

PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee Duncan Hunter, Chairman

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OPENING REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN DUNCAN HUNTER

Full Committee Hearing on Future U.S. Military Force Structure in Europe

Today, the committee meets to receive testimony on options for U.S. military force structure in Europe.

It is a pleasure to welcome our witnesses today:

- General Montgomery Meigs, USA (Ret), former Commanding General, U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army,
- Dr. Fredrick Kagan, Associate Professor of History at West Point, and
- Mr. Thomas Donnelly, Resident Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

Today we begin the debate on the future of our military force structure in Europe. The idea of altering our force mix and basing arrangements in Europe to meet new strategic realities is not new. The 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) outlined the general concept of developing a basing system that provides the United States with greater flexibility. It specifically stated that we should look beyond Western Europe and Northeast Asia, and look to find bases that will allow us access to areas where future conflicts are likely to occur. The QDR went on to discuss the idea of using overseas bases as hubs for power projection, and tasked the Army with sending an Interim Brigade Combat Team to Europe by fiscal year 2007 to provide a more responsive force in the event of a crisis.

More recently, the new commanding general of the U.S. European Command, General James Jones, raised the issue reexamining our military posture in Europe. At a briefing to a visiting U.S. delegation to Europe, General Jones outlined his thoughts regarding a change in the nature of our presence in Europe from a garrison force to a more expeditionary force. Under this concept, U.S. troops would rotate overseas as a unit on a periodic basis rather than be permanently stationed in Europe. Our bases in Europe would become, in General Jones' words, "lily pads" - bases from which our forces would deploy to crisis areas around the world.

Needless to say, this or any similar concept would represent a fundamental shift in the way we look at our security arrangements in Europe.

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Either way, for a variety of reasons, I believe the time has come to consider these issues. First, the threats to American interests today are radically different than they were when our forces were first stationed in Europe after World War II. At that time, our forces in Germany were there to prevent the Soviet Union from invading Western Europe through the Fulda Gap. Today, with Western Europe secure and at peace, our forces in Germany no longer are there to defend Germany, but instead forward deploy to the Balkans and the Middle East in response to requirements in those areas of operation.

Second, the nature of the NATO alliance has changed. Today, the alliance has expanded, allowing former Warsaw Pact nations to join NATO and be part of the new security framework in Europe. With this expanded NATO, the United States may have the opportunity to base its forces in new locations – locations that are closer to potential crisis areas and that could provide lower training and deployment costs. In the same way that basing our forces in Germany after World War II helped bring peace and security to Western Europe, so moving our forces east and south may allow Eastern Europe to share in the prosperity of the West.

Finally, our military is in an era of change. Both at the Department of Defense and here on Capitol Hill, we are looking at new ways of providing for the national defense. As we prepare for a possible base closure round in 2005, it is only right that our overseas bases, including those in Germany, receive an examination based on mission and cost and thus get the same scrutiny as military bases within the United States.

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