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Closing Military Bases Overseas Will Save Billions and Improve National Security, Say Experts in Open Letter to President Trump

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Washington, DC – A diverse group of military analysts, veterans, scholars, and other experts from across the political spectrum have sent an open letter to President Donald J. Trump urging the closure of unnecessary U.S. military bases abroad. The letter outlines how these bases, which cost taxpayers approximately \$66 billion annually, are not only wasteful but also undermine national security.

The letter emphasizes the need to re-evaluate the necessity and effectiveness of the U.S. military's global footprint, noting that many of the over 750 military bases overseas should have closed decades ago. According to the Pentagon, the military has at least 19–22% excess base capacity worldwide, imposing billions in unnecessary costs.

The letter notes that the President, himself, asked “What are we getting out of this?” as early as 2016, about the billions taxpayers spend on bases from Germany and South Korea to Saudi Arabia. Beyond cutting costs and waste and advancing Trump’s stated goal to “stop war profiteering,” the letter stresses that closing bases abroad will actually improve U.S. security: U.S. bases abroad have entangled the nation in costly foreign wars, created deadly blowback, and increased military tensions.

“Given your administration’s commitment to cutting waste and maximizing efficiency,” the letter says to the President, “you should direct the Pentagon to close wasteful, unnecessary bases abroad. Doing so could save billions of dollars annually while improving the security of the United States.”

The letter’s organizational and individual signatories span the political spectrum. They include groups as diverse as National Taxpayers Union, Taxpayers for Common Sense, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, and American Friends Service Committee, and experts such as former George W. Bush administration official and retired US Army Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, Brown University Professor Catherine Lutz, Eisenhower Media Network fellow Matthew Hoh, the Institute for Policy Studies’s Miriam Pemberton, and Harvard University Professor Elaine Scarry. The letter and full list of signatories follow.

“Most of these overseas bases are a costly legacy of the Cold War,” **commented Col. (Ret) Lawrence Wilkerson**. “Many need to be closed. They are dangerous because they encourage war and they are hugely expensive for the American taxpayer.”

Additional Media Contacts:

Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, US Army (Ret.), Eisenhower Media Network, 703-624-9148, wilkerLB@aol.com

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Letter: Closing Military Bases Overseas Will Save Billions and Improve National Security

April 16, 2025

Dear President Donald J. Trump,

For many years, you have rightly questioned the value of U.S. military bases abroad. “What are we getting out of this?” you asked in 2016 about the billions of dollars taxpayers spend on bases in places such as Germany and South Korea.¹ The U.S. operates more than 750 bases around the world costing around \$66 billion annually.² It is time to reevaluate the need and effectiveness of this strategy. The military’s last available study found at least 19–22% excess base capacity worldwide, imposing billions in unnecessary costs.³

The undersigned group of military analysts, veterans, scholars, and other experts from across the political spectrum agree that **your administration has an unprecedented opportunity to close unnecessary, wasteful military bases overseas and save billions of dollars while strengthening national security in the process.**

Many of the more than 750 U.S. bases abroad should have closed decades ago. Every member of the military stationed abroad costs tens of thousands of dollars more, on average, than stationing the same person on a domestic base.⁴ The transportation and shipping costs of moving troops, family members, and supplies to bases overseas, alone, are enormous.

Now imagine the billions we wastefully spend every year maintaining entire “America Towns” overseas—complete with housing, hospitals, schools, shopping malls, movie theaters, and much more. Large amounts of the money spent on bases abroad, including from the paychecks of military personnel, end up supporting host nation economies rather than the U.S. economy.

Significantly reducing the U.S. global footprint would bring home thousands of personnel and family members who would contribute to the domestic economy rather than foreign ones. Domestic bases should have plenty of capacity to receive troops: the Army and Air Force have both previously estimated having around 20% excess capacity at home.⁵

¹ *New York Times*, “Transcript: Donald Trump on NATO, Turkey’s Coup Attempt and the World,” July 21, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/22/us/politics/donald-trump-foreign-policy-interview.html>.

² Updating for 2025 the 2021 estimates of 750 bases and \$55 billion/year, given Biden administration base construction and inflation, in David Vine, Patterson Deppen, and Leah Bolger, “Drawdown: Improving U.S. and Global Security through Military Base Closures Abroad,” Quincy Institute/World Beyond War, September 2021, <https://quincyinst.org/report/drawdown-improving-u-s-and-global-security-through-military-base-closures-abroad>.

³ Department of Defense, “Department of Defense Infrastructure Capacity,” report, October 2017, <https://fas.org/man/eprint/infrastructure.pdf>.

⁴ Michael J. Lostumbo, et al., “Overseas Basing of U.S. Military Forces: An Assessment of Relative Costs and Strategic Benefits,” RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, 2013, xxv.

⁵ Katherine G. Hammack, “2014 Green Book: The Costly Consequences of Excess Army Infrastructure and Overhead,” Army.mil, September 30, 2014, https://www.army.mil/article/134864/2014_green_book_the_costly_consequences_of_excess_army_infrastructure_and_overhead; “Posture of the United States Army Before the Committee on Armed Services,” United States House of Representatives, 113th Congress, March 25, 2014, statement of John M. McHugh, Secretary of the Army, and Raymond T. Odierno, Chief of Staff United States Army; Courtney Albon, “U.S.AF Consolidating Excess Infrastructure but Still Calling for Base Closures,” *Inside the Air Force*, January 17, 2014.

As you know, past administrations have saved billions of taxpayer dollars by closing overseas bases.⁶ Your first administration closed bases in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Presidents George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush, among others, closed hundreds of unnecessary bases in Europe and Asia.⁷

Following your priorities, this letter's signatories agree that there are at least four major additional reasons, beyond costs alone, to close overseas bases and improve national security in the process:

1. Overseas bases can entangle the U.S. in unnecessary and costly foreign wars. Closing bases overseas will help you keep your promise that, "I'm not going to start wars, I'm going to stop wars." Bases abroad become a target for foreign adversaries and risk getting the country into unnecessary wars. Bases dotting the globe also make war look like an easy solution for those in the Military Industrial Complex who, as you have said, "want to go to war all the time."⁸ Closing bases abroad will allow you to bring troops home and reposition our military in locations that are actually essential to U.S. interests.

2. Overseas bases can increase military tension and cause blowback. Rather than deterring adversaries, U.S. bases can exacerbate regional tensions, as in Eastern Europe and the Pacific, leading to greater military spending and aggression. In the Middle East in particular, U.S. bases and troops have become focal points for violent threats, radicalization, and anti-American propaganda. Bases near Muslim holy sites in Saudi Arabia (where there are still U.S. bases) were a major recruiting tool for al-Qaeda.

3. Closing overseas bases will help "stop war profiteering" and "clean up... the Military Industrial Complex." You have rightly said that you will "carry out a much needed clean up of the Military Industrial Complex to stop the war profiteering and to always put America first."⁹ Maintaining unnecessary bases abroad enriches parts of the military industrial complex that are profiting off building and operating excess infrastructure abroad.

4. Overseas bases are increasingly unnecessary thanks to technological advancements. Because of advances in air and sealift and other military technology, the U.S. could retain the ability to deploy rapid response forces to any part of the globe with far fewer overseas bases. The development of extremely accurate intermediate- and long-range ballistic missiles also makes overseas bases vulnerable to attacks that are very difficult to defend against.

Beyond overseas bases, there are also many wasteful and unnecessary domestic bases that should be closed. While you begin the process of closing bases abroad, we encourage you to call on Congress to implement a long overdue Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, in which an independent commission helps select a list of bases to be realigned or closed in consultation with affected communities.¹⁰

⁶ The scale of savings can be seen in noting that closing unnecessary domestic bases has saved taxpayers an estimated \$12 billion on a recurring annual basis. Peter Potochney, "Statement Before the Senate Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies, FY2018," June 7, 2017, <https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/060617-Potochney-Testimony.pdf>.

⁷ See, e.g., David Vine, *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World* (Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2015).

⁸ "Trump Rally in Wisconsin," transcript, rev.com, September 7, 2024, <https://www.rev.com/transcripts/trump-rally-in-wisconsin>

⁹ "Trump Rally in Wisconsin."

¹⁰ The last BRAC was in 2005. Collectively, prior BRAC rounds save taxpayers around \$12 billion annually. Potochney, "Statement Before the Senate Appropriations Committee."

Given your administration's commitment to cutting waste and maximizing efficiency, you should direct the Pentagon to close wasteful, unnecessary bases abroad. Doing so could save billions of dollars annually while improving the security of the United States.

Sincerely,

Organizations

American Friends Service Committee
CODEPINK
Common Defense
Campaign for Peace, Disarmament and Common Security
Houston Peace and Justice Center
National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies
National Taxpayers Union
Peace Action
Prutehi Guåhan [Guam]
Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
RootsAction
Taxpayers for Common Sense
United for Peace and Justice
Veterans For Peace
War Prevention Initiative
Women Cross DMZ
Women for Genuine Security
World BEYOND War

Individuals

Ann Wright, Colonel, US Army (Ret.), Veterans For Peace
Catherine Lutz, Professor, Brown University
Coleen Rowley, Retired FBI agent, Eisenhower Media Network
C. Douglas Lummis, Discharged US Marine Corps as Captain; author, *War is Hell*
David Swanson, Author, Activist, World BEYOND War
David Vine, PhD, Author, *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*
Elaine Scarry, Cabot Professor of Aesthetics and General Theory of Value, Harvard University
Isa Arriola, Chair, Our Common Wealth 670
Jon Mitchell, *Okinawa Times*
Joseph Gerson, Executive Director, Campaign for Peace, Disarmament and Common Security
Karen Kwiatkowski, Lt Colonel, US Air Force (Ret.), Eisenhower Media Network
Lawrence B. Wilkerson, Colonel, US Army (Ret.), Eisenhower Media Network
Mark Selden, Emeritus Professor of History, Binghamton University
Matthew Hoh, Fellow, Eisenhower Media Network
Miriam Pemberton, Associate Fellow, Institute for Policy Studies
Norma Field, Ingersoll Distinguished Service Professor emerita, University of Chicago
Pat Elder, Director, Military Poisons
Pete Doktor, co-founder, Hawai'i Okinawa Alliance
Peter Kuznick, Professor/Director, Nuclear Studies Institute, American University
Satoko Oka Norimatsu, Director, Peace Philosophy Centre
Steve Rabson, US Army veteran, Brown University
Terry Lowman, Unitarian Universalists for a Just Economic Community
Tiara Naputi, Associate Professor, University of California Irvine
William J. Astore, Lt Colonel, US Air Force (Ret.), *Bracing Views*

cc: Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth
National Security Advisor Mike Waltz

Sen. Roger Wicker, Chair, Senate Committee on Armed Services
Sen. Jack Reed, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Armed Services Committee
Rep. Mike Rogers, Chair, House Committee on Armed Services
Rep. Adam Smith, Ranking Member, House Committee on Armed Services
Sen. Jim Risch, Chair, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Rep. Brian Mast, Chair, House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Rep. Gregory Meeks, Ranking Member, House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Sen. Susan Collins, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations
Sen. Patty Murray, Vice-Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations
Rep. Tom Cole, Chair, House Committee on Appropriations
Rep. Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations

LIST OF COUNTRIES HOSTING U.S. BASES ABROAD¹¹

ARUBA (Netherlands)
ASCENSION ISLAND (UK)
AUSTRALIA
BAHAMAS
BAHRAIN
BELGIUM
BOTSWANA
BULGARIA
BURKINA FASO
CAMEROON
CANADA
CHAD
CHILE
COLOMBIA
COSTA RICA
CUBA (Guantánamo Bay)
CURAÇAO (Netherlands)
CYPRUS
DENMARK(?)¹²
DIEGO GARCIA (Mauritius)
DJIBOUTI
EGYPT
EL SALVADOR
ESTONIA
FINLAND(?)
GABON
GEORGIA

¹¹ This list is derived from the list in Vine et al., “Drawdown,” updated with the Pentagon’s most recent (FY2024) “Base Structure Report” and news reports. Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Energy, Installations, and Environment, “FY2024 Base Structure Report,” Washington, DC, September 20, 2024.

¹² (?) indicates countries where the U.S. has an agreement to station troops but where a U.S. base presence is unconfirmed.

GERMANY
GHANA
GREECE
GREENLAND (Denmark)
HONDURAS
HUNGARY
ICELAND
IRAQ
IRELAND
ISRAEL
ITALY
JAPAN
JORDAN
KENYA
KOREA, REPUBLIC OF
KOSOVO
KUWAIT
LATVIA
LITHUANIA
LUXEMBOURG
MALI
MARSHALL ISLANDS
NETHERLANDS
NORWAY
OMAN
PALAU
PANAMA
PAPUA NEW GUINEA
PERU
PHILIPPINES
POLAND
PORTUGAL
QATAR
ROMANIA
SAUDI ARABIA
SENEGAL
SINGAPORE
SLOVAKIA
SOMALIA
SPAIN
SURINAME
SWEDEN(?)
SYRIA
TAIWAN(?)
THAILAND
TURKEY
UGANDA
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

UNITED KINGDOM