct training exercises with foreign militaries. Furthermore, they were concerned that the housing facilities in the U.S. were not yet ready to accommodate the soldiers and their families who would be departing from Germany.<sup>23</sup> The uncertain outcome of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan undoubtedly also factor into the decision. Bavaria alone spends \$11 million per year on police forces who protect the American facilities. If the

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<sup>20</sup> Alexander Cooley, *Base Politics: Democratic Change and the U.S. Military Overseas* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Kent Calder, *Embattled Garrisons: Comparative Base Politics and American Globalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Peter Badenhop, “Jeder Amerikaner, der geht, ist ein Freund, der geht” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 18 August 2004, and Agnes Schönberger, “Ami – bleib hier” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 22 August 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Thom Shanker, “Gates Halts Cuts in Army Force in Europe” in *New York Times*, 21 November 2007 and “Kein Beschluss über Truppenverbleib; In Washington aber Neigung zu einer Verzögerung des Abzugs aus deutschen Standorten,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 November 2007.

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U.S. were to pull out, these types of indirect host nation subsidies would disappear as well. So for the time being, Germany remains the second largest overseas deployment after Iraq. But for how long, is an open question.

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