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History of U.S. Troop Deployments, 1950-2023

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This paper presents and analyzes a unified dataset of annual U.S. troop deployments from 1950 to 2023. The global deployment of millions of U.S. troops has been the defining factor in international affairs for over 100 years, arguably more important than nuclear weapons and treaty alliances. The actual number of permanently deployed troops based in foreign nations has been trending downward over the short, medium, and long term, and is on a trajectory to zero before mid-century. This dataset, available online at www.UStroopdeployments.com, offers new insights on theories of hegemony, unipolarity, and durability. The roots of American engagement are traced to presidential decisions early in the Cold War, particularly the Truman and Eisenhower doctrines that introduced the permanent basing of U.S. combat forces on allied soil.

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1. Introduction

The global deployment of millions of U.S. troops has been the defining factor in international affairs for over 100 years. The paper updates the earlier versions of the troop deployments dataset (Kane 2004, Kane 2016) across some two hundred countries and territories since 1950, documenting the geographic location of over thirty-four million United States military troops, including soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen. The paper also presents a historical summary of the foreign policy decisions by presidential administrations.

Basing troops abroad became a permanent commitment during the Truman administration. The wartime mobilizations overseen by President Roosevelt, in response to the attack on Pearl Harbor and subsequent entry of the United States into World War II in 1941, did not end when the war ended. Instead, President Truman ordered combat troops to remain in permanent bases throughout Japan and Germany during the immediate postwar occupation period, and also most notably in allied countries such as the United Kingdom, France, China, and the Philippines. Heavy drawdowns in the late 1940s were swiftly reversed in the early 1950s during the emergence of the so-called Cold War between Moscow and the West.

The nature of the worldwide American troop presence during the latter half of the 20th century was unlike anything before in history because these forces were deployed not as conquerors but as deterrents to another World War. As Secretary of State Colin Powell famously said of Americans' intentions, "the only land we ever asked for was enough land

to bury our dead.”² Regardless of the motivations or effects of this uniquely American presence, the absence of a scholarly literature concerning the scale, scope and duration of U.S. troop deployments means this defining feature of international affairs is largely taken for granted, which may explain the lack of awareness of the unambiguous pullback of America’s troop presence underway now.

A few surprising facts stand out in overviewing the dataset. First, troop presence has declined, decade by decade, since peaking in the 1950s. The decline is even more pronounced when considered relative to the world population. Also, the scope of deployments (i.e., the number of countries hosting some threshold level) has held relatively steady. The U.S. concentrated its foreign-based troops mostly in two regions during the 20th century – Western Europe and East Asia – and also heavily engaged in the Middle East during 2001-2021.

The U.S. rise to superpower status wasn’t accomplished in “a fit of absence of mind” to quote historian John Robert Seeley’s characterization of the British empire, but neither was it planned. The American people were traditionally comfortable as an isolated nation, free of entangling alliances and buffered from the Old World’s affairs by two vast oceans. The U.S. entry into World War I was reluctant, opposed by a majority of citizens who re-elected Woodrow Wilson, whose 1916 campaign slogan was “He kept us out of the war.” A quarter century later, the U.S. was similarly reluctant to enter World War II until the Japanese navy forced the decision with a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The conclusion of World War II might ultimately have led to another global pullback of U.S.

² From Powell’s comments at an MTV sponsored global forum. See CNN.com story archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20020220234413/http://www.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/02/15/powell.mtv/index.html> (accessed March 19, 2019).

forces but for decisions by President Harry Truman and his successor Dwight Eisenhower. This policy was supported intuitively by others in foreign policymaking roles who had fought in World War I only to see the promise of peace turn out to be fragile without an enforcement power.

An alternative and complementary explanation for the continued presence of U.S. forces in Europe is the singular expansion of Soviet control in Eastern Europe. The Soviet Union annexed western Ukraine in October of 1939 followed by the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in June of 1940 (Vardys 1966).³ After defeating Nazi Germany, the USSR went on to occupy East Germany, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Romania, establishing puppet regimes. Although President Truman initially drew down the number of American soldiers based in Europe during 1946-48, he led a bipartisan consensus during his second term (1949-53) to “protect and defend America’s closest allies—those of NATO—from Soviet political intimidation and to deter the Soviets from attempting to overrun Western Europe quickly through a military assault.”⁴

Asia was a different matter, and it seems unlikely the U.S. would have remained deeply engaged in the region outside of Japan. That basic stance changed when Mao’s communist revolution overtook China and North Korea’s fateful invasion of South Korea in June of 1950. Echoing that event forty years later, it seems unlikely the U.S. would have deployed so many troops to the Middle East absent Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in August of 1990. To be sure, there were other foreign invasions that were not met with a U.S.

³ V. Stanley Vardys, “How the Baltic Republics Fare in the Soviet Union,” *Foreign Affairs* (April 1966).

⁴ John R. Deni, “The Future of American Landpower: Does the Forward Presence Still Matter? The Case of the Army in Europe,” Strategic Studies Institute, October 2012: 3.
http://www.eur.army.mil/pdf/Deni_OCT2012.pdf (accessed July 15, 2015).

deployment response on the same scale, which only affirms the central role of individual presidents such as Harry Truman in 1950 and George H.W. Bush in 1990 rather than an overarching national strategy that led to the current global order.

The global scope of American military power has been described in many ways: hegemony, primacy, and unipolarity. Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlforth (2012)⁵ cover the nuances of the terminology well, and their term “Deep Engagement” that Joseph Nye coined in a 1995 article is an apt assessment of the way the foreign policy establishment envisioned America’s role.⁶ Scholars agree on the reality of deep engagement itself, despite differences in analyzing its effects. Even so, force posture to date has not been well measured. Although case studies of wars and other major events are well documented, a unified dataset accounting for U.S. troop deployments across all countries and years has been a missing link in studies of international security. The complex patterns and nuances of engagement remain poorly understood, with a focus on conflict that ignores the preponderance of cases where U.S. forces have been peacefully based for decades. In short, foreign policy has focused on the heat instead of the light – countless studies, essays, and books on Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq stand in contrast to the negligible attention given to countries where the U.S. maintained large-scale and long-term troop basing such as Belgium, Korea, Turkey, and Kuwait.

As for terminology, when Charles Krauthammer first described the new post-Soviet global order in a 1990 lecture as the “unipolar moment,” he also predicted that it would last

⁵ William Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security* 24, no.1 (Summer 1999): 5–41; Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, “Don’t Come Home, America: The Case against Retrenchment,” *International Security* 37, no. 3 (Winter 2012): 7-51

⁶ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “East Asian Security: The Case for Deep Engagement,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1995: 90-102.

for “another generation or so.”⁷ Can deep engagement – the deployment of hundreds of thousands of troops overseas – be maintained? More accurately, has it been maintained? Considering one region and one moment alone, Europe after 1990, Posen (2006) described the unique challenge of Western European states in the aftermath of the Cold War, noting, “Abandonment fears have always been present in transatlantic relations, but they assume new urgency.”⁸ Most experts recognize the theoretical cogency of this concern, but would likely express skepticism that the U.S. would really abandon NATO allies. Empirically, though, this dataset shows that abandonment is well underway. During the 1990s, the number of U.S. forces based permanently in Western Europe was reduced by more than half. Today, with fewer than 70,000 boots on European ground, American engagement is closer to one-fifth the Cold War presence. And whereas nine European nations once hosted a thousand or more U.S. soldiers and sailors, today only five pass that threshold.

This paper contributes to the understanding of U.S. foreign policy starting with a history of the deployment of U.S. service members abroad in section 2. In section 3, I present the most recent US Troop Deployments dataset. Section 4 analyzes global patterns in U.S. troop deployments and introduces different synthetic measures of foreign engagement. With the troop data as context, section 5 reviews some of the effects of the grand strategy of deep engagement. Section 6 concludes.

⁷ Charles R. Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1, 1990/91: 23-33.

⁸ Barry R. Posen, “European Union Security and Defense Policy: Response to Unipolarity?” *Security Studies* 15, no. 2 (August 2006): 149-186.

2. History

The United States deployed its soldiers on foreign soil a decade after its founding, landing in the Dominican Republic during the undeclared naval war with France in 1798 that ended two years later. During the 1800s, there were approximately eighty instances of troop deployments on foreign soil, though most of these were small, temporary actions to protect U.S. citizens living abroad or to fight pirates and privateers.⁹ For example, American land forces were in Egypt for less than a week in mid-July of 1882 to protect American interests during a conflict between British troops and Egyptians. The first major overseas U.S. deployment was a three year mobilization to the Philippine Islands in 1899, immediately following the Spanish-American War.

Historical records show frequent American incursions in Colombia, Honduras, Cuba, and Nicaragua during the decades before World War II, but also in China. No other nation saw as many sporadic landings of U.S. forces during the 19th century than China, first in 1843 during a clash in Canton, then again in 1854, 1855, 1856, 1859, 1866, 1894-95, 1898-99, 1900, 1911, and then continuously after 1912. These actions were based on treaties with China dating back to 1858. As an example, in 1927, the U.S. had “5,670 troops ashore in China and 44 naval vessels in its waters.”¹⁰ Following Japan’s defeat in 1945, 50,000 U.S. Marines were sent to assist the Chinese Nationalists, in addition to 60,000 troops already in the country.

Deployments have never been limited to war, contrary to conventional wisdom. There have been only five wars declared by the U.S. Congress, against just eleven

⁹ Congressional Research Service, *Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad, 1798-2018*, CRS Report R42739, dated December 28, 2018.

¹⁰ CRS, p8.

countries, including twice against Germany and twice against Hungary. Since 1945, foreign deployments have been directed by various presidents with congressional authorization in a handful of undeclared wars (e.g., Vietnam from 1964-1973, ex-Yugoslavian countries during the mid-1990s, and Post-9/11 conflicts from 2001-2021) and in one instance under the United Nations in the Korean War from 1950-1953.

The commitment of troops in conflict is dwarfed by the scale of troop commitments to allied countries in peacetime. The status quo of the modern American global force posture begs two questions: How did it begin and What was the purpose? Although historical momentum may explain the longevity of peacetime overseas deployments, that only makes the decisions early in the Cold War more significant. It was Truman who broke the isolationist momentum of the early 20th century and Eisenhower who affirmed the new direction. As for the purpose, most Americans probably agree with sentiments expressed by then-Secretary of State Colin Powell that the purpose was to “put down oppression” as he said during a television appearance in 2002:

We have sent men and women from the armed forces of the United States to other parts of the world throughout the past century to put down oppression. We defeated Fascism. We defeated Communism. We saved Europe in World War I and World War II. We were willing to do it, glad to do it. We went to Korea. We went to Vietnam. All in the interest of preserving the rights of people. And when all those conflicts were over, what did we do? Did we stay and conquer? Did we say, ‘Okay, we defeated Germany. Now Germany belongs to us? We defeated Japan, so Japan belongs to us’? No. What did we do? We built them up. We gave them democratic systems which they have embraced totally to their soul. And did we ask for any land? No, the only land we ever asked for was enough land to bury our dead.¹¹

¹¹ Colin Powell, “Be Heard: An MTV Global Discussion,” February 14, 2002, in U.S. State Department archives, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2002/8038.htm> (accessed March 27, 2019).

History would have been written much differently without vast numbers of American soldiers stationed in South Korea for decades. In 1950, the Truman administration actually completed the total withdrawal of combat forces days before the North Koreans attacked across the 38th parallel (though there were 510 U.S. service members in the country as advisers to the South Korean Army). President Truman might well have simply allowed the attack to succeed. Seoul and the southern half of the Korean peninsula were undeveloped and strategically unimportant, according to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a 1947 assessment. And in January of 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson announced publicly that the United States would not provide military protection going forward because South Korea was “outside the defensive perimeter” of the U.S., despite the communist takeover of mainland China months earlier.¹²

The seminal moment that changed the nature of American policy was President Truman’s decision to redeploy American combat forces to the Korean peninsula one week after Pyongyang’s surprise attack. Further, he made that commitment while rallying international consensus and sanction by the United Nations. Ultimately, the new communist government of China entered the war on the side of the North Koreans and nearly wiped out U.N. forces. Three years later, nearly 34,000 U.S. service members had died as a result, as well as 47,000 soldiers from the Republic of Korea, and an estimated one million North Koreans and Chinese soldiers. An armistice on July 27, 1953 ended the fighting, following roughly a year of negotiations that newly-elected President Dwight Eisenhower pushed to a conclusion. The incoming administration, notably John Foster

¹² Colonel Tommy Mize, “U.S. Army, U.S. Troops Stations in South Korea, Anachronistic?” USAWC Strategy Research Project, 12 March 2012.

Dulles, “favored disengagement from Korea.”¹³ But they did not favor complete withdrawal by any means, rather it was an honorable truce they were after, even threatening the use of tactical nuclear artillery on mainland China to nudge a formal agreement. Troop deployments to South Korea dropped only slightly -- 326,863 in 1953 to 225,590 in 1954 then to 75,328 in 1955. In other words, Eisenhower kept the bulk of forces in the country for more than a full year after the armistice.

The Korean War is probably the most consequential conflict of the century as a matter of an escalation avoided. The powerful and charismatic U.S. Army General Douglas MacArthur made every effort to invade China, even encouraging the Truman administration to utilize the nuclear arsenal. Truman sacked him as part of his successful effort to limit the conflict. Likewise, President Eisenhower made efforts to avoid outright conflict during the early decades of the Cold War. Instances of sporadic troop deployments that were so common before 1941 were conspicuously uncommon during the eight years Eisenhower was in the White House. The reason is that Eisenhower carefully navigated the Cold War to avoid conflict while establishing a firm commitment to allies by stationing large numbers of troops already in place, even airlifting supplies into allied sections of Berlin, which was in the heart of East Germany when the communists restricted ground transportation and resupply.

Historians characterize the Eisenhower foreign policy by the “New Look” of 1953 which emphasized defense cutbacks against Cold War commitments, meaning in practice a cost-effective shift to nuclear deterrence instead of a large, conventional army. Announced in October 1953, the New Look was implemented as a million-man reduction of active

¹³ Max Hasting, *The Korean War*, Simon and Schuster, New York: 1987.

duty force strength from 3.5 million when the policy was announced to 2.5 million in 1960. This consensus view is overly simple. U.S. deployments abroad were never lower than 550,000 during the Eisenhower administration, and troop levels were increased significantly in many countries. Perhaps more important than the New Look was the Eisenhower Doctrine, though infrequently cited today, which in fact cemented the policy of permanently forward-deploying American manpower. Formally announced in an address to Congress on January 5, 1957 after the President's election to a second term, the Eisenhower Doctrine singled out the need to counter Soviet influence in the Middle East as its purpose.¹⁴ Overlooked is the distinct emphasis Eisenhower made on extending his predecessor's core doctrinal principle to this new region:

*It is nothing new for the President and the Congress to join to recognize that the national integrity of other free nations is directly related to our own security. We have joined to create and support the security system of the United Nations. We have reinforced the collective security system of the United Nations by a series of collective defense arrangements. **Today we have security treaties with 42 other nations which recognize that our peace and security are intertwined.** We have joined to take decisive action in relation to Greece and Turkey and in relation to Taiwan.*

Thus, the United States through the joint action of the President and the Congress, or, in the case of treaties, the Senate, has manifested in many endangered areas its purpose to support free and independent governments—and peace—against external menace, notably the menace of International Communism. Thereby we have helped to maintain peace and security during a period of great danger. It is now essential that the United States should manifest through joint action of the President and the Congress our determination to assist those nations of the Mid East area, which desire that assistance.

...
The occasion has come for us to manifest again our national unity in support of freedom and to show our deep respect for the rights and

¹⁴ U.S. State Department's Office of the Historian. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/eisenhower-doctrine> (accessed March 25, 2019).

*independence of every nation—however great, however small.*¹⁵ (bold emphasis added)

A few years later, those principles were echoed during John Kennedy’s inaugural “pay any price, bear any burden” commitment to the “freedom of man” in every nation. But the Eisenhower Doctrine, unlike so many other presidential doctrines, was affirmed with a congressional vote soon after his speech. Although the doctrine was issued and is remembered in the context of the Middle East at a time when the colonial influence of Britain and France waned, it is better understood as an extension of Eisenhower’s fundamental principle already embodied in permanent bases throughout the globe. Moreover, it was an extension of the principles of America’s support for all free countries expressed in the Truman Doctrine.

Speaking to a joint session of Congress on March 12, 1947, President Harry Truman called attention to the duress of Greece and Turkey in the face of Soviet-funded communist terrorism. Although his remarks called primarily for \$400 million in assistance, it also mentioned military personnel. The speech established the universal principles that profoundly changed foreign affairs from that moment forward.

I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.

I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.

I believe that our help should be primarily through economic and financial aid which is essential to economic stability and orderly political processes.

...

¹⁵ President Dwight Eisenhower, address to the Congress on January 5, 1957, transcribed by the Miller Center, University of Virginia. <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/january-5-1957-eisenhower-doctrine> (accessed March 20, 2019).

*In addition to funds, I ask the Congress to authorize the detail of American civilian and military personnel to Greece and Turkey, at the request of those countries, to assist in the tasks of reconstruction, and for the purpose of supervising the use of such financial and material assistance as may be furnished. (emphasis added)*¹⁶

According to the State Department’s Historian, “The Truman Doctrine effectively reoriented U.S. foreign policy, away from its usual stance of withdrawal from regional conflicts not directly involving the United States, to one of possible intervention in far away conflicts.”¹⁷ But it was actually Eisenhower who leveraged the doctrine from primarily economic assistance into a larger, more permanent military presence. Consider that in 1952, at the end of Truman’s presidency, there were 745 U.S. troops stationed in Turkey and 521 in Greece. In 1960, the end of Eisenhower’s time, those numbers had risen to 7,454 in Turkey and 1,976 in Greece.

Treaty commitments are another vital explanatory factor for the permanent presence of American forces abroad. The U.S. and South Korea entered into a Mutual Defense Treaty just two months after the 1953 armistice, mirroring the treaty obligations the United States had made to NATO allies immediately after World War II. Then in September of 1954, the United States entered into SEATO (South East Asian Treaty Organization) with seven nations – Thailand, the Philippines, Pakistan, as well as a few countries outside the region but including the United Kingdom with its local territories – in order to block communist expansion. In December of the same year, Eisenhower signed a mutual defense pact with Taiwan.

¹⁶ President Harry Truman, address to a joint session of Congress, March 12, 1947. <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/march-12-1947-truman-doctrine> (accessed March 21, 2019).

¹⁷ See <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/truman-doctrine> (accessed March 21, 2019).

Hastings Ismay, Secretary General, purportedly said that the purpose of NATO was “to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.” It worked, but perhaps not the way the British tended to think of “down.” West Germany was not only included in the countries given financial support through the Marshall Plan’s rebuilding effort in the wake of the Second World War, but its economy boomed under the security umbrella provided by NATO. Germany was half the strength of Great Britain in 1950 comparing per capita GDP, but equal in 1970, and notably wealthier by 5 percentage points in the half century thereafter. But those are just relative numbers. Over the past seventy years, a time when U.S. forces blanketed Western Europe, the United Kingdom’s real income per person has quadrupled.¹⁸ This climate of economic prosperity has not locked in U.S. forces. France hosted more than 40,000 American combat soldiers until an abrupt drawdown in the mid-1960s. Italy, in contrast, hosted an average of 11,000 U.S. troops for decades and continues to still.

Basing troops on foreign soil has become ingrained in the U.S. modus operandi. Americans take for granted how unusual it is for one nation to peacefully maintain tens of thousands of soldiers, sailors, and armaments inside the border of another nation, but are stunned by news that a pair of Russian bombers landed at an airfield in Venezuela or that China is developing a blue-water navy. At the same time, the U.S. foreign policy culture has tended to resist abrupt base closings and drawdowns, with the notable exception of the “peace dividend” during the presidency of Bill Clinton that began one year after the Soviet Union dissolved.

¹⁸ Robert C. Feenstra, Robert Inklaar, Marcel P. Timmer (2015). The Next Generation of the Penn World Table. *American Economic Review*, 105(10), 3150-3182. URL <http://www.ggdc.net/pwt/>. (accessed June 2, 2015).

South Korea provides a case study of the challenges of drawing down. Years before his 1976 campaign for the presidency, Jimmy Carter was telling editorial boards and voters that he favored withdrawing all U.S. forces from South Korea, and further that he would begin doing so during his first year in the White House. On June 12, 1977, the Washington Post reported, “His original idea was to pull out all U.S. forces – ground and air – and to negotiate assurances from China and the Soviet Union that North Korea would not invade the south.”¹⁹ He quickly pivoted to pulling out only ground forces, and then to phasing the pullout out over a five-year period. Carter was out of office by then, and his successor shelved the withdrawal, increasing boots on the ground instead.

At the time, White House Press Secretary Jody Powell said that Carter’s decision stemmed from his “basic inclination to question the stationing of American troops overseas.”²⁰ Privately, Carter expressed worries about the “tripwire” role forward-deployed troops might play, forcing the U.S. into a war if China attacked, which is ironic given that the tripwire is a feature that cuts both ways and is essential to the deterrent role of boots on the ground. Nevertheless, Carter’s views were informed by a four-year education at Annapolis and many more as an officer in the U.S. Navy – he favored island bases more than continental bases, and felt the land war in Vietnam was a cautionary tale.

Seoul’s economic prowess was evident when President Carter’s term began. As Astri Suhrke and Charles Morrison explained in 1977, “Not only did [South Korea] have twice the population of her North Korean adversary and larger armed forces in terms of

¹⁹Don Oberdorfer, “Carter's Decision on Korea Traced Back to January, 1975,” Washington Post, June 12, 1977. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1977/06/12/carters-decision-on-korea-traced-back-to-january-1975/d21ffe33-35ac-4ef9-bcac-25b8fc999559/?utm_term=.e22614112b53 (accessed March 24, 2019).

²⁰ Ibid.

manpower, but her gross national product had been growing about twice as fast ... reaching US\$19.6 billion in 1975 compared to US\$7 billion for the North.”²¹ Yet the troop withdrawal plan was met with alarm in both Washington, D.C. circles and in Seoul. Senior Pentagon leaders were openly critical of the plan’s destabilizing effects, noting that it risked a replay of the events of 1949-50, pushed Seoul and Tokyo to nuclearize, and hurt America’s credibility as an ally. The authoritarian government of Park Chung Hee was at once hostile to the withdrawal and unsurprised. The United States was by far the country’s closest ally, yet Park’s increasing authoritarianism was increasingly corrosive to the bilateral relationship. In late July of 1977, the Carter administration announced an agreement to keep 7,000 Air Force personnel and 4,000 logistics troops in Korea indefinitely, while keeping most of the ground combat forces there until 1982.²²

The economic strength of South Korea today dwarfs the failed communist regime of Pyongyang, a fact that motivates many critics who argue the U.S. presence is no longer necessary. However, the government in Seoul paid \$830 million dollars per year to support the costs of 28,500 U.S. troops, nearly half the total cost. The two countries agreed to new terms in February of 2019, in which Seoul increased its annual commitment to \$924 million.²³ In sum, the case of South Korea showcases both sides of the engagement question: a successful proof of mutually beneficial U.S. forward deployment that brought peace and prosperity so decisive that it may no longer be needed, but also if ended may put the peace and prosperity at risk.

²¹ Astri Suhrke and Charles Morrison, “Carter and Korea: the difficulties of disengagement,” *The World Today*, Vol. 33, No. 10 (Oct. 1977), p. 366-375.

²² Bernard Weinraub, “U.S. Will Keep Bulk of Combat Forces in Korea until 1982,” *New York Times*, July 27, 1977. <https://nyti.ms/1XW4Vz0> (accessed February 5, 2019).

²³ Kim, Hyung-Jin, “S. Korea, US sign deal on Seoul paying more for US military,” *Associated Press*, March 8, 2019. <https://www.apnews.com/78b6132e4a574b3489f5660ecec72bd3> (accessed March 26, 2019).

3. Data

This paper accompanies the publication of a comprehensive dataset that accounts for all annual U.S. troop deployments to over 200 countries and territories from 1950-2023. It extends earlier papers, focusing on counts of “boots on the ground” of uniformed service members from the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps.²⁴ The definition of a “troop” here is the same used by the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD): a single individual in a foreign country during a given year. For decades, the DoD tasked one of its offices to publish a global count of all countries where troops are based. Although the DoD office in charge of the data’s publication changed a number of times, and the formatting of the report evolved, the basic definition remained the same: Country Z in year Y is reported to have X American troops. This accounting was essentially a snapshot in time, usually on September 1 of the year. The count includes troops based permanently in

²⁴ The original dataset was compiled in Tim Kane, “Global U.S. Troop Deployment, 1950-2003, Center for Data Analysis Report 04-11, The Heritage Foundation, October 27, 2004. That dataset has been cited in numerous papers, including Glen Biglasier and Karl DeRouen, Jr., “Following the Flag: Troop Deployments and U.S. Foreign Direct Investment,” *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (December 2007): 835-54; Alex Braithwaite, Jeffrey Kucik. (2017) Does the Presence of Foreign Troops Affect Stability in the Host Country? *Foreign Policy Analysis*; Alex Braithwaite (2015), “Transnational Terrorism as an Unintended Consequence of a Military Footprint,” *Security Studies*, 24:2: 349-75; Jo Jakobsen, Tor G. Jakobsen. (2019) Tripwires and free-riders: Do forward-deployed U.S. troops reduce the willingness of host-country citizens to fight for their country? *Contemporary Security Policy* 40:2, pages 135-164; Claudia J. Kim. (2018) Bases That Leave: Consequences of US Base Closures and Realignments in South Korea. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 48:2, pages 339-357; Michael A. Allen, Michael E. Flynn, Julie VanDusky-Allen. (2017) Regions of Hierarchy and Security: US Troop Deployments, Spatial Relations, and Defense Burdens. *International Interactions* 43:3, pages 397-423. Uk Heo, Min Ye. (2019) U.S. Military Deployment and Host-Nation Economic Growth. *Armed Forces & Society* 45:2, pages 234-267; Zhiyuan Wang, Hyunjin Youn. (2018) Locating the External Source of Enforceability: Alliances, Bilateral Investment Treaties, and Foreign Direct Investment. *Social Science Quarterly* 99:1, pages 80-96; Sam R. Bell, K. Chad Clay, Carla Martinez Machain. (2017) The Effect of US Troop Deployments on Human Rights. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61:10, pages 2020-2042; Christopher J. Coyne, Abigail R. Hall. (2014) The empire strikes back: Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, and the Robust Political Economy of empire. *The Review of Austrian Economics* 27:4, pages 359-385; Vincenzo Bove, Leandro Elia, Petros G. Sekeris. (2014) US Security Strategy and the Gains from Bilateral Trade. *Review of International Economics* 22:5, pages 863-885; Michael A. Allen, Julie VanDusky-Allen, Michael E. Flynn. (2014) The Localized and Spatial Effects of US Troop Deployments on Host-State Defense Spending. *Foreign Policy Analysis* 44.

the country and also troops deployed for expeditionary reasons. If a soldier is based in the country for five years, then that individual would be counted five times, once per year.

Pentagon records of U.S. troop deployments on a country-by-country basis exist as far back as 1950 and have been published annually by different offices ever since. The annual report was published by the Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (DIOR) from 1997 until 2011. Kane (2004) integrated the annual reports for the first time in a single spreadsheet by de-conflicting the different historical formats, definitions, and geopolitical shifts.²⁵ The difficulty of accurate accounting has increased because of a new opaqueness in annual reports, namely the practice of non-reporting deployment figures for countries involved in wartime operations including Iraq, Afghanistan, neighbors in the region, and even South Korea.

Reports for 1951 and 1952 are lost to history, either discarded by accident or never made public, therefore annual counts for those years are interpolated here from neighboring years. Another complication is that some annual records do not include the same list of countries, and this occurs for a variety of reasons – countries change names, balkanize, and so forth – requiring some effort to digitize and integrate the reports into a unified spreadsheet. Starting in 2012, the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) began publishing the same cross-country “boots on the ground” data in a quarterly report.²⁶ This paper’s integrated dataset includes the September quarterly count for each year.

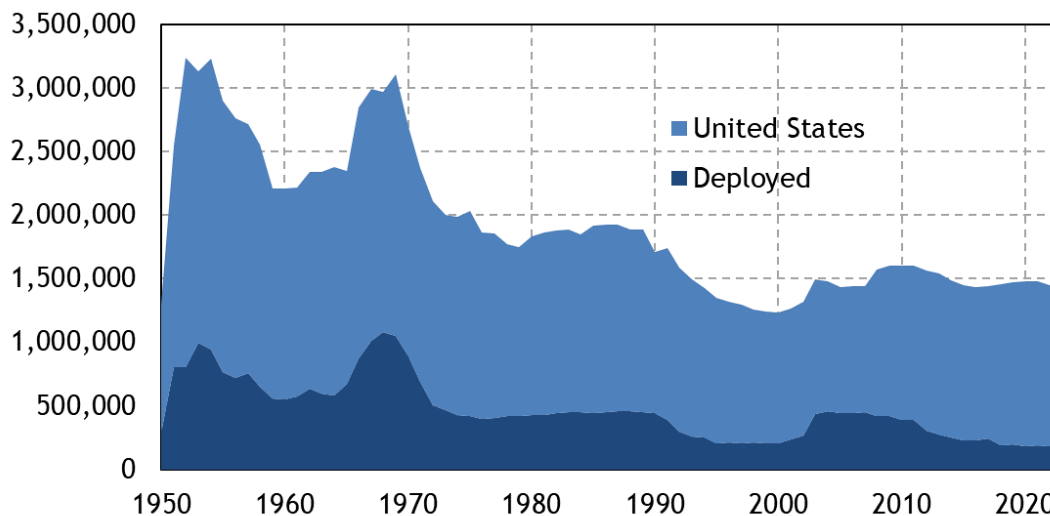
Reported troop levels in Middle Eastern countries are complicated and often opaque due to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Defense Manpower Data Center, “Active Duty Military Personnel by Service by Region/Country,” *Department of Defense*, (2008-2015).

Over the past two decades, many of the DMDC reports list zero/blank troop counts for Iraq, Afghanistan, and other OIF/OEF countries, as well as an inflated number of “undistributed” troop counts. I endeavored to supplement the raw files with more accurate counts from other official sources. Furthermore, the DMDC reporting format is revised frequently in the way countries are reported, the order of countries / regions, or the format of summary totals. For example, recent reports include data on military families (dependents) which were never included before, so a researcher needs to take care to distinguish total active duty forces for comparison across the years.

Figure 1. U.S. troop locations since 1950 (all branches)



Source: DOD data compiled by Tim Kane

While total troop levels continue to decline in the Middle East and neighboring countries, exact boots-on-the-ground measurements were difficult to collect. In response to Congressional interest, the Congressional Research Service published a number of insightful reports that detail country deployment counts with great accuracy. Notably, Belasco (2014) documents troop deployments by year and month for OIF/OEF countries.²⁷

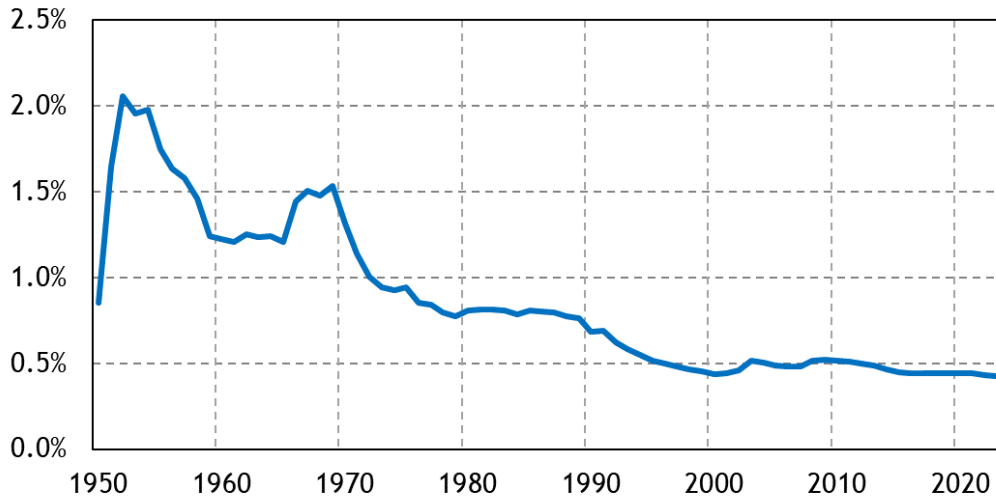
²⁷ Amy Belasco, “The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11,” *Congressional Research Service*, RL33110, (December 2014).

She found that troops deployed in support of OEF were based primarily in Afghanistan, but sizeable numbers were based in the Philippines and Kyrgyzstan, among a dozen other locations in the theater of operations. Likewise, Belasco identifies eight countries in addition to Iraq as bases for OIF troops, and a sizeable portion of troops that remain in the “Other” category, including classified locations as well as afloat (Navy vessels). By working with congressional staffers, I was able to compile a detailed annual count of boots on the ground in all OIF/OEF countries, although this alone did not completely clarify the matter. In most but not all cases, the congressional count was equal to or higher than the raw data, but in a few cases the public DMDC count was higher. I report the higher of two figures on a case by case basis.

Roughly 1.3 million men and women were in uniform in 2023, compared to 2 million in 1990 (the end of the Cold War) and 3 million in 1970 (the middle of the Vietnam War), as shown in figure 1. The figure shows that the total number of active duty service members doubled between 1950 and 1953, peaking at just over 3 million in the early 1950s and early 1970s, and drawing down gradually over the past four decades.

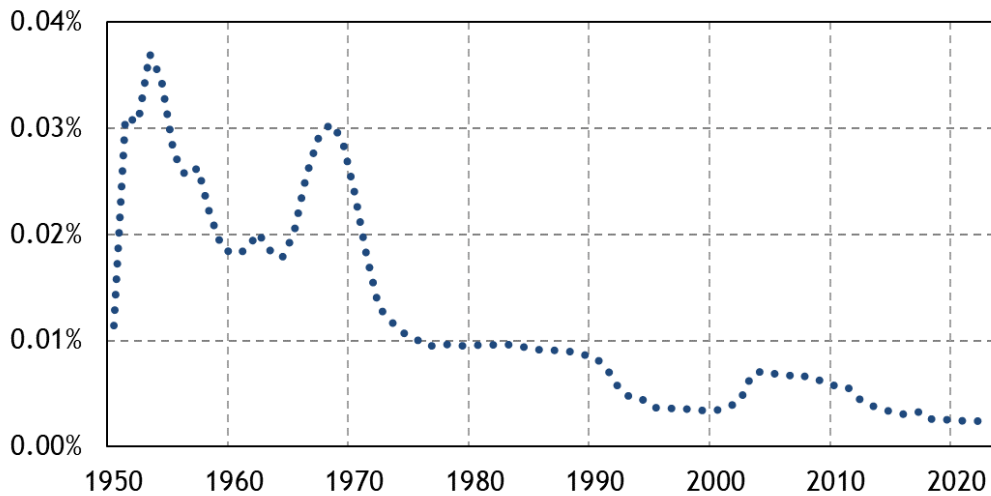
Two surprising facts about U.S. force posture in recent years stand out. First, the percentage of the U.S. population serving on active duty is lower today than at any time in the modern era, currently less than half of one percent. Second, today there are fewer deployed U.S. troops based overseas relative to the world population than at any time since 1950. See figures 2a and 2b.

Figure 2a. U.S. Troops relative to U.S. population



Source: DOD data compiled by Tim Kane

Figure 2b. U.S. Troops deployed relative to world population



Source: DOD data compiled by Tim Kane

These two facts establish an unmistakable long-term trend – the strategic withdrawal of U.S. forces from the world. Regardless of public impressions of heavy U.S. engagement, the downward trend seems beyond doubt.

4. Global Patterns in U.S. Troop Deployments

In 1950, there were 1.46 million active duty U.S. service members (not counting the Coast Guard, National Guard, or Reserves), nearly the same as the 1.22 million in 2023. The total active duty number varied tremendously during the intervening decades. Over one million U.S. troops were added to the ranks in 1951 alone. By 1953, the U.S. had 3.5 million troops on active duty, a peak that was matched only once since, during the Vietnam conflict in the late 1960s.

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the U.S. had maintained a relatively small force in Germany as well as countries allied with the U.S. during the war, including France, England, and others. However, the level of troops stationed permanently on European soil tripled during the 1950s as tensions between NATO and the Soviet Union intensified. In West Germany alone, there were roughly 250,000 U.S. forces stationed permanently until the Cold War ended in 1990. Despite the initial withdrawal and resurgence of America's military presence during the Truman administration, the conventional perception of an expanding hegemony in the academic literature is incorrect. Sasha Davis (2011) for example writes that "it suffices to say that there are very few places left on the globe (or in its orbit) that are deemed to be outside the interest and vision of American power."²⁸ While Davis and others in the related literature tend to focus on the multiplication of U.S. military bases abroad, observing that "the base network is an ever-shifting mosaic," they have neglected the aggregate decline in American boots abroad, even as the mosaic seems to expand.

²⁸ Sasha Davis, "The US military base network and contemporary colonialism: Power projection, resistance, and the quest for operational unilateralism," *Political Geography*, 2011, 30: 215-224.

Table 1. Average Annual U.S. Troop Deployments by Region

	1950-1963	1964-1973	1974-1992	1993-2001	2002-2021	2022-2023
Total Worldwide	2,549,674	2,580,730	1,849,863	1,320,380	1,489,307	1,421,612
Percent Abroad	27%	30%	23%	17%	21%	13%
Africa	1,031	1,721	277	1,158	2,482	1,023
Americas	35,086	23,189	15,705	10,691	2,164	1,778
Asia	287,293	450,686	106,093	79,091	76,672	81,627
Western Europe	343,033	291,962	292,135	105,555	72,022	64,816
Eastern Europe	83	57	114	9,477	1,267	592
Former Soviet Union	45	34	48	119	2,760	323
Middle East / N Africa	22,517	14,371	11,188	15,485	144,959	11,341

An overview of the force posture is presented in Table 1 and Figures 4 and 5. Table 1 shows the average annual number of troops based in each region of the world during six time periods. I divided the series at key points in recent history.

The first period 1950-1963 marked the peak number of forces in Europe, averaging nearly 350,000, and the peak number stationed in Latin America, averaging one-tenth that amount at 35,000. The second period 1964-73 covers the years of the Vietnam conflict, when there were 450,000 troops per year stationed in Asia, which is the highest for any region in any period.

During the third period 1974-1992 the war in Vietnam was over and the all-volunteer force (AVF) began. It was an era of stability in European troop levels, but a massive withdrawal of U.S. troops from Asia that could have been larger as the previous section discussed. This era covers the Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations, Soviet adventurism in Afghanistan, and the sudden demise of communism in all the nations of Eastern Europe. U.S. forces in Europe actually rose by 5 percent during this period, but it is remarkable that the Gulf War barely registers in this data. Why not? Amazingly, the massive invasion of Iraq in 1991 occurred after the September 1990 count,

but nearly all those troops were demobilized and sent back to their stateside and other overseas bases before the September 1991 report. During the “peace dividend” troops in Asia were drawn down by roughly 25,000. However, the Bosnia conflict and intervention also occurred during the Clinton presidency.

The next period, 2002 to 2021, immediately follows the 9/11 attacks which precipitated OEF and OIF. The most interesting pattern that runs counter to conventional wisdom is the decline in total forces worldwide (which includes the United States) after 2001. There were roughly 100,000 fewer active duty troops in the modern era after the 9/11 attacks than during the “peace dividend” era before. The Biden withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Middle East more broadly is reflected in the years from 2022 onward.

Figure 4. U.S. Troop Deployments, stacked by region

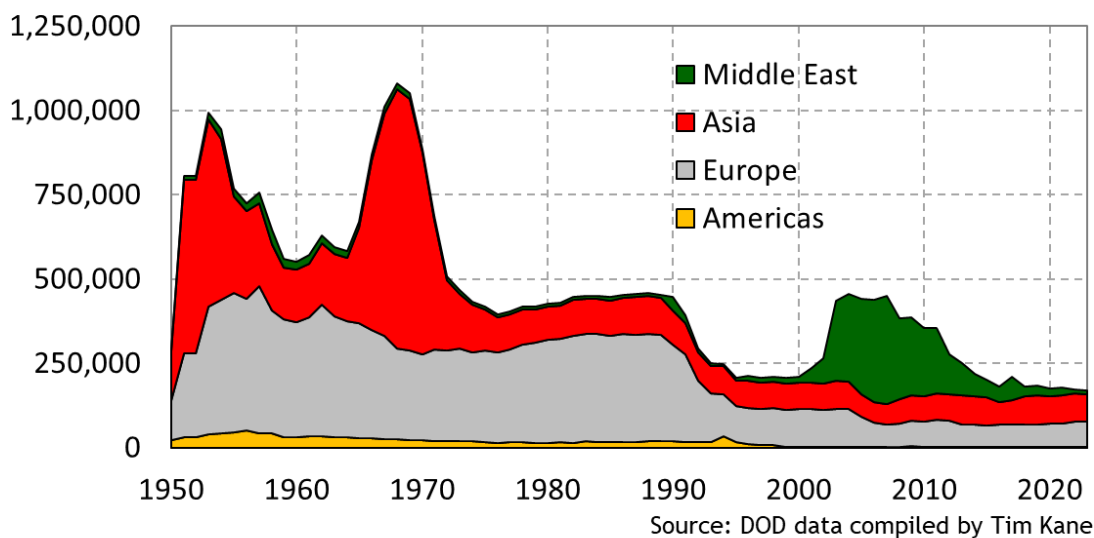
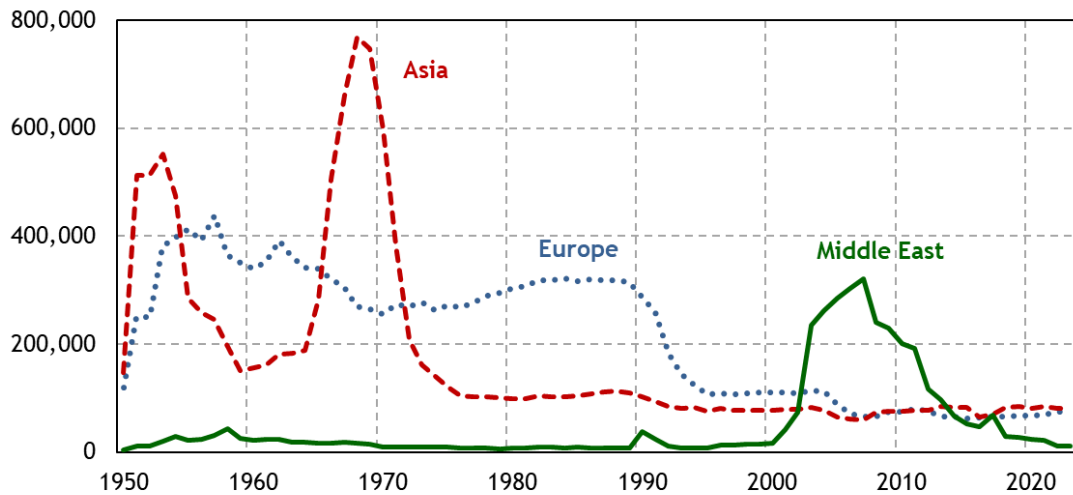


Figure 5. U.S. Troop Deployment, disaggregated, by region



Source: DOD data compiled by Tim Kane

Another surprise is how rapidly forces were withdrawn from the Middle East after 2010, midway through President Obama’s first term, shown in figure 4. There were 321,570 American forces deployed to Middle Eastern countries at the peak year in 2007. There were 100,000 fewer in 2011, and another 100,000 were withdrawn in 2012, leaving just 128,020 total.

Forward deployment of U.S. forces to NATO countries have been the norm since the 1950s. Only after the 1990 “peace dividend” and the end of the Cold War did a major reshaping occur. And the distribution of those troops among NATO allies was wide. Peak levels of permanently based U.S. service members among the 23 countries in Western Europe were 274,000 in Germany, 63,000 in the United Kingdom, 18,000 in Italy, 15,000 in Greece, 14,000 in Austria, 13,000 in Spain, 8,000 in Greenland, 6,000 in Portugal, 5,000 in Iceland, 4,000 in Holland, 3,500 in Belgium, 3,500 in Ireland, and 2,000 apiece in Denmark and Finland. France hosted more than 20,000 U.S. troops for nearly two decades, peaking at 72,000 in 1957, but abruptly terminated permanent basing in 1968. Today, deployments have remained sizable only in Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom.

There had been no major deployments of American forces in former Soviet and/or Eastern European countries until recent years. In 2019, it was widely known that the government of Poland “has lobbied hard for a permanent U.S. base and more ground troops, offering \$2 billion to help fund the idea.”²⁹ In total, 16 million U.S. troops have been deployed to Europe since 1950.

In Asia, a total of 13 million U.S. troops have been permanently deployed since 1950. Wars in Korea and Vietnam saw large spikes in deployments to the region. After 1974, U.S. troop levels in Asia were steady at just over 110,000 per year, mostly based in Japan, Korea, and the Philippines until 1992. No other nation hosted more than a thousand. Starting in 1993, U.S. force posture pivoted away from Asia as major bases were shuttered and the number of forces hosted permanently in the region was cut by a third. Two continents have seen almost no U.S. troops on permanent bases – South America and Africa.

The rise in “Undistributed” troops in the past decade is a new development in public data forthcoming from the Pentagon. In the past, this category was used for miscellaneous and unknown assignments. For example, it was common in the 1960s for official reports to account for 30,000 and sometimes more troops as “undistributed,” but most of those were categorized as “afloat.” Troops counted as undistributed “ashore” were routinely fewer than 100 until the post-9/11 era. During this most recent era, the average count has been 100,000 undistributed troops, which explains why so many OIF/OEF countries had zero counts.

²⁹ See JOHN VANDIVER, “US prepares for larger military presence in Poland,” *Stars and Stripes*, February 13, 2019. <https://www.stripes.com/news/us-prepares-for-larger-military-presence-in-poland-1.568458> (accessed March 11, 2019).

5. Rethinking Primacy

The global U.S. force posture shapes world affairs, all agree, but to what effect? As Braithwaite (2015) observes, “Little systematic empirical research exists to explain patterns in troop deployments. However, they are generally thought to play an important role in defining states’ deterrence capabilities and in preparing for and securing global economic interests.”³⁰ That may be the thinking among the foreign policymaking establishment, but a starkly negative view is common among the public, a view epitomized by David Vine’s *Base Nation* (2015), a critical examination of America’s “800 military bases” around the world.³¹ Vine’s book was reviewed in the *Washington Post* and featured on *National Public Radio*, echoing conventional wisdom of an expanding military footprint. Likewise, Cypher (2016) characterizes, “USA’s surging interventionist tendencies ... arising from the relentless pursuit of global militarism.”³² The wide and uncritical echo of this image of “American empire” is quite at odds with the historical presented here.

As for scholarly critics of foreign engagement, Posen (2014) extends a longstanding warning that a heavy U.S. military presence can produce negative attitudes.³³ While noting the positive relationship that was discovered by Biglasier and DeRouen (2007) between U.S. troop deployments, foreign direct investment, and trade flows, Braithwaite considers a particular negative response: the terrorist backlash. The invasions

³⁰ Alex Braithwaite (2015), “Transnational Terrorism as an Unintended Consequence of a Military Footprint,” *Security Studies*, 24:2: 349-75

³¹ David Vine, *Base Nation: How US Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World* (New York, New York: Henry Holt, (2015).

³² James M. Cypher, “Hegemony ...,” *Third World Quarterly*, 2016, Vol. 37, No. 5, 800-817.

³³ Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for US Grand Strategy*. Ithica: Cornell University Press (2014).

of Iraq and Afghanistan seem to have led directly to Islamic terrorism against the United States but also against coalition partners such as Spain, whose capital Madrid was attacked within nine months of its 2003 deployments. This important theory is supported by multiple case studies that the dataset illuminates. For example, Iran hosted hundreds of U.S. troops for decades up until its 1979 Revolution. In the three years before 1979 there were 1000 U.S. troops stationed in Iran, then an abrupt decline in 1979. A second example: The United States stationed roughly 400 troops in Saudi Arabia for decades until 1990 when the count swelled to 30,831 during the first Gulf War. Thousands of troops from all major services filled large, new bases throughout Saudi Arabia and stayed until 2004, when the Bush administration repositioned forces in other countries throughout the region. The 9/11 attacks were justified by Osama Bin Laden by the large American presence in his home country.

Braithwaite marshals some impressive econometric data to support his theory, and also recounts a surge of terrorism against the Soviet Union that closely followed its deployments to Afghanistan in the 1980s. He makes a similar, quantitative case concerning Philippine terrorism against the United States in the mid-1980s soon after a troop surge there. Or was there? That latter case is unconvincing in light of this paper's longer dataset, which shows U.S. forces in the Philippines were not on the rise in 1982, but rather steady since 1950 and stood at 13,387 in 1980. This isn't to say Braithwaite's theory is incorrect, only that this paper's new dataset will be helpful in exploring his and other theories about primacy/hegemony/unipolarity.

Troop presence in a foreign country is likely creating positive as well as negative impressions on the host country populace. A recent study of public opinion in 14 countries

hosting U.S. military personnel by Allen, Flynn, Machain and Stravers (2019) hypothesized that “in non-combat settings, U.S. personnel may in fact facilitate more supportive attitudes among the host population,” by, among other things, increasing U.S. soft power.³⁴ Deploying a 50-question survey of 1000+ local citizens in each country, the authors found significant, robust, and large positive relationships. The countries were diverse, including Austria, Belgium, Japan, Kuwait, the Philippines, and Turkey, among others. Consistently across each nation, people who experienced personal contact with U.S. troops were much more favorable in their “attitudes toward the U.S. military presence in their country” and “attitudes toward the U.S. people” but not, interestingly, in their “attitudes toward the U.S. government.” The marginal effect of direct contact is a 5-7 percentage point increase in positive attitudes toward the U.S. military presence. The seminal analysis of American unipolarity in the aftermath of the Soviet demise and before China’s rise to great power status comes from William Wohlforth (1999). He, along with other notable scholars such as Stephen Brooks, John Ikenberry, and Robert Kagan have argued forcefully that the U.S. grand strategy of deep engagement has been successful as a means of establishing a transnational environment for peace and prosperity.³⁵ An equal, if not greater, number of scholars believe the U.S. should retrench.

³⁴ MA Allen, ME Flynn, C Martinez Machain, A Stravers, “Outside the wire: US military deployments and public opinion in host states,” available at SSRN, January 14, 2019. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3326211 (accessed March 12, 2019).

³⁵ William Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security* 24, no.1 (Summer 1999): 5–41; Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, “Don’t Come Home, America: The Case against Retrenchment,” *International Security* 37, no. 3 (Winter 2012): 7-51; Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, “Lean forward: In defense of American engagement,” *Foreign Affairs* 92, (January/February 2013): 130; Robert Kagan, *The World America Made* (New York: Vintage books, 2013).

Critics such as Monteiro (2011) warn that American unipolarity actually makes conflict more likely,³⁶ a point directly countered by Terhalle (2011).³⁷

The majority of scholars do not judge American power in binary terms, but are keenly aware of that presence as the central fact of the global order (Selden 2013).³⁸ Even now, as calls for an increased troop presence in Poland grow louder (Breedlove and Vershbow 2018),³⁹ the durability of forward basing of U.S. troops is declining faster than either proponents and critics may realize.

6. Conclusion

With the publication of the global U.S. troop deployment dataset described in this paper, foreign policy scholars and policymakers have a new tool to understand the so-called American Century. By integrating inconsistent and divergent public files, the dataset offers an unparalleled perspective on where and when and how many U.S. boots were on foreign ground. A visual overview of summary data shows an outright decline that runs counter to conventional wisdom, but is made stark when projected forward using linear and nonlinear techniques. Not only is America's global footprint growing smaller in raw and per capita terms, but the size of the worldwide force is trending lower as well.

The downward trend begs the question: is a boot on the ground today equivalent to one in years past? Force projection today requires fewer people for at least three reasons.

³⁶ Nuno P. Monteiro, "Unrest Assured: Why Unipolarity Is Not Peaceful," *International Security* 36, no. 3 (Winter 2011/2012): 10.

³⁷ Maximilian Terhalle, "Is Unipolarity Peaceful?" *International Studies* 48, (2011): 317–324.

³⁸ Zachary Selden, "Balancing Against or Balancing With? The Spectrum of Alignment and the Endurance of American Hegemony," *Security Studies* 22, no. 2 (May 2013): 330-364.

³⁹ Philip Breedlove and Alexander Vershbow, "Permanent Deterrence: Enhancements to the US Military Presence in North Central Europe," Atlantic Council report, December 2018. at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/Permanent-Deterrence-Enhancements-to-the-US-Military-Presence-in-North-Central-Europe.pdf> (accessed March 28, 2019).

First, modern troops are more effective at delivering combat power. Economically, we would say that warfighting productivity has increased, and it has arguably increased by an order of magnitude since 1950. Second, logistics are better, meaning the Pentagon can mobilize and transport large numbers of troops to theater from stateside bases much faster. Indeed, the wartime experience after 9/11 has seen a dramatic logistics improvement, and this requires fewer warfighters to be forward based. Third, the Army and Marine Corps have restructured to be more agile for expeditionary purposes. This too requires fewer troops to be forward deployed, and in fact can be understood to require more troops to be domestically deployed.

The first shift, a new revolution in military affairs, is evident not only in the acceleration of combat power per soldier in terms of better armor, weaponry, and the like, but has to include the rapid adoption of remotely operated drones. Intelligence assets and airstrikes are not as labor-saving as the public may think, but the operating manpower is mostly rear-deployed to bases inside the United States itself. Furthermore, new modes of war, particularly cyber war as discussed by John Stone and others, involve a revolution that makes geography nearly irrelevant.⁴⁰ Crippling attacks can occur without any forward troops in the traditional sense.

My instinctive interpretation is that these three shifts have created an illusion of sorts. No one can deny that U.S. warfighting capabilities have been enhanced, but these are not equivalent to peacekeeping capabilities. In an economic sense, we need to distinguish between nominal troops and real troops, similar to how we account for nominal prices versus real (inflation-adjusted) prices. The nominal number of deployed troops is the raw

⁴⁰ John Stone, "Cyber War Will Take Place!" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36.1 (2013): 101-108.

number. An alternative real number of deployed troops would equal the nominal number times relevant force multipliers over time including technology, structure, and strategy.

A real troop measure recognizes that each soldier today is a more efficient (productive) warfighter than ever. This kind of real measure is useful for assessing conflict scenarios, from operations to tactics. However, it is less clear that such warfighting capacity is what deters conflict. How do states quantify commitment? In all seriousness, diplomatic and presidential “red lines” may or may not carry any weight at all. Indeed, potential foes likely consider a reduction of nominal U.S. troops in a region as the more accurate measure of U.S. commitment than either diplomatic statements of force multiplying technologies. This is presumably how the Russians view the withdrawal of over 80 percent of nominal U.S. troops from Europe since the Cold War peak, as well as the withdrawal of 99 percent from Iraq.

A similar objection is that uniformed troops have been increasingly supplemented if not displaced by contractors. Michael Zenko wrote in May 2015 that private contractors outnumbered U.S. troops stationed in Afghanistan by three to one.⁴¹ DoD reports the number of contractor fatalities outnumber troop fatalities by roughly two to one. And a Defense Science Board report in 2011 noted the increasing use of contractors in wartime operations in the past decade, although contractors of one kind or another have been employed in nearly all wars dating back to 1776.⁴² However, we must make a distinction between warfighting and peacekeeping on this issue in particular, because the use of contractors is heavily concentrated on wartime operations. The nominal level of deployed

⁴¹ Michael Zenko, “The New Unknown Soldiers of Afghanistan and Iraq” *Foreign Policy* (May 29, 2015), online at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/05/29/the-new-unknown-soldiers-of-afghanistan-and-iraq/>.

⁴² Defense Science Board, “Contractor Logistics in Support of Contingency Operations,” (June 2014) online at http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/CONLOG_Final_Report_17Jun14.pdf.

troops remains the correct measure for peacetime commitment to the defense of a foreign country.

Offering a rich opportunity for further study, the dataset poses as many new questions as it answers old ones. Why is there a downward trend in U.S. foreign engagement? The answer cannot be found by exploring this raw data series alone, and future studies should look to other explanatory variables such as defense budgets, the increasing costs of human resources, and the impact of war. Scholars might also find clues by examining shifts during historical junctures such as presidential administrations and major institutional changes in the services (e.g., the all-volunteer force in 1973). The data is likely to have some kind of relationship with host country defense spending and force posture. Although the level of deployed U.S. troops is much larger than levels from other countries, there is undoubtedly a rich interaction to be explored if deployment data for Soviet, English, French, and other nations' forces were compiled and contrasted with this one.

This new dataset offers a measure of America's level of engagement in foreign affairs that is potentially more relevant to questions of hegemony, unipolarity, and deterrence than measures of defense spending and alliances. Yet the data confirm a paradox in foreign affairs – an unambiguous downward trend in troops and troop deployments over time and a simultaneous increase in breadth of engagement across more nations and regions. Proponents and critics of U.S. foreign policy are likely to agree that the paradox represents an American appetite to guide world events that has not been matched by necessary resources to do so successfully. And yet, the real lesson may be an affirmation that foreign engagement is not a spectrum choice (let alone binary) of more

versus less, rather it may be an affirmation of different types of hegemonic presence (Rovner and Talmadge, 2014).⁴³

⁴³ Joshua Rovner and Caitlin Talmadge, "Hegemony, Force Posture, and the Provision of Public Goods: The Once and Future Role of Outside Powers in Securing Persian Gulf Oil," *Security Studies* 23 (August 2014): 548-581.

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