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Return Ticket from Fulda – Trends in US Military Basing Policy in Europe, 1989 to Present

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RETURN TICKET FROM FULDA

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1 INTRODUCTION: A GLOBAL WEB OF MILITARY BASES

«
Although the United States has long had some bases in foreign lands, this massive global deployment of military force was unknown in U.S. history before World War II (..) We probably have more bases in other people's lands than any other people, nation, or empire in world history.»

DAVID VINE (2015, P.11)

It is estimated that the United States currently operates around 800 military sites throughout the world. These range from grand military bases such as Ramstein Air Base in Germany to that of unstaffed weapons depos scattered across the globe (Vine 2015, pp14- 15, 86). As spelled out by (Kawana 2021, p.7), the establishment of military bases in foreign lands is not a new development, but dates to ancient times. The Roman Empire rapidly military bases in conquered territory as a means of consolidating their rule and as a staging ground for further conquest. From the age of discovery and onwards, the seafaring nations of France, Spain, England, Portugal and The Netherlands engaged in rivalry over the acquisition of overseas territories and bases. By the 19th century, the British Empire had established what Harkavy (2007, p.12) describes as the "*first truly global network of bases*". Across its vast colonial territories, the British maintained numerous naval ports, coaling stations and army assembly points. Nevertheless, as Harkavy (2007, p.13) outlines, the British Empire dwarfs in comparison to the contemporary global network of American military bases. Whereas the British military might had largely been restricted to its naval assets and often failed in exercising of land-power, the military power projection of the United States penetrates every ocean and every continent (Harkavy 2007, pp.12-13). Indeed, the US has military sites in in locations as diverse as Greenland, Djibouti, Australia and several former Soviet states. Combined with modern technology such as satellites recognizance, in-flight tanking and aircraft carries, this makes for a global military reach unparalleled in history (Harkavy 2007, pp.12-13).

In spite of the scale of the US overseas presence and its importance in projecting American influence globally, it is a somewhat underexplored theme in International Relations. As Yeo (2017, p.130) spells out, "Base Politics" as a scholarly domain first really emerged in the 1990s and the literature on the topic still seems rather thin. For an academic field that is so concerned with issues of sovereignty and state

behavior, it seems rather strange that so few scholars have investigated the matter. While bases have indeed been included in IR scholarship when examining security issues, they have as Kawana & Takashi (2021, p.2) argues often been reduced to subsets of related research topics. In a sense, they are treated as effects, not causes, of larger issues in international relations. This seems strange, given that military bases have been central to international disputes in their own right. When Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, it can in part be seen in connection with Russian fears of losing their strategically important Naval Base in the port city of Sevastopol. In a related sense, one of the demands posed by the Putin regime prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was the withdrawal of foreign troops and bases from countries of joined NATO after 1997.

As for this thesis, it was very much conceived out of a generalized sense of curiosity about US military bases abroad. In part, this was spurred on by a sense that their existence seems violate some of the principles of dominant IR theories. For instance, for a school of thought such as realism that is so adamant that states seek independence and sovereignty, and that other states cannot be trusted, it seems rather strange that many countries have voluntary allowed a foreign power military bases on its soil (Diez et al 2010, p.57). On the other hand, if the liberal belief in moral principles and the conviction that international disputes can be resolved through peaceful arbitration holds true, why do so many states deem it necessary to host the bases of a military superpower? (Diez et al 2010, p.32). All in all, American base policy seemed an interesting, yet underexplored theme in international relations, hence the choice of topic.

As for the scope of this study, we shall dwell deeper into how the United States has restructured their web of military bases in Europe to deal with changes in the geopolitical landscape since the end of the Cold War. Specifically, we will investigate how developments such the fall of Soviet Union and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, the Gulf War and the conflicts in the Balkans in the 1990s, the War on Terror and a more aggressive Russia since the 2010s have impacted American base strategy.

This angle entails looking at which bases have been expanded, which new ones have been established and which bases have been closed. In a manner of speaking, the population of

my study is overseas American military bases, we will also examine other sources not directly related to military bases as such to connect these developments to changes in US foreign policy (Bryman 2012, p187). All the while, we shall make sense findings by looking at them through the context of three main theories, “Containment”, “Balance of Threat” and “The Empire by Invitation thesis respectively. With this as the backdrop, this thesis shall examine the following research question:

What are some of the main trends of how the United States has developed its network of military bases in Europe in line with geopolitical changes since 1989 until today?

In processes of answering this question, we shall also explore the following underlying question:

Why do sovereign European states allow the presence of US military bases on their soil?

1.1 What constitutes a base?

For the purposes of this paper, we first need to establish what we mean by the term "military base(s)". The Pentagon uses the term base site to include any "*Physical (geographic) location that is, or was owned by, leased to, or otherwise under the jurisdiction of a DoD Component on behalf of the United States*" (DoD 2018, p.4) In turn, they distinguish between three types of such facilities, the first of which is "Main operation operating bases" (MOBs). This refers to major and well-protected overseas bases hosting substantial numbers of permanent personnel, strong infrastructure and with "*robost sea and/or air access"* (Sun 2010, p.52). These sites often include family housing, schools and extensive leisure facilities, and due to their size and similar lifestyle to American towns are often dubbed "Little Americas" (Vine 2015, pp.78-81). Examples of such bases include Kadena Air Base in Japan and Ramstein Air Base in Germany, the latter the largest US overseas military base in the world (Vine 2015, p.78).

Next are so-called "Forward operating sites" (FOS). These are facilities with a limited American support presence intended to keep the facilities "warm" and often hold prepositioned equipment. Should the need arise, these bases are designed to be rapidly expandable, and they are also subject to rotational deployments (DoD 2004, p.10). An example of such a base is Sato Kano Air base in Honduras, which hosts a small contingent of US personnel, but rarely family members (DoD 2004, p10) (Vine 2017, p.78).

Third are "cooperative security locations" (CSL), often called "lilly pads" (Vine 2015, p.78) These are sites with little to no US troops and are often maintained by private contractors or the host nation to be used as a contingency site for the US military (DoD pp.10-11). These sites often kept secret, and commonly house drones and other prepositioned equipment (Vine 2015, p.78).

However, as to avoid any confusion, we will in this paper use David Vine´s (2015, p.15) definition of military base as "*any place, facility, or installation used regularly for military purposes of any kind*". Notably, this also includes sites that do not serve combat

roles, such as military hospitals, intelligence facilities and even military resorts (Vine 2015, pp.15-16).

1.2 Briefly about the origins of the US global basing complex

While there had been overseas US military sites before, Vine argues (2015, pp.38-39) that a considerable expansion in the US global basing complex took place during World War 2. He notes that this started with signing of the "Destroyers for Bases" agreement with the United Kingdom in 1940. In exchange for providing warships to Britain, the United States obtained permission to establish military bases in a range of British colonial possessions Vine (2015, pp.38-39). This set the stage for a significant growth in US military installations around the world. In 1938, the US had about 14 overseas bases. By 1945, this number was closer to 5000 (Kawana 2021, p.7).

The end of the war did not mean an end to the American overseas presence. Quite on the contrary, as Yeo & Pettyjohn (2021, p.25) argue, it signaled a major swift in American Defense Strategy. Even though American military planners and the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not identify any immediate threat to the US homeland, they devised a new doctrine that stipulated that US security hinges on maintaining a large network of bases to prevent any potential adversary of becoming too dominant in any region of the world. Thus, the strategy of "containment" was born (Yeo & Pettyjohn 2021, pp.25-26).

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Three theories on the drivers behind American basing policy since 1945: Containment, Balance of Threat and Empire by invitation

Scholars analyzing US basing policy in 2022 can build on decades of research and writing done by other academics in the field. As described above, the network of bases operated by the United States was expanded massively particularly in the years after the end of the Second World War (Yeo & Pettyjohn 2021, pp.25-26). What were the drivers behind this expansion and of the truly global network of bases that the US has sustained in changing forms up until today?

On that matter, this thesis theories relies on the theories in particular. The first is the "Containment theory", which in in its original form attributes the rationale behind extensive US basing network in Eurasia to the desire to contain the spread of communism and to halt Soviet military aggression (Croddy & Wirtz 2005, 72-74). Following the end of the Soviet Union, this thesis suggests that a degree of "residual" containment against a potentially resurgent Russia was still part of the motivation in maintaining such a relatively large basing network in Europe in the despite a substantial drawdown in the 1990s. In later years, in the wake the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Russia´s threatening actions in Eastern Europe, it is further argued that containment of Russia as a full-fledged military doctrine was reborn. In that relation, it is suggested that this in part explains the revamped US basing presence on the continent in recent years.

The second theory is the "Balance of Threat" thesis. It asserts that the traditional focus on balance of power is fundamentally flawed, and that countries balance against the most threatening states, not necessarily the most powerful ones (Walt 1985, pp.8-9). This can also to a degree help explain why the United States maintained such a large force posture in Europe in the 1990s despite Russia being much economically and military weaker. This brings us to a related point, namely that "balance of threat" and "containment" carries much of the same logic, and many aspects overlap one another. Nevertheless, they seem to have certain differences in some respects. For example, the balance of threat thesis seems

more open to “external balancing” by means of force on the territory of potential adversarial states, whereas containment could be interpreted as more defensive in nature (Levy 2004, p.35) (Croddy & Wirtz 2005, 72-74). In that respect, the extensive use of European Bases as springboards for military operations in the Balkans and in the Middle East from the 1990s and onward are interpreted in the context of the balance of threat thesis. Moreover, “the balance of threat” theory appears to provide more insight into why European states wish for the presence of US military bases on their soil. In short, the United States is by far the most powerful country in the world, but it is by no means the most threating for most countries in Europe. On the contrary, The United States is generally perceived to have quite benign intentions and hosting American bases can viewed as means of balancing against foreign aggression by European states. This in turn, touches on the third main theory employed in this paper, “The Empire by Invitation” hypothesis.

The Empire by Invitation thesis holds that the United States is different from most empires in that its military presence in Europe is there by consent or even explicit request from the states in which their stationed (Lundestad 1986, p.271).The theory suggests that the host countries view the presence of US military as desirable due to two main reasons, it a provides significant security guarantee against foreign aggression and often offers substantial economic benefits. Thus, throughout this paper, we will explore to which extent this is true.

In the next sections, the theories will be outlined in more depth more depth. They have been chosen since these three theories because they are among the more well-known, acknowledged and debated theories on in the field of global security.

2.2 Containment

Containment of communism as a general US foreign policy goal in the years after 1945 is well-established and relatively uncontroversial (Croddy & Wirtz 2005, p72). The birth of this American containment strategy has often been attributed to the American statesman and diplomat George F. Kennan (Croddy & Wirtz 2005, p72). Between 1944 and 1946, he had been the deputy head of the U.S. diplomatic mission to Moscow (Jespersen 2002, pp

ix-x). In his time there, he had grown increasingly worried about supposedly sinister Soviet post-war intensions. As a result, he wrote a diplomatic cable to Washington in 1946, later dubbed "The Long Telegram", in which he portrayed the Soviet Union as an aggressive, expansionist power in need of containment (Iatrides 2005, p.130). The cable of widely circulated in higher levels of government and was later described by presidential advisor Clark Clifford as "*probably the most important, and influential, message ever sent to Washington by an American diplomat*" (Iatrides 2005, p.126). Jespersen (2002, pp.xi-xii) asserts that its impact stems not primarily from what he wrote, but when he wrote it and to whom. In the wake WW2, the Truman administration viewed with growing concern the way the Soviets had set about installing communist governments in Eastern Europe (Iatrides 2005, p.128) Similarly, the presence of Soviet forces in North-East China and the Korean peninsula alarmed Washington. On that matter, Iatrides (2005, p.128) argues that the decision to drop the nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were in part intended as a show of force to deter the Soviets from becoming as aggressively expansionist in East-Asia as they have proven themselves in Europe. Thus, Kennan did not tell policy makers something they already did not know, but through his sharp and sometimes emotional language, he captured and articulated the suspicious sentiment that had been prevailing in Washington for some time (Jespersen 2002, xi). In doing so, Jespersen (2002, xv) argues, he provided the intellectual groundwork for the containment doctrine which would be pursued by subsequent administrations in the next four decades.

It is not without a sense of irony that George Kennan himself never envisaged containment as being a military doctrine (Croddy & Wirtz 2005, 72-74). For him, the Soviet Union and communism posted more of a political threat, one to be contained by propaganda and massive economic assistance (Croddy & Wirtz 2005, 72-74). In that respect, Kennan was key figure in instigating the Marshall Plan, which saw 12.3 billion USD worth of aid being directed to Western European countries between 1948 and 1951 (Holm 2017, pp.i, 43-52). However, he watched in dismay as his containment policy was interpreted by the Truman administration as a military doctrine, aimed at building a bulwark against the Soviet Union through military means (Croddy & Wirtz 2005,.72-74). As touched upon above, this line was continued by subsequent administrations.

As the Cold War began in the late 1940s, "containment" was largely focused on the Soviet Union (Yeo & Pettyjohn 2021, p.26). As such, a perimeter of bases was set up across the Eurasian continent, most notably in countries such as West Germany, Italy, Japan and South Korea. The rationale behind this move of "defending forward" was to establish a credible deterrent to Soviet expansionism in Europe and communist aggression in Asia (Yeo & Pettyjohn 2021, p.26). Meanwhile, as a means of securing international waterways, the also US established a noticeable presence in the Persian Gulf and the Asia-Pacific region (Kawana 2021, pp.7-8). All in all, these developments served to underline the US´s break from isolationism and its new role as a leader and superpower in the international community (Kawana 2021, pp.7-8).

2.3 Balance of Threat Theory

The "balance of threat" theory is the brainchild of Steven M. Walt. It was originally conceived in his 1985 piece, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power", as a supplement or modification of, the traditional "balance of power" theory within the neorealist school of thought (Walt 1985, pp.3-43).

There are many subbranches of the "balance of power" theory, but they all share the realist assumption that the key actors in international relations are states who that they exist in a state of anarchy (Levy 2004, p.31). Above all, their main purpose is self-preservation, and since there is no higher authority above the state, the only way they can ensure this is through the maximization of their own power (Levy 2004, p.31). This tendency to try to maximize their own power will necessarily provoke a response from other states, which is where the balancing comes in. In short, the "balance of power" approach presupposes that states will strive to make sure that not a single state does not become powerful enough to dominate all others (Walt 1985, p.5) The notion is not a new one, the ancient Greek historian Polybius once wrote that "*we should never contribute to the attainment of one by state of a power so preponderant, that none dare dispute with it even for their acknowledged rights*" (Levy 2004, p.32).

In simple terms, there are two ways a state can go about achieving this. The first route is to increase their own inherent power, what is known as "internal balancing". This entails

building up one´s own defense capabilities and laying economic and industrial foundations necessary for military strength (Levy 2004, p.35). The second option is known as external balancing, which usually involves the formation of alliances whereby states pool together their resources to counterweight the power of potential aggressors. External balancing can also involve offensive acts such as the threat of the use of force or even outright territorial acquisitions (Levy 2004, p.35).

When choosing whom to ally with, the balance of power thesis suggests that it is a risky strategy to ally with most the dominant state or collation, what is known as bandwagoning. This is because by joining as a junior partner, it adds relatively less in terms of strength to the alliance (Walt 1985, pp.5-6). The continued assistance of the more powerful allies depends solely on their continued benevolence, which somewhat ironically can leave it vulnerable to being dominated the major partner(s) in the coalition. By allying with the weaker side, however, the state may increase its own influence, since the other allies are more dependent on assistance (Walt 1985, pp.5-6).

However, if that holds true, how does that compute with the existence of American military bases in Europe and the fact that several countries are allied with what is generally recognized as the most powerful country in the world? This is where the balance of threat thesis comes in. Walt suggests that the sole focus on power when trying to understand balancing behavior is inherently flawed (Walt 1985, p.8) While power is indeed part of the calculation, it is by no means the most important factor in considering potential adversaries and allies. Instead, Walt (1985, pp.8-9) suggests that one does necessarily balance against the strongest power, but the most threatening one. In assessing the potential threat of a foreign power, Walt (1985, p.9) outlines four factors that states tend to consider. The first of which is “aggregate power”, which refers to total resources of a state (Walt 1985, p.9). This includes factors such as military capability, population, industrial capacity and level of technological development. The greater combined resources a state has, the greater a threat it may potentially pose (Walt 1985, p.9). The second is proximity. As projecting power becomes more difficult with distance, states nearby generally pose a greater threat than those on the other side of the world (Walt 1985, p.10). This is related to the third factor, namely offensive capability. Although

offensive capability tends to decline with distance, it can to various extents be compensated for through means such as large naval fleets, air-craft carriers and military bases abroad. This leaves us with the last and most important factor, offensive intent. Above all, states tend to balance against powers who they perceive to behave aggressively. The most prominent example of this is Germany in WW2, who was defeated by an uneasy alliance vastly superior in both aggregate power and offensive capability (Walt 1985, pp.9.12)

During the Cold War era, in which the American network of military bases in Europe saw the light of day, United States and the Soviet Union were both considered superpowers, yet as Walt (1985, p.35) himself spells out, the United States was superior in aggregate power vis a vis the Soviet Union. If aggregate power was the most important factor for who is considered a threat, one could then assume that more states would align with the Soviet Union, yet the opposite was the case (Walt 1985, p.35). This can in part be seen in connection with the geographic position of the Soviet Union, nearby or bordering many independent or nominally independent states in Europe. As the most powerful state on the Eurasian continent, this proximity potentially poses a grave threat to these countries (Walt 1985, p.36). The United States, on the other hand, was literally an ocean away. Thus, for the middle powers of Europe, the United States does not pose a threat by virtue of geographic proximity, yet it does hold sufficient offensive capability to contribute substantially to their defense (Walt 1985, p.36). In the words of Walt (1985, p.36) himself the United States is in that sense “the perfect ally”. This notion was reinforced by the perception that Soviet intensions were generally considered more aggressive and expansionistic than that of the United States. The Soviets had repeatedly intervened militarily in Eastern Europe, whereas the United States had displayed much more benign intentions (Walt 1985, pp.36-37). Consequently, the Soviet relationship with its neighbors was generally characterized by imperialism or hostility, with most being either satellite states or allies of the United States (Walt 1985, p.36).

2.4 An Empire by Invitation

An important distinction between the US overseas military bases and that of other great powers is that its presence largely rests on the consent of the states that host them. To make sense of this, Lundestad (1986, p.263) suggests that the United States is very much "*An Empire by Invitation*". As opposed to the Soviet presence in its sphere of influence, the American presence was largely welcomed by the local population of the states in which it harbored military bases, particularly in Western Europe (Lundestad 1986, pp.263-264). In the wake of World War 2, Britain had largely lost its great power status, and looked to set up a defense alliance in Western Europe backed by the United States. This push was supported by amongst others France, The Netherlands, and the Benelux countries. In that regard, Lundestad (1986, pp.270-271) makes the argument that the creation of NATO in 1949 was just as much a European initiative as it was an American one. In that regard, even traditionally neutral countries such as Denmark and Norway joined the alliance and allowed a limited American presence on their soil (Lundestad 1986, p.271). In Lundestad´s view (1986, pp.267-270), there were two main reasons for this. First, in the course of two world wars, the United States had proved themselves capable of protecting Western Europe from coming under hostile foreign control. Thus, somewhat ironically, security guarantees from the United States were seen as indispensable to European sovereignty (Lundestad 1986, p.267), Secondly, the other motivation was economic; the Europeans benefited greatly from being under the American defense umbrella. Instead of focusing on defense spending, the Europeans could concentrate their resources on growing their civilian economies (Lundestad 1986, pp. 274-275) Indeed, in the later era of the cold war, the economies of all America´s European allies except Britain grew faster than the United States itself. Of course, the Americans took note of this, and stressed to their allies should bear a larger part of the financial responsibility for maintaining their collective defense (Lundestad 1986, p.275). Interestingly, this remains a point of tension within the NATO alliance to this day.

3 METHODOLOGY

In this section, the methodical choices and considerations made in this thesis shall be outlined and explained.

3.1 Choice of Research Question

A research question is a statement or a question clarifying what the researcher wants to find out about a particular topic (Grønmo 2020, p.258-259). In its final form, it should accurately delimit and specify the scope of examination, clarifying what specific issues will be explored and discussed within the chosen field (Grønmo 2020, p.270). Commonly, however, one does not start out with a clear and sharpened research question, but rather out of a vague idea of what one finds interesting about the topic at hand (Bryman 2012, p.10)

To begin with, the research question was as follows "*What seems to be the main features of how the United States has developed its strategy of military bases outside the continental United States from 1989 until today?"*. This timeframe was chosen since the end of the cold war the marks the beginning of the most significant changes in the size and geographic orientation of the US network of military bases overseas since the end of World War 2 (Yeo & Pettyjohn 2021, p.29) However, after initial data collection and analysis, it soon became clear that examining American base strategy globally became too broad of a topic. Thus, the decision was made to narrow down the scope of examination to focus primarily on the European theatre. The choice of Europe was due to two considerations. First, the European continent is alongside the eastern Pacific the region of the world with the heaviest concentration of American military bases outside the continental United States (Vine 2015, pp.19-20). Second, Europe is arguably the region of the world that has seen the greatest changes in US basing policy since 1989 (Yeo & Pettyjohn 2021, pp.29-31). With that in mind, the main research question was reformulated to the current: "*What are some of the main trends of how the United States has developed its policy of military bases in Europe in line with geopolitical changes since 1989 until today?*". Moreover, in order to explore the apparent anomaly of sovereign European states willingly hosting foreign military bases, the following underlying research

question was added, "*What seems to be some of the reasons why sovereign European states allow the presence of US military bases on their soil?".*

3.2 Choosing a Research Strategy

The social sciences have traditionally distinguished between two main methodological approaches, qualitative and quantitative research (Bryman 2012, p.35). In simple terms, quantitative research is concerned with quantifiable data, often expressed as numbers, and is commonly used to measure the prevalence of a given phenomenon (Grønmo 2020, p.44). (Bryman 2012, pp.35-36). Qualitative research designs, on the other hand, are more concerned with texts and imagines, and are generally more constructivist and interpretivist in nature (Grønmo 2020, p.108) (Bryman 2012, p.380). Still, the two approaches are not opposing categories, but rather complementary to one another (Grønmo 2020, 57-60) In a sense, both qualitative and quantitative data exist on a continuum. In one end of the spectrum, you have purely metric data (Grønmo 2020, p.57-60). On our case, this could for instance be the number of American military bases in Europe and how their numbers change. Indeed, an important part of the research process have been to examine quantifiable data such as which bases have closed, and which new ones have been established since 1989. However, to set the numbers of bases is an interpretative process, as then again, what constitutes a base? This is where the qualitative element comes into play. Qualitative research, with its emphasis on words and images, tends to dwell deeper into understanding the how people interpret various phenomenon in the social world (Bryman 2012, p.36). In that respect, this paper aims to give more than a descriptive account of how the United States has restructured their network of military bases in a physical sense. Above all, it is an investigation into how the meaning ascribed to the US bases in Europe has changed over time in line with perceived changes in the social world, hence the focus on geopolitical developments. Furthermore, it is an attempt at understand some of the reasons why European states wish to host American military bases. Both these issues are hard to examine in depth using quantitative methods, hence this thesis is largely qualitative in nature, although some quantitative data is used.

Moreover, in terms of deductive and inductive theory, this study leans towards the latter (Bryman 2012, pp.25-27) It is deductive in the sense that the sense that it seeks to test how the three main theories, “Balance of Threat”, “Containment” and the “Empire by Invitation” thesis can help explain main trends in US basing policy in Europe within the chosen timeframe, and why European states allow US bases in their soil. However, it does not start out with a strict hypothesis, but rather a more open-ended stance, hence it also has a deductive quality (Bryman 2020, pp.25-27).

3.3 Data Collection and Method of Sampling.

A sampling strategy denote the method(s) that is used to select a segment of the population that falls within the scope of a study (Bryman 2012, p.187). By population, one means any unit of analysis that the research question applies to (Grønmo 2020, p.525). In terms of this study, that implies any source that has information pertaining to, or may be helpful in understanding, US basing policy in Europe from 1989 until today. Due to practical considerations, most of the data in this thesis comes from secondary sources. This, the information in this piece mainly derives from as books, journals and academic papers, in addition to articles from selected news outlets and websites of relevant organizations. Still, many primary sources have also been sampled, including public and declassified documents from NATO and various US agencies, as well as several government websites.

With that in mind, the main sampling approach used in this thesis has been a type of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a strategy in which the research does not sample cases on a random basis, but rather strategically choses which units in the population to include in the study (Bryman 2012, p.418) There are many variants of purposive sampling, one being theoretical sampling. In this approach, the researcher simultaneously codes and analyses data in order to decide what data to collect next (Bryman 2012, p.419). This study has drawn heavily on the logic of theoretical sampling, but deviates in that the generation of new theory has not been guiding principle the data collection process. Moreover, coding in in a traditional sense have not been used (Bryman 2012, p.19). Rather, documents have been categorized on a rudimentary basis according to

simple categories as it was deemed more feasible. Analysis have nonetheless taken place simultaneously with data collection and the findings in the research process have guided the direction of further sampling.

Moreover, this paper has also relied on a degree of convivence sampling. In short, this is a strategy in which the sample is chosen due to availability and ease of access (Ary et al 2019, p. 384). In that respect, it has sometimes been challenging to find sources on the topic of US basing policy in Europe, and thus some aspects of the topic have been left unexplored. It is understandable given the sensitive nature of the subject, but it can be disadvantageous with regards to the validity of the study (Ary et al 2019, p. 384). This in turn brings us to the next section, namely data quality and information evaluation.

3.4 Information Evaluation and Data Quality

When evaluating the quality of a piece of research, it is common to employ the criteria of reliability and validity (Bryman 2012, p.46). Reliability can be understood as the trustworthiness or accuracy of the data. It is closely related to the concept of replicability, which refers to whether a study can be repeated using the same methods and research design, and still produce the same data (Bryman 2012, p.46-47). In qualitative research studies such as this one, this becomes a bit challenging. Considering that data collection and analysis takes place simultaneously, and that the data gathering process is guided by the subjective interpretation and analysis on part of the researcher as to what to include in the sample, the study becomes nearly impossible to replicate. Thus, in qualitative research it is often common to instead use the related concept of credibility. Like reliability, credibility is concerned that the findings have basis in data about actual conditions (Grønmo 2020, p.930). They are not considered credible if the data gathered is purely assessed on a subjective basis on part of the researcher or solely chosen for pure convivence. Thus, it is expected that that one adheres to established academic standards and sample data from trustworthy and credible sources accordingly (Grønmo 2020, p.930-931). In that respect, continues efforts have been made to evaluate the sources used in this piece to ensure their credibility. This have involved frequent triangulation, which refers to the method of using more than one source of data for examining the same phenomena

(Bryman 2012, p.392). In that relation, finding sources representing a variety of different views has been a guiding principle. Moreover, several sources have been discarded since they have not been deemed credible.

Validity, meanwhile, refers to the integrity of the conclusions drawn from a given piece of research (Bryman 2012, p.47) On that matter, it is common to distinguish between internal and external validity. Internal validity is mainly concerned with the issue of causality, and whether the causal links suggested in the conclusion make sense (Bryman 2012, p.47). It is not an unusual mistake in the social sciences to fail to distinguish between correlation and causality. Just because two phenomena occur at the same time or in succession does not necessarily mean that they are connected or that one caused the other (Gerring 2012, p.374). With relation to this paper, that does indeed present some challenges. Even when stated so by the relevant authorities, such as the Pentagon, it can be hard to know for certain that a given base is opened, expanded and closed as a direct or indirect result of a geopolitical developments. There can be ulterior motives or unknown drivers behind such developments that are hard to account for. The same holds true for why European States willingly host American military bases. Thus, while this paper represents the best efforts on part of the author at connecting the dots between geopolitical events and developments in the US basing network, he is open to the possibility that some of the causal links drawn can be proven invalid. This is connected to the second aspect, namely external validity.

External validity refers to whether a study can be generalized to the wider population beyond the segment the study has sampled (Grønmo 2020, pp.947-948). The purpose of this validity test is to ensure that any conclusions with respect to causality does not spawn from odd characteristic of the research sample, but really reflect actual conditions in society at large (Grønmo 2020, p.948). In that relation, an important motivation for examining such a broad selection of bases in several countries over a long timespan was to ensure that any outliers did not distort the bigger picture of wider developments in US basing policy Europe in the last three decades. Nevertheless, given the often secretive nature of US military bases, it is conceivable and perhaps even likely that there exists several sites out of public knowledge, which may come at the expense of the external validity of this study.

3.5 Weaknesses and Limitations

A potential weakness of this thesis may be lie in the concept of reflexivity. Reflexivity refers how the researcher´s own experiences, opinions and values affects the way he or she perceives and interprets a phenomenon in question (Grønmo 2018, p.40). In turn, this may spill over into the arguments made and the conclusions drawn. In that regard, the author of this thesis acknowledges he is slightly supportive of the US basing presence in Europe. While he has tried the best of his ability to present a balanced account US of using basing policy in Europe, it is nevertheless likely that his own bias has affected his assessment of the matter to some degree.

Another weakness may lay in the broad scope of this study itself. Examining US basing policy in such a long-time span covering such a large geographical area has certainly proven to be a difficult undertaking. Conceivably, a smaller scope could have allowed for an even deeper examination of certain aspects in European US basing policy. Nevertheless, it may also made it more difficult to say something about the deeper patterns of US basing strategy with reference to a historical perspective.

Lastly, the Covid-19 Pandemic provided some challenges in the making of this thesis. The author had wished for conducting fieldwork at US bases in Germany and Italy, but the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic halted these plans. When many of the pandemic related restrictions lifted in early 2022, hopes were renewed, and a request was sent to the press office at Ramstein Air Base in early February. The response was as follows "*Thank you for your request and interest regarding coverage of ongoing operations within our command. There are currently no opportunities for media flights, embedding with or covering Ramstein forces at this time.*" It is uncertain whether there was a relation, but a reply was sent on the 28th of February, a mere four days after Russia invaded Ukraine. Subsequently, any further efforts at realizing the planned fieldwork were scrapped.

3.6 Ethical Aspects:

As the NNRC (2021) lays out, research can be valuable, but still harmful if it leads to unfortunate, albeit unintentional consequences. In that relation, it goes without saying that research into a subject that not only concerns the national interests of the United States but also to a large extent its allies constitute a research field where one should tread lightly. However, in terms of publicly available literature and documents, harm to individuals or groups are not that much of a concern, although general research ethics such as transparency and honesty still applies (NNRC 2021). In that respect, efforts have been made to present the views of authors cited as authentically and fairly as possible.

4 TRENDS IN US BASING 1989-2001

4.1 The situation in 1989: A Massive Presence in Germany

In 1989, Germany had been the center of gravity for US military bases in Europe for decades (Holmes 2014, p.95) According to the Pentagon, there were a total of 224 US military sites in Western Germany in 1989, making up for almost two thirds of base sites in Europe at the time (Cleaves 1991, p.227). Still, this number may be an underestimate, as one contemporary study by the Stockholm Peace Institute found put the figure at 625, including associated facilities (Cleaves 1991, p.277). Regardless of which number holds true, these sites included a wide variety of different facilities, including radio terminals, tank training grounds, cargo terminals, airfields, fuel depots and command headquarters, as well as an abundance of housing facilities both on and off base in order to accommodate nearly 250.000 US soldiers and their dependents (Cleaves 1991, p.277).

It is no coincidence that West Germany was the main hub of American basing in Europe. In NATO terminology, the country was deemed part of the “central front” (Holmes 2014, p.95) The vast central European plain where both Germanys were located were believed to become the staging ground for an eventual showdown between the NATO allies of the West and the Warsaw Pac (Holmes pp.95-96). Facing each other from their respective sides of the Iron curtain were hundreds of thousands of soldiers, all posed for a war that ultimately never happened.

4.1.1 The Focal point of Containment: Showdown at the Fulda Gap

In the cold war imagination, few places captured people´s attention more than a narrow strip of land on the border between East and West Germany known as the Fulda Gap. The gap consisted of a narrow lowland corridor running westwards from the East German city of Eisenach to Frankfurt am main in West Germany (Hammerich 2017, p3). The place has its name from the town of Fulda on the former inner-German border (Mason 2015, p.24). In the past, the corridor had been used by the armies of Frederick the Great and Napoleon Bonaparte, and due to its easily navigable terrain and proximity to the West-German heartland along the river Rhine, it was assumed by military strategists to be the most like route for a Warsaw Pact incursion into Western Europe (Broder 1989) (Nelson 2005

pp.27-28). So much so in fact, that the scenario incorporated into basic officer training at the US army college. Consequently, officers who would never set foot in Germany would practice at containing Soviet and Warsaw Pact aggression at the Fulda Gap (Edwards 2001, p.10).

Moreover, the Frankfurt area was also an important location for the US military in Germany, being home to the US Airforce Rhein-Main base, as well as Frankfurt airport, the largest airport in Germany (Gierra 2012, pp.281-282) (Wilson 2015, p.8).

For western military planners, both sites were considered essential in receiving US reinforcements in case of war (Gierra 2012, pp.281-282). In that relation, Wilson (2015, p.10) points out that even though the North German plain may offer a more suitable route for a Soviet tank rush due to its flat grasslands, a push through the Fulda Gap would effectively split US forces in Germany in two. He goes on to argue that a defeat in the Gap could very well have led to the defeat of all conventional US forces in Germany (Wilson 2015, p.10).

In fact, the primary responsibility for defending the Fulda Gap fell to the United States (Edwards 2001, p.210). Throughout the Cold War, the US forces manned several checkpoints and defensive positions along the border in the region (Edwards 2001, p.210)

As of 1989, two armored regiments of the US army V corps were permanently stationed here (Broder 1989). The regiments consisted of 5000 troops each, residing in three military camps adjoining the border. As Wilson (2015 p.19) spells out, the area between Frankfurt and the inner-German border was in a sense “a single huge training ground” for American forces. Indeed, American armored columns on the roads and US fighter jets in the sky was an everyday sight (Wilson 2015, p.19).

It seems like the logic of containment also was practiced by the on the other size of the border, where troop concentrations were in fact heavier. In that respect, the Soviet 8th Guards Army was headquartered in East German town of Nohra, less than 70 kilometres away from the border (Uhl 2017, pp.52,57). This heavily mechanized force was made up

of 90,000 men, equipped with 1235 modern tanks, 1892 armoured personnel carriers, as well as a large arsenal of self-propelled guns and towed artillery (Uhl 2017, p.56). On the western side of the gap, US and allied military planners recognized the numerical inferiority of their forces. Accordingly, western strategy came to rely heavily on the quick reinforcement of airborne troops through US and German air force bases in the Frankfurt region (Poppe 2017, p.274). However, US military strategists recognized that airlifting sufficient troop numbers in time would prove a major logistical challenge, and NATO therefore reserved the right to use tactical nuclear weapons if facing imminent defeat. (Poppe 2017, p.274) (Hammerich 2017, p.4) Thus, the Fulda Gap became a powerful symbol of the cold war as the place where the conflict stood ready to burst into nuclear war (Hammerich pp.3,32).

4.2 The interlude 1989-1991: Withdrawing Soviets, wary Americans and an aggressor in Bagdad

The timespan between the fall of the wall and the end of the Soviet Union had peculiar impact on US basing policy in Europe. Recognizing that the communist threat was withering, the Pentagon began restructuring US forces in Europe into smaller and more mobile units to deal with any contingency that may arise in the post-cold war era (Gehring 1998, p.7,261). Still, wary of a change in heart in Moscow, the US retained considerable troop numbers at military bases in Europe (Gehring 1998, p.7). This was not without controversy, at the legitimacy of the US presence was increasingly being called into question as the Soviets were withdrawing (Gehring 1998, p.6), However, when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August 1990, he inadvertently gave a new purpose to this still sizeable, yet idle force.

In fact, the Gulf War would mark a shift in American basing policy. This marked the first American military bases in Europe would be used in so-called “out of area” operations on a grand scale. (Gehring 1998, p.261). By “out of area” in this context, we are referring to military interventions outside NATO territory (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2003, p.100). In fact, more than a third of the US European Command´s equipment, personnel, and critical supplies were quickly deployed to the Gulf Theatre, now tasked with a new mission of

balancing against the threat from Saddam Hussein´s Iraq (Gehring 1998, p.13). To facilitate this transfer, army personnel were directly flown from army bases in the German state of Baden Wurttemberg to Saudi Ports to set up reception areas, and they managed to accomplish this massive undertaking in just 42 days. (Gehring 1998, p.13). This included whole infantry divisions and armored cavalry regiments, including detachments from the V Corp recently relived of their duties of guarding the Fulda Gap (Gehring 1998, p.57-58, 171). Moreover, vary that their forces in Europe may be stretched thin, the Pentagon and the US European Command devised a strategy wherein forces participating in the conflict would rotate between US bases in Saudi Arabia and Europe (Gehring 1998, pp.4,54).

The European connection would also extend to medical support units. Recognizing that the US Central Command had no air ambulance capacity and that moving such units from the United States proper would take too much time, the 45th medical company of the US Southern European Task Force stationed in Italy were the first unit to be redeployed from the European theatre to US bases in the Gulf (Gehring 1998, pp.55-56) Along with other medical units, this company would be responsible for airlifting wounded servicemen for medical treatment at US facilities in Europe. In fact, US military hospitals in Europe would set aside 1760 beds, 25% of total capacity, to patients flown in from the Gulf (Gehring 1998, pp.56-57). As the conflict progressed, the reliance on medical facilities at US bases in Europe became so intrinsic to the war effort that such facilities were expanded. Most of these were in Germany, among them Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, nearby Ramstein Air Base (Gehring 1998, pp.56-57, 183-184). This would later turn into the largest US military hospital outside the United States and play a vital role in future “out of area” operations (Xydakis et al 2005, pp.497-498).

4.3 Christmas Day 1991: The End of the Soviet Union,

On 8 December 1991, the leaders of the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian Soviet republics gathered to sign the treaty effectively dissolving the Soviet Union. The Soviet state seized to exist on Christmas Day 1991 (Smith-Sivertsen 2011, pp, 141,155). As the red banner was lowered from the flag-pole of the Kremlin, the premise of 55 years of US defense and basing policy fundamentally changed. As impeccably spelled out by US Secretary of Defense Lee Aspin in a 1993 report:

"The *Cold War is behind us. The Soviet Union is no longer. The threat that drove our defence decisions for four and a half decades – that determined our strategy and tactics, our doctrine, the size and shape of our forces, the design of our weapons, and the size of our defence budgets – is gone*" (DoD 1993, p.iii).

The quote above is taken from a DoD report on the so-called "Bottom Up Review" (BUR). The BUR refers to a comprehensive review of US defense strategy and force posture commissioned by the Clinton administration in 1993 (DoD 1993, p.iii). The report explicitly recognizes that "*containment of the Soviet Empire*" is no longer a strategic aim of the United States and stressed the need to realign US force posture to adapt to the new strategic environment of the post-cold war era (DoD 1993, p.1) With the Soviet threat gone, it further states that the United States can protect its interests with "*significantly reduced levels of forward deployed forces*" (DoD 1993, p.8). Thus, in the first half of the 1990s, the US closed 60% of its overseas military bases globally, while bringing 300 000 troops home to the United States (Vine 2020, 367). Most of these returnees (207 000) came from installations in Europe, with 175 000 from Germany alone (Kane 2005). Indeed, in the following decade, the DoD closed an estimated 922 US military sites in Europe (Fields 2004, p.94). The bases that remained were realigned to serve new aims as the geopolitical landscape was changing during the 1990s.

In that respect, that BUR outlines identify four main threats to the security of the US and its allies, all of which can be seen in connection with US basing policy in Europe. The first is the danger posed by "*nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction*" (DoD 1993, p.2). In that respect, the large nuclear stockpiles still present in countries making up

the former Soviet Union is singled out as a particular cause for concern. While recognizing that relations for the time being are friendly, the report cautions against the possibility of a future anti-western government in Russia. Thus, the report recommends cooperating with Russia in the mutual reduction of nuclear stockpiles (DoD 1993, pp.5-6). As we will get back to, nuclear disarmament initiatives would lead to include drastic reductions in the number of American nuclear weapons stationed at bases in Europe

Second, aggression by major regional powers is identified as the "*chief among the new dangers* (DoD 1993, p.iii). Iraq during the Gulf War is as a case in point as an example of a rogue nation with malicious intentions, but other regional dangers include internal ethnic and religious conflict. (Dod 1993, pp.1-2). With regards to the latter, the ongoing civil war in Croatia and Bosnia and its potential to spill over to the wider Balkans region is identified as a risk to European stability (DoD 1993, p.7). In relation to US bases, it is stated that the presence of US forces in Europe deters acts of aggression by potentially hostile states, and furthermore contributes to regional stability (Dod 1993, p.8).

Moving on, the third and fourth threat outlined are "*dangers to democracy and reform" and "economic dangers"* respectively (Dod 1993, p.2). While acknowledging the positive trend of democratic and economic reform in Eastern Europe, the BUR emphasizes that this development is entirely reversible. As the report spells out, the new democratic institutions in these countries are fragile and market reforms have not yet produced any tangible results in terms of increased standards of living (DoD 1993, p9). Should reforms fail, the report warns, this may lead to the rise of "ultranationalist authoritarianism".

Among other measures to prevent this from happening, targeted economic aid is recommended (Dod 1993, p.). As explained in greater detailed later on, in the early stages, much of this aid was in fact routed through American air bases in Europe. Still, in an eerie foreshadowing what was to come down the line, the BUR nevertheless recommends that the United States should "*retain the means to build a larger force structure, should one be needed to in the future to confront an emergent authoritarian and imperialistic Russia reasserting its full military potential*" (DodD1993, p.10). And indeed, even though the early 1990s saw a substantial quantitative reduction in the number of US bases in Europe,

the geographical distribution of remaining bases followed a pattern strikingly similar to that of the cold war era (Vine 2020, pp.366-369). While a degree of "residual containment" against a potentially resurgent Russia may be part of the explanation, it can also be seen in connection with a host of different reasons. Thus, in the pages to follow, we shall sample US military bases on a country-to-country basis to examine how the force posture changed in light of the changed geopolitical climate of the 1990s.

4.4 Post 1991: Drawdown and Realignment in Germany

As touched on above, the most drastic reductions in 1990s in the number of US troops and bases took place in Germany. Between 1990 and 1995, the United States closed 88% of its military installations, while scaling back its troop deployments in the country from 248.000 soldiers in 1989 to 73000 by 1995 (Kane 2005) (Vine 2015, p.90) Still, Germany would remain the most important hub for American basing in Europe. Out of the roughly US 100.000 troops that would remain in Europe throughout the 1990s, the majority would continue to be stationed in Germany (Kane 2005).

While hundreds of minor locations were closed, some of the most modern and capable MOBs were retained. A few, like the Airbases at Ramstein and Spangdahlem, were even expanded. In addition to serving the traditional role in the defense of central Europe, these sites would serve as springboards for US military operations in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa. An early example includes the so-called "Operation Provide Hope" starting in 1992, whereby leftover medical supplies from the Gulf War and vast quantities of food were shipped from airbases in Germany and Turkey the newly independent countries that formerly made up the Soviet Union (USEUCOM 2022). The US European Command was chosen for this mission because of their substantial airlift capacity. Much of this was routed through Rhein Am Main Air Base in Germany, from which the operation was first launched (USEUCOM 2022). Even if the military doctrine of containment had officially ended, this effort can be seen in view of Kennan´s original conception of containment as a political tool. Although this time, communism was not the danger to be contained, but as touched on above, the rise of authoritarian and nationalistic regimes in Eastern Europe should the transition to democracy fail. Indeed, at the launching

ceremony at Rhein Am Main in February 1992, Secretary of State James Baker stated that "*This airlift is not charity, but an investment in security*" (Hoffman 1992). Moreover, the aid packages with food and medicine were fitted with stickers that said, "*From the American people, who assure you the struggle for democracy is worth it"* (Hoffman 1992). By historical compassion, the labels plastered on Marshall Aid Packages from 1951 and onwards said "*Strength for the Free World—From the United States of America*" (Schröder 2000, p. 228).

Moreover, US airbases in Germany were also frequently used during the 1990s to balance against threats "out of area". In that respect, the 86th Airlift Wing stationed at Ramstein would become the main unit responsible transporting USEUCOM troops and equipment both within and beyond the European theatre (August 2018, p.30). For instance, during the 1995 NATO intervention in the Bosnian civil war, a considerable portion of hardware and personnel was flown in by the 86th (August 2018, p.31).

The same unit would later also transport cargo in support of Operation Allied Force; the 1999 NATO bombing campaign aimed at forcing Serbian forces out of Kosovo (August 2018, pp.32-33). Moreover, in 1997, a sizeable bulk of forces destined for Operation Phoenix I-IV was flown to American bases in the Persian Gulf by way of Ramstein AB. This operation was intended as a show of force to balance against the threat of Iraqi nuclear ambitions (August 2018, p.32). Interestingly, when that failed, American bases in the Gulf were used as staging grounds for bombing raids in Iraq the following year (Burford 2002, 61-74).

Anyhow, given that the geographical focus of most threats had moved away from central Europe, why did Germany continue to host such a substantial American military presence? To put it simply, why did not the Pentagon relocate these bases closer to where the trouble was at?

Part of the explanation may indeed be to maintain residual capacity to contain a potentially resurgent Russia. Another may be that Germany generally took a more hands-off approach to basing rights than was the case in non-western countries (Duke 2009,

pp.4-5). In fact, during the 1998 raids against Iraq, Turkey refused the US Airforce to use the Incirlik Air base for combat sorties (Liel 2001, p.164). In a way, the United States was more of "An Empire by Invitation" in Germany than was the case in the Middle East.

Still, another explanation for the lasting base network in Germany may lie in what is known as path dependency (Duke 2009, p.4). Essentially, the American basing infrastructure built up throughout the cold war represents a massive financial investment. This includes not just major hubs for power projection such as the Air Base at Ramstein, but also major training grounds such those at Hohenfels and Grafenwoehr, the latter of whom remains the largest American training facility in Europe to this day (Duke 2009, p.6) (7th ATC 2022). As (Duke 2009, p.7) argues, the potential economic benefit of closing these facilities would have to be weighed against the cost of relocating them to the continental US or elsewhere. Furthermore, given the scale and complexity of these bases, relocating them would likely be a slow and complicated process (Duke 2009, p.5)

A somewhat related point may be that the reluctance to leave may be due to conservative mindset and in a sense habit. When asked in an interview why the spatial distribution of American military bases had changed relatively little with the end of the cold war, Andrew Hoehn, a senior Pentagon strategist, put it this way "*there were a lot of important voices in the American community that did not want to leave… It was comfortable, it was comfortable for a young soldier or airman to move to Europe."* (Vine 2020, p.368). And as Holmes (2014, pp.153-154) points out, US troops in Germany had grown accustomed to a high standard of living. Great effort had been put into making life at major US bases in Germany as similar to home as possible. In many ways, these communities resembled American towns, with American type suburban housing, American high schools, malls, gulf courses and American restaurant chains (Vine 2015, pp.78-81).

Moreover, as opposed to what was the case with bases in the Middle East or many other region closer to post-cold war "hot zones", US troops on bases in Germany generally enjoyed warm relations with the local communities that hosted them (Duke 2009, p.8). While there had been protests against the deployments of nuclear weapons, the American presence was on the whole welcomed, particularly in communities where they played

important part in the local economy. Once such instance was the Fulda region. When American forces was about to depart in 1993, local town officials went as far to fly Washington failed bid to convivence the Pentagon to let the troops stay (Walker 1997). In a sense, the American Empire was invited to stay by virtue of the economic benefits of hosting US bases.

4.4.1 Containment revised: From containment of the Soviet Union to containment of Germany?

On a darker note, part of the reason why American contingent in Germany remained so large after the cold war can be viewed in connection with containment, albeit not of the Soviet Union, but of Germany itself. In a 1992 report prepared by Richard L. Kugler of the Rand Corporation for the Commander in Chief of the US European Command, Kugler (1992, pp.47-48) warns against the destabilizing effects that the removal of American forces from Europe would have on regional European stability. In his view, the presence of US troops in Europe is the glue that holds NATO together. If NATO was to dissolve, he fears that old European rivalries might reemerge (Kugler 1992, pp.47-48). Of particular concern is French-German relations, and what direction Germany might head in should the American forces depart the continent. While concurring that for the time being, Germany is a democratic and peaceful nation, he maintains that history has shown that a Germany left without credible security guarantees and free to plot its own course can lead it down a path to militarization and a potentially hostile stance towards both its eastern and western neighbors (Kugler 1992, pp., 16, 47-48). In fact, when the prospect of German reunification became a realistic possibility following the fall of the wall, both the French and the British were deeply worried. British prime minister Margaret Thatcher allegedly went as far as to tell the French ambassador that "*France and Great Britain should pull together today in the face of the German threat* (Allen 2009). In the end, membership in NATO would be a prerequisite for the United States consenting to German reunification (Wiegrefe 2010). In a strange twist, and what is many ways quite contrary to the balance of threat thesis, band-wagoning with a strong and potentially threating Germany became the preferred option to keep the Germans docile.

4.5 The United Kingdom: A massive scale-down from 1989 to 1996

The United Kingdom holds a peculiar place in US basing policy. As touched on in the introduction, the vast expansion of American military bases abroad was marked by the destroyers for bases agreement in 1941, in which the United Kingdom allowed the US to set up bases in what was then its colonies Vine (2015, pp.38-39). In a sense, the "Empire by Invitation" was in part built on the foundations of the crumbling British Empire. Throughout the cold war, the UK continued to be an essential enabler of US basing policy, both at home and abroad. While it may fall somewhat outside the scope of this study, it is worth mentioning that that when Mauritius obtained independence from Britain in the 1960s, the British carved out the Chagos archipelago and surrounding islands to form the British Indian Ocean Territory (Vine 2015, pp.106-113). Subsequently, the expelled the native inhabitants of the island, the Chagossians, to make room for a grand US Naval Base. (Vine 2015, pp.106-113). At home, Britain was considered be NATO and US planners to be "*an unsinkable aircraft carrier*" and in the event of war with the Soviet Union, was envisioned to host up to 40 % of the total manpower of NATO's combined air forces in Europe (Duke 1989, p.304). However, with the end of the cold war, the bases in the United Kingdom would not be spared in the subsequent drawdown of the American military´s European presence.

Beginning in the early 1990s, the US military reduced the number of servicemen stationed in the UK from about 26000 in 1989 to 11000 by 1996 (Kane 2005). Consequently, several sites were either closed or ceded back to British control, including the air bases at RAF Bentwater and RAF Upper Heyford (USAFE 2016, p.7). The first had been home to a sizeable deployment in the 81st Fighter-Interceptor Wing, while the latter had hosted the 42nd Electronic Combat Squadron, notable for jamming Libyan air defenses in 1987 as part of a US strike against the Gadhafi regime (USAFE 2016, pp.3-5). Another important site up for closure was RAF Greenham Common. The base had gained some notoriety for hosting nuclear tipped American Tomohawk missiles, which in turn inspired the "Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp", a protest movement against the US deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in the UK (Stead 2006). However, by 1991, the

last of these missiles had been removed to comply with the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with the Soviet Union (and later Russia), and the Greenham base was subsequently closed the next year (Stead 2006) (USAFE 2016, pp.5-7).

For the British, meanwhile, this was an unwanted development, as a substantial American presence was advantageous in many ways. First, it was a means for the British to obtain what (Dumbrell 2006, p.132) describes as "*influence on the cheap*". The hard backing of American force at bases in UK meant the British themselves could spent relatively less on defense. In turn, the presence of American forces enhanced Britain´s own standing in Europe and in the world. Essentially, by inviting in the American Empire, the British could cling on to some global influence still now that it no longer had an empire of its own (Dumbrell 2006, p.73,132, 85-86, 132).

This is related to a second point, namely that American bases could be viewed a physical manifestation of the special relationship between the two countries, especially particularly in terms of intelligence facilities. As Milmo (2014) spells out, there are hardly any other countries in history that have shared more secrets than Britain and the United States. In that relation, the United States had for decades operated numerous listening post and intelligence installations in the UK, often in conjugation with British agencies. This includes sites such as RAF Molesworth and RAF Menwith Hill, the latter of whom had been under direct control of the US National Security Agency since 1966 (Wood 2004, pp.149-1951). In so doing, the United States paid 90% of the costs of operating these sites, while providing intelligence to both British and American agencies alike (Dumbrell 2006, p.170). Adding to the economic benefits for local communities hosting these bases, it is no wonder that the British were anxious about keeping a substantial American presence (Dumbrell 2006, p.132).

Whether it was another case of habit and path dependency, "residual containment" or perhaps successful British diplomacy, the United States continued to maintain several bases in Britain throughout the 1990s. These bases would much like their German counterparts take on a new mission in supporting "out of theatre" operations in the post-cold war security environment. In that respect, starting in 1993, the 492d and the 494th

fighter squadrons of USAFE would rotate between RAF Lakenheath in England and Incirlik Air Base in Turkey as part of subsequent missions aimed enforcing a no-fly zone over Iraq (USAFE 2022). Officially, this was done due to humanitarian concerns in stopping the Saddam regime´s prosecution of their Kurdish minority, but as (Shakuri 2017, pp. 56-61) argues, that this may as well be seen an effort at balance against the threat of an aggressive Iraq. In that respect, there was the worry that Kurdish refugees spilling over to Iran and Turkey could destabilizing the entire region (Shakuri 2017, pp.56-61). A similar situation took place in 1999 with the Serbian aggression against the Albanian minority in Kosovo. In that relation, as part the Operation Allied Force, US fighter jets were dispatched from directly to RAF Lakenheath directly to the battlefield in Serbia and Kosovo (Lambeth, 2010, pp.35-36)

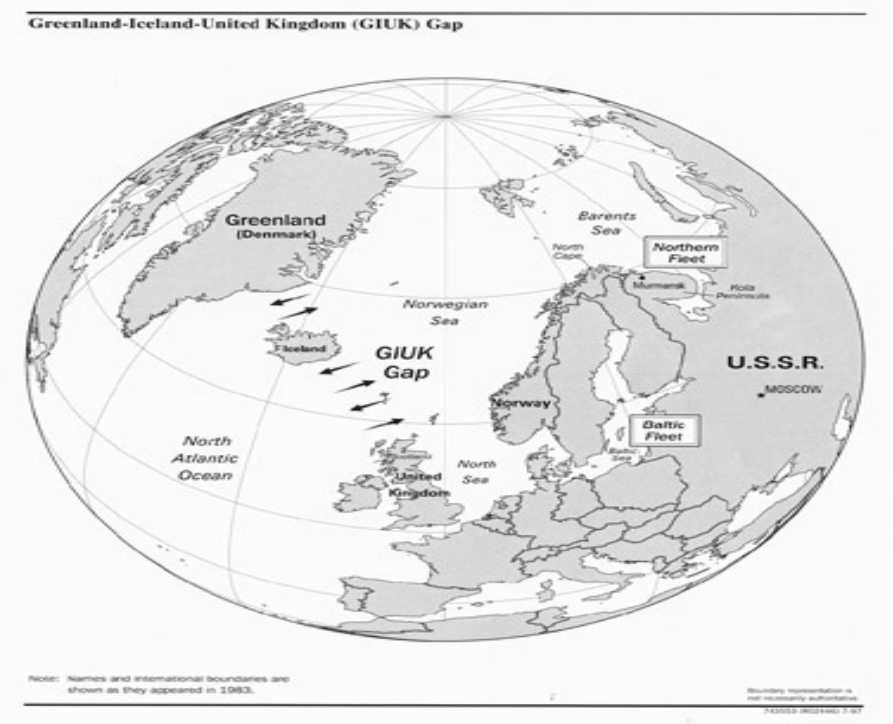
Moving on, the United States also retained considerable motoring and intelligence assets in Britain in the 1990s despite the drawdown. The base at RAF Menwith Hill was even expanded and would later become the largest electronic listening station in the world. Another site of interests that remain include RAF Fylingdales, which remained an integral part of the joint UK-American early warning system against ballistic missiles (Bingley 2018 p.164). A new radar was installed at the base in 1992, nicknamed the pyramid by locals for its shape (Wainwright 2003; Stockner 2004, p.14). The first of its kind in the world, it was capable of 360 coverage 3000 miles in range (Stocker 2004, p.14). In the latter part of the 1990s, the US wanted to use the Fyllingdales site as part of its National Missile Defense system. (Stocker 2004, pp.14-15). However, the Russian were highly skeptical of this, as the radars range coverage large swatches of Russian territory as well as the Atlantic (CRS 200, pp. 11-13). Indeed, a 1997 visit to the site revealed that training videos still depicted launches from Russian nuclear submarines in the Barents Sea (Smith 2002). Thus, the radar may still have been a tool in balancing against Russian nuclear threats. As an officer at the installation later would put it "*No one can launch a surprise attack - we are a deterrent. We know where every missile comes from*" (Macdonald 2019).

RAF Fylingdales. The old orbital shaped radars in the background were decommissioned in 1992. (AFSPC 2017)

4.6 An Empire by Insistence? Continued US Presence in Iceland in the 1990s

American forces had been present in Iceland ever since relieving the British occupation force in the country in 1941 (Pétursson 2020, pp.34-35. In 1949, Iceland became a founding member of NATO, and found itself in the peculiar situation of being the only member of the alliance without a military of their own (Pétursson 2020, pp.27, 161). Throughout the Cold War, the defence of Iceland was the primary responsibility of the United States, who retained a permanent force at Naval Air Station Keflavik nearby the capital of Reykjavik (Thorhallsson & Vignisson 2004, p.103). To NATO and the United States, Iceland held a key strategic position right in the centre of the so-called GUIK (Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom) gap (Thorhallsson & Vignisson 2004, p.103). The term refers to the sea lanes between Greenland, Iceland and the United Kingdom, passages Soviet submarines had no choice to pass through in order to reach the Atlantic Ocean and the Eastern seaboard of the United States. Monitoring the GUIK was a key task for the US forces in Iceland, as it was considered essential in containing Soviet aggression in the key

shipping lanes between North America and Europe (Thorhallsson & Vignisson 2004, p.103).



However, with the fall of the Soviet Union, Iceland lost much of its strategic value (Pétursson 2020, p.100). In simple terms, there was longer any threat to contain. With their Cold War rival out of the way, the United States was eager to cut military spending and rid themselves of what they viewed as antiquated bases of a bygone era. Thus, the pressure was on to close the Keflavik base (Pétursson 2020, p.100). Between 1990 and 1996, the number of US servicemen at Keflavik was cut down from 3300 to 2300 troops (Thorhallsson & Vignisson 2004, pp.112). In the same time span, the number of F15 fighter jets stationed at the base was reduced from 16 to just 4 (Thorhallsson & Vignisson 2004, pp.112). The Icelandic government at the time were disturbed by this development, as they viewed the base as indispensable for Iceland´s defence capabilities (Thorhallsson et al 2018, p.547). Thus, they lobbied the Clinton administration extensively, imploring the US government not to downsize to the base to extent they had originally envisioned. This effort led to an agreement in 1996, wherein the US agreed to maintain a permanent, albeit reduced presence for the next five years (Thorhallsson & Vignisson 2004, pp.112). In a sense, this implies that in the Icelandic case, the United States was not just “an empire

by invitation", but "an empire by insistence". Moreover, it may serve to support the argument that US basing policy is not solely crafted in Washington but is also shaped by interests of their allies.

4.7 US Bases in Italy in the 1990s: Increased presence due to the unrest in the Balkans

The existence American military bases in Italy dates to the aftermath of World War 2. Since becoming a founding member of NATO in 1949, the Italian government hosted a range of US sites (Dian 2021, pp.39-40). These were centered around three main hubs, Camp Ederle, nearby Vicenza in Northern Italy, Camp Darby right in the middle in Tuscany, and lastly in Naples in the south. The latter would become home to the Allied Forces Southern Europe Command (AFSOUTH) (Dian 2021, p.40). As the cold war progressed, enhanced Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean led to increased significance of the US bases in Italy. (Dian 2021, p.41). With respect to the theoretical framework, this can be viewed in relation US efforts at containing Russia in the Mediterranean Basin.

In 1989, US troop deployments to Italy (10-15 thousand troops) were considerably smaller than that of those in West-Germany (200-250.000 thousand troops) (Dian 2021, p.40). However, unlike Germany, Italy´s geopolitical importance did not decline with the end of the cold war. With the Soviet menace gone, US bases in the Italian peninsula would take on a new role as a staging ground for missions aimed at balancing against new threats in the Balkans, Middle East and North Africa (Dian 2021, pp.45-47). Indeed, following the end of the Cold War, the relative importance of the Italian bases grew – particularly in comparison with the German set of bases (Dian 2021, p.46). As a new geopolitical landscape formed, the Italian bases were key in a series of American operations. The projection of military force into the Balkans were to no little degree sourced through Italy (Dian 2021, pp.45-47).

As an example, the joint Aviano Air Base in Italy, run by the US jointly with the Italians, was instrumental in the NATO interventions in Bosnia in 1995, and again in Serbia in

1999 (Dian 2021, p.46). These operations were directed from the above-mentioned Allied Forces Southern Europe Command (AFSOUTH) in Naples, as well as from the NATO Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) located in the city of Vicenza in Northern Italy (Dian 2021, p.46). The Aviano base was radically expanded, eventually being doubled in size. By the middle of the 1990s a new squadron of F-16 Fighting Falcons were deployed to Aviano, strengthening the role of the base in balancing against threats ongoing and upcoming "out of theatre conflicts" (Dian 2021, pp.46-47).

4.8 The Makings of 9/11 - The Link to US Bases in Saudi Arabia

In 1996, Osama bin Laden issue his "Declaration of Jihad again the Americans Occupying the land of the Two Holiest Sites" (Mizobuchi 2021, p.111) In the document he described the presence of American military bases in Saudi Arabia as "*the greatest tragedy of the Islamic World*" (Mizobuchi 2021, p.111). He further proclaimed it to be a duty of all Muslim to "*expel the infidels from the Arabian Peninsula*" (Mizobuchi 2021, p.111).

At the time, Bin Laden was a wanted man, but he had formerly enjoyed warm relations with the Saudi ruling elite. Well respected for his role in fighting atheist invaders in Afghanistan, he had returned to Saudi Arabia in 1989 to a hero´s welcome (Clarke 2004 59-60) However, this relationship quickly turned sour when the Saudi government invited in the "American Empire" during the gulf war. While Bin Laden had no love lost for the secular Bath regime in Bagdad, and even offered to help contain aggression by rallying fellow veterans of the Afghan war, he considered America the greater threat (Clarke 2004 59-60). Deeply disturbed by the prospect of infidel soldiers being allowed onto the soil of the prophet's homeland, he warned that if the US was allowed to establish themselves on the Arabian-peninsula, they would never leave (Clarke 2004 59-60).

In a sense, it seems Bin Laden was right, at least for the time being. While a vast majority of American forces Saudi Arabia were withdrawn following the end of the Gulf War, almost US 2000 troops remained in 1996 (Mizobuchi 2021, p.126). Adding to insult, the figure increased to 5000 by 1998 (Mizobuchi 2021, p. 126). True to his word, Bin Laden and his likeminded responded with a terror campaign (Mizobuchi 2021, p. 125). In 1996,

Al Qaida bombed the Khobar Towers, a housing complex for US servicemembers (Atwan 2006, pp.168-169).

The attack killed 19 people and wounded an additional 372 (Mizobuchi 2021, p. 125). In 1998, the group took a step further, and decided to international with the call for a "World Islamic Front" (Lewis 1998, p.14). In that regard, bin Laden issued a new fatwa that stated that" "*to kill Americans and their allies, both civil and military, is an individual duty of every Muslim who is able, in any country where this is possible*" (Lewis 1998, p.15). This soon translated into action in the form of the bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania the same year (Atwan 2006, p.169). Sadly, Al Qaida was yet to execute its most deadly attack, one that would have a deep impact on US basing policy in the years to come; the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, the 11th of September 2001.

5 POST 2001: THE WAR ON TERROR, SHOWDOWN WITH SADDAM HUSSEIN AND A WAR IN EASTERN EUROPE

"On September 11, 2001, the United States came under vicious, bloody attack. Americans died in their places of work. They died on American soil. They died not as combatants, but as innocent victims. They died not from traditional armies waging traditional campaigns, but from the brutal, faceless weapons of terror. They died as the victims of war - a war that many had feared but whose sheer horror took America by surprise"
(Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld 2001, p. VI).

The quote above are the opening words to the report on the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). Like the "Bottom-Up Review" before it, the QDR was a comprehensive review of US defense strategy and force posture that had been in the works since the fall of 1999 (Schrader et al 2003, p.10). Released a mere three after the horrific events of 9/11, it was a hastily redrafted and edited version of the QDR that was largely finished by the summer of 2001 (Wirls 2010, p.101). In that respect, the shock that Rumsfeld describes also hit deep in the military and political establishment. In fact, President Bush had earlier argued that that that the United States should not be the "world's policeman" and had called for rolling back American troop deployments around the world, most notably in the Balkans (Davis 2006, pp.200, 256). Indeed, the original draft of the QRD outlined the closure of dozens of military bases, as well as a reduced frequency of overseas tours. (Borns et al 2002, p.7) (Killan 2001). In that relation, 22 to 23% of US military bases were deemed redundant, including many in Europe (Killan 2001). As Rumsfeld (2011, p.735) noted in his memoirs, there seemed little point in maintaining a large presence in Europe ten years after the end of the cold war. Furthermore, he questioned the fairness of the United States paying for the defense of wealthy allies who could easily afford substantial militaries of their own (Rumsfeld 2011, p.737). In fact, it was estimated that it would save American taxpayers between 3 to 6 billion USD per year closing unnecessary bases, a much welcome measure in an increasingly tight fiscal climate (Killan 2001) (Wirls 2010, pp.129-130).

However, with the events of 9/11, all bets were off. Eight days later, on September 20, President Bush famously declared his "War on Terror" in a speech to a joint session of

Congress. In a drastic departure from his earlier rhetoric, Bush (2001) stated that "*Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated… Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen".*

In this fog of war, any budgetary concerns were thrown out the window. Before September 2001 was even over, congress passed "the Military Construction Bill", allocating $700 million dollars to DoD construction projects (Wirls 2010, p.131). Furthermore, 20 billion USD were immediately added to the defense budget for "anti-terrorist" measures in general (Sköns 2002, p.239). Moreover, in December 2001, congress decided to put off any further rounds of base closures until 2005 (Bill 2014, p.249). Thus, instead of yet another drawdown, a massive buildup of military bases was instigated the likes of which had not been seen since the second world war.

5.1 Establishment of new bases outside Europe – with a noticeable European connection

Unsurprisingly, the center of gravity for these new bases were not Europe, but rather Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa. In that respect, new basing arrangements were reached with Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan and the Kyrgyz Republic, allowing US forces to use airfields and other military infrastructure in the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 (Mayer 2008, pp. 95-96). Moreover, in as little as nine days after 9/11, the Pentagon began probing the possibility of establishing a presence in Djibouti. As Vine (2020) outlines, the strategic location in the horn of Africa provided an ideal springboard for balancing against terrorist threats in North-East Africa and the Middle East. Thus, at the end of 2001, Camp Lemonier was established in the country as a small FOB with a few-hundreds troops. However, by the following year, it had turned into a MOB, with four thousand troops permanently stationed supported by substantial infrastructure.

While most the new sites were not in Europe, many still had a noticeable European connection. For instance, the operations at Camp Lemonier was supervised by US European Command, headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany (Vine 2020). Moreover, in

December 2001, Manas Air base in Kyrgyzstan was set up by engineers of the 86th Contingency Response Group based out of Ramstein Air Base (Bergeron 2008). 22-24).

Arguably, the war on terror provided a lifeline against any further downsizing of the US European basing network, at least the time being. Whereas the pre 9/11 QDR draft had envisioned substantial reductions in European bases, the final report makes no mention of that at all. While it does concur that the overseas force posture with heavy troop concentrations Western Europe and North-East Asia, "*is inadequate for the new strategic environment*", the QDR merely calls for the creation of additional bases in South Asia and the Middle East as opposed to any further downsizing in the European theater (DoD 2001, p.4, 25,26). Indeed, it states that "*The United States will maintain its critical bases in Western Europe*", both to "*assure allies*", and because these sites may "*serve the additional role of hubs for power projection in future contingencies in other areas of the world."* (DoD 2001, pp.20,27). In fact, by the time the QRD was released, US bases in Europe were already in high alert following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. As we shall see below, many were intrinsic to the planning and execution of the US invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001.

5.2 The Role of European Bases during the 2001 Invasion of Afghanistan

The "Empire by Invitation" had rarely been so unconditionally welcomed in Europe as in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. On the same day as the planes hit the towers, German Chancellor Gerard Schröder famously proclaimed «*unlimited solidarity with the United States*» (Brunstetter 2005, p.26). Similar remarks were made by other European leaders, among them British prime minister Tony Blair, who wove to stand "*shoulder to shoulder*" with the Americans in the war against terrorism (Mahmood & Afsar 2017, p.56).

In capitals across Europe, spontaneous crowds gathered outside American embassies to hold memorial services, lit candles and lay flowers (Hall & Ross 2015, p.865). Initial polling showed that public support for military action was overwhelming; 73%, 68% and 65% of the French, British and German people respectively approved of such a move (Everts & Isernia 2002, pp.28-29). Thus, on September the 12th, the NATO allies invoked

Article V of the Washington treaty, which states that an attack against one member of the alliance is an attack against all (NATO 2022). To support the war effort, the allies pledged to provide extensive access for US forces to ports and airfields, as well as a blanket check for military overflights in NATO airspace (NATO 2022).

The Americans were quick to anticipate this move, and immediately after the second plane hit the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, crisis teams were activated at Ramstein AB and at RAF Mildenhall in England (Lambeth 2005, p.263). In the days to follow, extensive preparations took place at airbases across Europe in anticipation of what would become "Operation Enduring Freedom", the coming invasion of Afghanistan (Lambeth 2005, p.263)

At Aviano AB in Italy, a "a regional operations" center was rapidly established to handle the logistic challenges of an increased American presence soon to follow (Lambeth 2005, p.263). In fact, several European bases would serve as important logistic hubs in support of the invasion. For example, Moron Air Base in Spain would become an important refueling stop for planes en route to Afghanistan, while RAF Lakenheath in England was directed to transport medical equipment to the battlefield (Lambeth 2005, pp. 263-264). Still, the most significant base remained Ramstein AB, the headquarters of USAFE, from which much of logistics of the entire operation were organized. So much so, that according to Lambeth (2005, p.264), the head of USAFE became "de facto commander" of all US Air Force mobility operations in support of Enduring Freedom.

A curious aspect of this is that on the 28th of September 2001, USAFE was designated "*the bread bombing entity*" of Operation Enduring Freedom (Lambeth 2005, p.254). They meant this in a quite literal sense. Short of an hour after first bombs rained down on Afghanistan the night of the 7th, two C-17 transport planes on tour from Ramstein AB dropped 34,000 packages of food in the countryside outside of Kabul (Lambeth 2005, p.265). The initiative was at the behest of President Bush himself, for whom this was not just a war against terrorism, but a struggle for the hearts and minds of the Afghani people. As Lambeth (2005, p.265) spells out, he wanted the Americans to be welcomed as liberators. Indeed, in the later stages of the so-called humanitarian mission, leaflets and

radios preset to an American station were dropped along with aid packages an attempt to justify the invasion (Lambeth 2005, p.85). In a way reminiscent of Operation Provide Promise of the early 1990s, this can be seen as another tactic of containment in the political sense, albeit not against right-wing authoritarianism, but against radical Islamism.

Anyhow, the unified European and American response to 9/11 and the subsequent toppling of the Taliban regime may have emanated from a shared perception of threat. Statements from several European leaders in wake 9/11 about "the global threat of terrorism" may have been more than empty rhetoric or an expression of sympathy for their American ally. In fact, international terrorist already been active in Europe preceding the attacks in New York. In 2000, a plot by Al Qaida affiliated cell to bomb a Christmas market in Strasbourg France had been uncovered (Klausen 2021, pp.172-173). Similarly, in April 2001, Italian police cracked down on an Al Qaida network in Milan (Sagramoso & Nativi 2005, pp. 81-82). Still, as Archick (2014, p.1) outlines, 9/11 was a "wake-up call" for European governments and really brought home severity of the threat posed by international terrorism.

With regards to the balance of threat thesis, it therefore makes perfect sense that the European allies essentially gave the United States a carte blanche in the use of NATO and US bases in the first phase in the invasion of Afghanistan. While Al Qaida and by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was by no means a powerful actor on the world stage, they have proved themselves the most aggressive one. Indeed, even Russia, known for being highly skeptical of new US bases in Europe, greenlighted the establishment of temporary American bases in former Soviet states Central Asia in face of the greater threat of radical Islamism (Rumer 2002, pp.65-66). This this trans-Atlantic harmony nevertheless stands in stark contrast to what would be the case in the next campaign in the war against terror, the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

5.3 A Disinvited Empire? The 2003 Iraq War and Frictions over the use of US Bases in Turkey and Germany

In his 2002 “state of the union” speech, President Bush famously branded Iraq as part of “an axis of evil” and accused the country of seeking to develop weapons of mass destruction (“WMD”). Meanwhile, a new national security strategy was formulated, whereby the United States proclaimed the right to act “preemptively” against the threat of terrorist and “rogue states” acquiring WMD (POTUS 2002, p.15). It furthermore stated that the United States shall “*coordinate closely with allies to form a common assessment of the most dangerous threats”* (POTUS 2022, p.16).

Thus, in the following months, the US made overtures to European allies to convince them of the imminent danger of Saddam´s regime and to gather their support for invading Iraq (Huldt pp 30-40). However, when Iraq consented to weapons inspections by the UN, and no evidence WMD were found, it caused unprecedented split in transatlantic relations (UN 2003). Whereas the Britain, Italy, Spain and several Eastern European countries stood by the Americans in support of the impeding invasion, the Turks, the French and the Germans opposed (Huldt pp.41-43). In short, the latter three did not share the American view of an impending Iraqi aggression and the need to against balance it. While there had been no permanent US bases in France since 1966, the Turkish and German opposition presented grave challenges. As Holmes (2014, p.161). outlines, the massive basing structures in Germany had “had no equal”. Furthermore, Turkey´s geographical location neighboring Iraq made it an essential springboard for the invasion (Holmes 2014, p.161).

The original war plan had envisioned the stationing of 75000-80000 troops and 250 aircraft across several bases in Turkey (Holmes 2014, p.173). This included major sites such İncirlik Air Base and six other airbases to be used for combat sorties against Iraq. In addition, the US requested to use eight additional airports for logistics operations, as well as port access in Iskenderun and Mersin along the Mediterranean (Holmes 2014, p.178).

Given the poor state that many of these facilities were in, the US intended to upgrade and expand several of them. This extensive list of requests came as something of a shock to

the Turkish government, who believed that the US only wished to use airbases in Turkey much akin to the first gulf war (Holmes 2014, p.173).

Nevertheless, this shock pales in comparison to the one that US Defense planers got when the Turkish National Assembly on March the 1st, 2003 voted deny the United States the use of bases in Turkey (Holmes 2014, p.186). While the US had anticipated Turkish reluctance, the "Empire by Invitation" was so confident in their standing invitation that the Pentagon had already began moving troops and equipment military bases in Germany to sites in Turkey (Nosal et al 2003, pp.19-22). However, following the vote in the Turkish parliament, these forces were rendered effectively useless, striking a devasting blow to US war planners' intention of opening a "Northern Front" in Iraq (Holmes 2014, pp.156, 187).

The disinvited empire did not take well to this rejection, and Donald Rumsfeld would later blame Turkey for many of the problems the US encountered in Iraq (Holmes 2014, p.187). Holmes (2014, p.183), on the other hand, blames the failure on Bush administration´s failed perception of a common threat. Whereas the United States pressed the need to balance against the threat of Iraq, the Turks were considered the fall of the Iraqi central government and the possible establishment of a Kurdish state in Northern Iraq the bigger threat (Holmes 2014, pp.174, 180-181) Moreover, for Turkey, it seems that balancing against Iraq by granting the US basing rights was too risky in the face of potential retaliation from the Saddam regime (Holmes 2014, p.81). Thus, if not band- wagoning with Iraq, then certainly appeasement seemed the safer option. Hence, while Turkey did eventually consent to overflight rights for American planes, they nevertheless stood their ground in denying base access (Smith 2003). This stands in contrast to Germany, who much like Turkey were highly reluctant to do so.

In the run up the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the US defense establishment had counted on unrestricted access to military bases in Germany (Holmes 2014, p.161). Despite some restrictions being put on basing rights in previous conflicts, the Germans had by and large taken a hands-off approach to the use of US bases in Germany for "out of area" operations. The paraphrase Holmes (2014, p.162), the "Empire by Invitation" has become

so accustomed to using bases in Germany as a toolbox for out of theater military ventures that it never even entertained the idea that they could overstay their welcome.

Thus, when German Chancellor Gerard Schroder in August 2002 made it clear that Germany would oppose the War in Iraq, a diplomatic crisis ensued which many have described as "*the worst crisis in US-German relations since the end of the cold* war" (Holmes 2014, p.162). In line with Turkey, Germany did not share the perception that Iraq was a danger to be balanced against. As German defense minister Peter Struck put it in plain language "Iraq is no threat to us" (Dirks 2009, p.196).

Gone were the days overwhelming sympathy for the American cause. In Berlin, lit candles and roses had been replaced by anti-war demonstrations against gathering hundreds of thousands of people (Holmes 2014, p.166). Polling meanwhile showed that 95% of the German public opposed the war against Iraq (Brunstetter 2005, p.29). While the Bush administration eventually came to accept that German soldiers would not participate in the conflict, bases in Germany were considered essential in staging the invasion. Accordingly, despite German opposition, they demanded unrestricted access to bases in the country, as well as overflight rights. Furthermore, they requested German soldiers be dispatched to protect US bases in order to relive US troops destined for deployment to Iraq (Holmes 2014, pp.162-163).

The Germans were initially hesitant, and the Americans made it clear that refusal would have serious negative consequences for Germany. At one point, the Pentagon openly discussed drastic cuts in the US basing networking in the country, well-aware of the devastating impact this would have on the German economy (Newnham 2008, p.194). Five weeks after these requests were made, President Bush himself called the German chancellor to press the issue. In the end, Schroder gave in. c. In what is in many ways more reminiscent a classical imperialism through intimidation rather than invitation, the US was eventually given free near free reign in the use of bases in Germany in the War against Iraq.

In that respect, the US training grounds at Grafenwöhr were used extensively for war games in preparation for the invasion (Fontenot et al 2004, p55). When war was underway, several army units rotated between deployments in Iraq and bases in Germany, among them the V Corp out of their headquarters in Heidelberg (Carter 2005, pp.3-4). What´s more, now that Turkey had denied the use of their territory in the conflict, the airbases at Rhein am Main and Ramstein would become instrumental in opening a Northern Front in by Air (Tripak 2003, pp.26-27).

Thus, for the much of the of the initial phases conflict, C-17 transport planes would fly roundtrips to the battlefield carrying troops, supplies and heavy equipment (Tripak 2003, pp.26-27). On the way back, they would often bring wounded American soldiers. In fact, Landstuhl Regional Medical Center nearby Ramstein treated as many as 80% of military patients evacuated from the battlefield in Iraq in the first four month of the war (Johnson et al 2005, p.177). All in all, as Holmes (2014, pp.168-169) argues, Germany did more in enabling the war than many countries who supported the Iraq war.

5.4 The Ever-loyal Ally: Operation Iraqi Freedom and Bases in Britain

To the British meanwhile, there was hardly any question that the "American Empire" would remain invited. As touched on earlier, cultivating the "special relationship" remained a top priority to the British government, as it provided the UK a measure of influence they could never achieve on their own (Dumbrell 2006, p.73,132, 85-86, 132). In turn, the Americans had come to expect unrestricted base access in the country, which they by and large received, in no small part because the United Kingdom stood toe to toe with the United States in their perception of the Iraqi threat (Jacobsen & Ringmose 2015, pp. 138-139. Indeed, prime minister Tony Blair shared the view that it was only a matter of time before Saddam Hussein got his hands of weapons of mass destruction (Blair 2004). He deemed this an "existential threat" to the United Kingdom, one that Britain had to balance against by any means necessary (Blair 2004).

Thus, thus addition to participating in the invasion with troops, the British provided extensive basing rights to the United States for the duration of the conflict. In that respect,

the US air bases at Lakenheath and Mildenhall were used expensively as grounds for fighter jet sorties (Bingley 2018, p.110) Likewise, RAF Fairford served as a base for American B-52 bombers bound for Iraq, which in turn got a large share of their munitions from RAF Welford (Milmo 2014). Directly connected by road to the Fairford site, Welford remains the largest weapons depot of USAFE in Western Europe to this day (Milmo 2014; Bingley 2018, p.164).

The American use of bases in the UK also extended to intelligence assets. On that matter, the listening post Menwith Hill provided valuable intelligence about Iraqi military installations and was also used to intercept communications between Iraqi field commanders (Webb 2008, pp.455-461). A curios degression is that site was in fact also used to ease on UN delegates prior to the UN vote for authorizing the war. Indeed, a leaked memo revealed that the purpose was learn to the positions of "swing states" such as Mexico and Pakistan in order to gather their favor for the impeding invasion (Spannaus, 2013, 40-41) (Webb 2008, 460-461). Anyhow, access to intelligence facilities and listening post in the UK were vital so the US war effort that it arguably gave the "Empire by Invitation" ample of reason to stay. In addition to detecting threats, they also were an important means to balance against them. In fact, in the lead up to the Iraq war it was decided that the radar at RAF Fyllingdales would receive yet another upgrade to increase the facility's coverage of the Middle East (Stocker 2014 14-16). As communique by the British foreign office spelled out, without an upgraded radar at Fyllingdales, "its *effectiveness in meeting threats to the United States from the Middle East would be likely to be significantly impaired*" (Stocker 2014, p.15).

5.5 Renewed Drawdown and A Thrust East - Global Defense Posture

The "lifeline" that the War on Terror seemingly provided against any further reductions the European basing network came to an end in 2004. That year, the Bush Administration formulated the "Global Defense Posture Review" (GDPR) (Dod 2004, p.30). This new policy stipulated that in an era of asymmetrical warfare, the US armed forces needed to be more flexible and able to respond quickly to any terrorist activity across the globe (Yeo & Pettyjohn 2021, p.30). With reference to the experiences of the Iraq War, it emphasized

that moving heavy force units from Europe did not provide any benefits in terms of out of theater operations compared to deployment from the United States itself (DoD 2004, p.6). On the contrary, this had proven difficult given the widespread opposition to the war from many European countries. Both Switzerland and Austria had denied overflight rights to American military planes, complicating flights between US airbases in Germany and the UK to Italy and the Middle East (Fields 2004, p.82). In addition, Austria barred the United States from using Austrian railways in transporting troops and equipment bound for Iraq from bases in Germany to sites in Italy (Kirk 2003) (Fields 2004, p.82). Thus, "lighter" facilities were favored over larger, traditional base structures such as those in Italy or Germany (Yeo & Pettyjohn 2021, p.30). This was further justified by the argument that the current force posture was a legacy of "Cold War containment", and inadequate to balance against the new threat of global terrorism (DoD 2004, p.2).

Accordingly, the DoD announced that hundreds of military bases were to be closed following decade, including half of all installations in Europe (Lachowski 2007, p.21). Subsequently, the total number of US troops on the continent reduced from about 110,000 in 2004 to roughly 64.000 in 2008 (Allen et al 2022). In the same time span, the US Army closed 32 smaller and medium sized installations in Germany alone. While the GDPR outlined that the US was to hold on to certain MOBs such as Ramstein AB and the training grounds at Grafenwoehr, several major bases faced closure (DoD 2004, p.11) This includes Rhein Am Main AB, which was returned to German control in 2005, and notably, Keflavik Air Station (Lachowski 2007, pp.22,24). The closure of this Atlantic outpost had been long in the making and had been earlier been singled out by Secretary of Defense Donald as a case in point for antiquated base of the cold war era (Rumsfeld 2010, pp.741-742) By 2006, the US was no longer willing to be "An Empire by Insistence", and the base closed the same year (Thorhallsson et al 2018, p.547)

Nevertheless, as the Pentagon began to move troops out of cold war hotspots, they all the while set their eyes on obtaining new facilities in Eastern Europe. In that relation, they probed the possibility of establishing FOB´s in Bulgaria and Romania (Fields 2004, pp.82-83). This can in part be seen in connection to their strategic location closer to the conflict zones of the Middle East, but also with their hands off approach to the use of US bases

(Lachowski 2007, pp.24-25) (Fields 2004, pp. 82-83). Indeed, the Turkish refusal to allow the US basing rights in the Iraq war had struck a chord with the Americans. In a manner of speaking, the "Empire by Invitation" had rarely felt so unwelcome.

President Bush himself sarcastically said that bargaining for basing rights with Turkey reminded him of horse trading in Texas (Holmes 2014, p.184). In light of this painful lesson, the GDPR stressed the need for new host countries that would provide "greater operational flexibility" (Lachowski 2007, p.13) In that respect, Romania and Bulgaria had already proven their worth when they allowed American forces extensive basing access in the war against Iraq. In fact, access to base sites in these countries were essential in compensating for the loss of access in Turkey (Lachowski 2007, pp 24-25). At any rate, when the "American Empire" petitioned the Romanian and Bulgarian government in 2003 about the establishment of a longer presence, they did not hesitate to invite them in (Lachowski 2007, 24-25).

In both Romania and Bulgaria, the requests were warmly welcomed by the political establishment (Iliev 2008, pp. 13-14) (Mitrache 2009, p.208). Even a decade after the cold war, the fear of falling into the Russian orbit yet gain was very much alive. As Mitrache (2009, p.208) argues, many saw the presence of American troops as the only guarantee to preventing this for happening. In other words, containing and balancing against a potentially threatening Russia was an important motivation for allowing a US basing presence. On that matter, Bulgaria offered the use of its Naval Base at Atiya for US operations in the Black Sea, while making available several airbases across the country (Lachowski 2007, p.25).

In 2006, an agreement was reached whereby 2500 US troops would be stationed in Bulgaria on a rotational basis. These would mainly be stationed at Berzmer airbase, as well as at the extensive training grounds at Novo Selo (Lachowski 2007, p.25) Furthermore, in a similar feat, Romania gave the US permission to preposition equipment and conduct training exercises at several Romanian bases (Lachowski 2007, p.26). In addition, 100 US troops would be permanently assigned to Mihail Kogalniceanu airbase; a base that had gained some notoriety for being used by the CIA for so-called "retention

flights", essentially illegal transfers of terror suspects for secret integrations at sites in Europe (Lachowski 2007, 26-27).

Anyhow, the basing agreements with Bulgaria and Romania were sharply criticized by Russia. They saw the development as being in violation of the 1997 "NATO-Russia Founding Act", which in their interpretation prohibited the establishment of permanent new US bases in former Warsaw Pact Countries (Lachowski 2007, pp. 26-27). The United States, on the other hand, argued that the small and largely rotational nature of these deployments were well within the bounds of the agreement. This, however, did little to comfort Russia, who feared being encircled by an expanding network of US bases (Fields 2004, p.88).

In that respect, it did not help that NATO at 2008 summit proclaimed their intention that Ukraine "will become a member of NATO" (Mearsheimer 2014, pp.78-79). Deeply alarmed, Russian President Vladimir Putin made it clear that Ukrainian membership was "a direct threat to Russia", one that Russia would balance against by any means necessary (Mearsheimer 2014, p.79). In a chilling display of foreshadowing, Putin allegedly hinted to Bush that if Ukraine was to be accepted into NATO, "*it would cease to exist*." (Mearsheimer 2014, p.79).

5.6 The Rebirth of Containment – US Basing in Europe in wake of the 2014 Ukrainian Conflict.

After coming into office in 2009, President Obama famously launched his initiative to "reset" the relationship with Russia following the cooling of bilateral in the latter half of the 2000s (Deyermond 2013, pp500-503). This extended hand did produce some tangible results. In 2010, Russia and the United States signed the "Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty" or "NEW START", in which they pledged to number of strategic nuclear warheads deployed by the respective parties to 1550 each (Deyermond 2013, p.502). On that matter, there are indications that the United States removed a third of all nuclear weapons stationed at bases in Europe the next years (Schneider 2021). Moreover, NATO`s 2010 strategic concept stressed the importance mutual disbarment and friendly relations

with Russia (NATO 2010, pp.24,29). The arguably naïve zeitgeist was captured in the 2012 US presidential campaign when Obama ridiculed his contender Mitt Romney for calling Russia America´s "*number one geopolitical foe*" (Cillizza 2022). In the words of Obama himself "*the 1980s are now calling to ask for their foreign policy back, because the Cold War's been over for 20 years"* (Cillizza 2022). Little did he know it was about to return.

In the morning hours of the 27th of February 2014, heavily armed men in military attire without any insignia began seizing government buildings, radio stations, critical infrastructure and military installations in the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea (Bebler 2015, p.39). These "little green men" as some would come to call them, were later revealed to be Russian soldiers. Following a referendum widely condemned by the international community on March the 17th, the Republic of Crimea and the port city of Sevastopol were admitted as new subjects of the Russian Federation (Bebler 2015, pp.41-43). This marked the first time since World War 2 that a country in Europe had forcibly annexed a part of another sovereign state (Wright 2017, p.48). Adding fuel to fire, report of additional "green men" would also come of out Eastern Ukraine in the months to come (Aslund 2015, p.18).

With regards to the Crimea annexation, Mearsheimer (2014, p.81) argues that it was a relatively easy undertaking, considering that the Russian already had several thousand troops at their Naval Base in Crimean seaport of Sevastopol. Treisman (2016, p.47) meanwhile argues that retaining this base was a key motivation for the invasion in the first place. Ever since the fall of the Soviet Union, the site had been leased to the Russia by Ukraine, but basing rights at the port had nonetheless remained point of friction in Ukrainian-Russian relations (Bebler 2015, p.39). When Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych renewed the lease in 2010, it was sharply criticized by the pro-western opposition (Levy 2010). Following the overthrow of the Yanukovych government on February the 22nd 2014, this opposition now found themselves in power (Mearsheimer 2014, pp.80-81). In a peculiar twist, Putin was afraid that Russia might find itself a disinvited Empire, ousted from their Crimean naval base (Triesman 2016, p.50). By

extension, he feared that the American Empire would be their place by means of the establishment of a NATO base at the Sevastopol site (Mearsheimer 2014, p.77).

Shocked by this Russian move, the US promptly increased their military presence in Eastern Europe. In a sense, the "containment" in the traditional military sense, was reborn. On a visit to Warsaw in 2014, President Obama announced a grant of 1$ billion US dollars to support increased US military presence in Poland and its allied neighbors (Foerster 2017, p.179-180). In that respect, significant funds were invested in upgrading US bases in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. A site of interests in that respect is Mihail Kogalniceanu airbase, at which 50 million Euros were invested to make room for an increased US presence (Gherasim 2017) Commenting on this build-up of forces in Romania, Secretary General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg said "*is part of NATO's answer to increased Russian presence in the Black Sea*" (Gherasim 2017). Moreover, 2016, NATO announced its "enhanced forward presence" strategy (Foerster 2017, p.180) As part of this initiative, a battalion of four thousand American troops would rotate between bases in Poland and the three Baltic countries. In addition, an armored US brigade would supplement the mission (Foerster 2017, pp.180-181). As outlined in a 2016 NATO statement, these deployments were a direct result of Russia´s actions in Ukraine and their increasingly aggressive military posture against their neighbors (NATO 2016).

The United States also revamped its presence in Western Europe. In 2016, the Naval Station at Keflavik was reactivated (Pettersen 2016). On a visit to Iceland the year prior, US Defense Secretary Bob Work noted the importance of this renewed presence, raising concern over recent circumnavigation flights made by Russian fighter jets (Pettersen 2016). Consequently, Keflavik would henceforth house P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft on behalf of the US Navy, tasked with monitoring the Russian activity in the GUIK gap (Beardsley 2016). Thus, the base regained its cold war purpose of containing Russia in the Northern Atlantic.

In a related measure, a detachment of 300 US marines was sent to Værnes in Norway in 2017. The aim of the mission was to conduct year-round training with Norwegian forces and to reassert US determination to contain Russian aggression on Norway´s eastern

border (Jacobsen 2022, p.231). The move was a controversial one, as Norway had long had a policy of not allowing permanent foreign bases on Norwegian soil (Lorentzen & Kleven 2016). In a sense, the invitation the American Empire was by no means unconditional. Indeed, Norwegian authorities were careful to emphasize that the rotational nature of the deployment and it in their view did not constitute the makings of an American base (Granviken 2017).

Moving on, the 2014 Ukraine Crisis and the souring of relations with Russia seemingly put the prospect of any further downscaling in Europe to rest. This in spite of the election of Donald Trump in 2016, who early on made it clear saw little purposes in maintaining large military bases in Europe (Jacobsen 2022, pp.1, 227) To him, being "An Empire by Invitation" was just a means for the Europeans to free ride under the American defense umbrella (Jacobsen 2022, p.227) Germany in particular had been singled out as a "*delinquent*" country that "*took advantage*" of the United States by not paying their fair share (VanOpdorp 2020). Thus, in 2020, he attempted to withdraw 11,800 of the 35,000 troops still stationed in country, but the move was blocked by congress (VanOpdorp 2020) (Jacobsen 2022, pp.232-233). As Jacobsen (2022, pp.233-234) outlines, there was broad bipartisan consensus amongst lawmakers that this would strike a devasting blow to the US ability of contain any further aggression by Russia. As one lawmaker put it, "*it would make champagne flow freely at the Kremlin*" (Jacobsen 2022, p.234). Thus, somewhat ironically, US troops numbers in Germany remained remarkably stable under Trumps tenure, and only saw a 0.9% decrease (Jacobsen pp.187-188). The same held true for the presence Italy and the United Kingdom, the latter of whom would in fact host 11.1% more troops by the end of Trumps time in office (Jacobsen 2022, p.228). In fact, both under Obama and Trump, the United States reopened some old bases and established some new ones.

5.7 The Ghost from Fulda: The Suwałki Gap

It is often said that history has a peculiar way of repeating itself. That may be true, but it is a strange twist of history that has paved the way what is today a new strategically important choke point at border between Lithuania and Poland known as the "Suwałki Gap". The 110 long kilometer border makes for a corridor that separates the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad from Belarus (Veebel & Sliwa 2019, p.110) It is named after the town of Suwałki on the Polish side of the border and has been dubbed the "Fulda Gap of the 21st Century" (Scholtz 2020, p.31).

The current borders of the Suwałki corridor came into being in the aftermath of World War 2. In 1945, as a prize of war, the Soviet Union annexed the lion's share of former German province of East Prussia, adding the newly christened Kaliningrad oblast to the Russian Soviet Republic (Scholtz1 2020, p31). Still, for or the next decades, the Suwałki region carried little strategic significance, as Lithuania had become part of the Soviet Union and Poland a firm member of the Warsaw Pact. With the fall of the Soviet Union, however, Kaliningrad became an exclave of the Russian Federation (Scholtz1 2020, p31). When Poland and later the Baltic states joined of NATO, the alliance´s only land bridge to their new Baltic partners became the narrow Suwałki corridor (Hogdes et al 2018, p III). Sandwiched between the Russian exclave and their ally in Belarus, and with few natural barriers, military planners recognized the strategic weakness of the Suwałki region in the event of Russian aggression (Parafianowich 2017, pp.14-15). In fact, one study found that without NATO reinforcements, Moscow could seize the area in just 72 hours, cutting of the Baltics from the rest of the alliance (Elak & Śliwa 2016, p.26). These fears were greatly exacerbated following the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, and former Estonian president Toomas Hendrik Ilves is said to have coined the term "Suwałki Gap" in 2015 with obvious reference to its cold-war counterpart (Elak & Śliwa 2016, p.24). (Karnitschnig 2022). The situation soon caught the attention of US military planners, and in the next years, the US military established a noticeable presence in the region.

Map of the Sulwaki Gap (The *Daily Mail 2022)*

In 2017, the 2nd Cavalry regiment of the US Army was redeployed from Germany to "Bemowo Piskie Training Area" nearby Orzysz, Poland, a mere 95 km from the Polish Lithuanian border (Vandriver 2022a). Once there, this unit was tasked with leading "Battlegroup Poland" of NATO´s enhanced forward presence initiative (Vandriver 2022a). Although a relatively minor deployment of only 800 troops on a rotational basis, these GIs will like their processors at Fulda be among the first responders in the event of a Russian invasion. Along with their allies, the regiment´s mission would be to hold off the Russian advance until reinforcement can arrive (Vandriver 2022a). Still, the deterring effect of this minor force and the ability to contain an attack was called into questioned by military and political leaders alike. As Ilves put it "*You have a so-called trip-wire force, but you may as well call it a suicide mission" (*Karnitschnig 2022).

Ilves is one of many political and military leaders that have called for an increased US presence near the Suwałki gap to balance against the Russian threat. In 2018, the Polish Ministry of Defense sent a request to the Pentagon entitled the "*Proposal for a Permanent US Presence in Poland*" (MON 2018). In the bid, the establishment of an American military base in Bydgoszcz-Toruń in central Poland in outlined (Jureńczyk 2021, p.85). This envisioned facility was intended as the permanent headquarters of a US armored division (MON 2018, pp.4). For reference, an armored division is typically made up of

between 10000 and 15000 soldiers, along with heavy equipment such as tanks, artillery and attack helicopters (UAFB 2022) The proposal warns against the threat that an increasingly aggressive Russia poses to shared US-Polish security interests and goes on to suggest that a "*a permanent American military presence in Poland would significantly reduce security vulnerabilities in the region, particularly in the Suwalki Gap"* (MON 2018, p.9). To help fund the base, the even Polish offered between 1.5 and 2 billion USD (MON 2018, p.9). While certainly an instance of "Empire by Invitation", we may in this case even be witnessing an attempt at "Empire by Manipulation". In fact, Polish Andrzej Duda suggested that this planned military base be called "Fort Trump", in what some deemed an appeal to the alleged narcissistic personality of former president Donald Trump (Jureńczyk 2021 p.85). Anyhow, for the being, such a base did not materialize, but the American reluctance towards establishing a permanent American presence in Poland did change following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. At a NATO summit in June 2022, President Biden pledged for the first time to establish a permanent American military base in Poland (Vandriver 2022b). As fate would have it, V Corp, the very same unit responsible for guarding the Fulda Gap three decades prior, will henceforth be headquartered at the newly christened "Camp Kosciuszko" in Poznan (Vandriver 2022b).

5.8 In Brief: The Future of US Basing in Europe

Predicting the future is always an uncertain exercise, but there are nonetheless some patterns that already seem to be emerging. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 certainly seem to have paved out a path towards substantial increase in the US basing presence in Europe the years to come. Indeed, the DoD (2022) has announced that its currently making "*significant investments in the long-term U.S. presence in Europe*". Just since last year, the United States has increased its troop numbers in Europe by over 40000, bringing the total number of American forces on the continent to over a hundred thousand (Allen et al) (DoD 2022). In fact, the Pentagon has already released a brief with glimpses of American basing plans for the near future (DoD 2022). Amongst the measures outlined are the deployment of two additional F-35 fighter squadrons at RAF Lakenheath in England by 2024, as well as the dispatchment of two additional naval destroyers to the

US naval base at Rota in Spain. While the exact number of troops have yet to be disclosed, the plan also calls for further enhancing the ongoing rotational deployments in the Baltics (DoD 2022). Furthermore, the brief outlines the creation of new rotational brigade of the US army to be headquartered in Romania, as well as the deployment of additional air defense units to bases in Italy and Germany (DoD 2022).

Furthermore, the penny has dropped on any diplomatic attempt at pretending the eastward expansion of NATO is not about the containment of Russia. In that respect, the US congress recently ratified Finland and Sweden´s applications to join the alliance (Biden 2022). On that occasion, President Biden held a speech where he made American motivations abundantly clear: "*In a moment when Putin's Russia has shattered peace and security in Europe, when autocrats are challenging the very foundations of a rule-based order, the strength of the transatlantic alliance and America's commitment to NATO is more important than it has ever been. That's why, in June, in Madrid, at a pivotal NATO Summit, all 30 nations came together to invite Finland and Sweden to apply*" (Biden 2022). As Diesen (2022) spells out, the addition of the two countries to the alliance would make available important air and naval bases along in the Baltic Sea Basin. This in turn would make containing Russian offensive moves against the Baltic states considerably easier (Diesen 2022). While there are no current plans for establishing permanent American bases in Sweden or Finland, it is conceivable that this might change in the future (Bunyan 20222). While Sweden has been more reluctant in its invitation to the "American Empire", Finland has not ruled out the possibility (Diesen 2022). Moreover, US defense officials have hinted that rotational troop deployments are in the cards, and as we have seen, these "temporary" assignments have peculiar way of becoming enduring missions (The Independent 2022).

6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this piece, we have explored main trends in US basing policy in Europe since 1989. In so doing, we have also attempted to understand why sovereign European states allow the presence of US military bases on their soil.

We started out in 1989 in cold-war era Western Germany, which by far hosted the largest garrison of US troops in Europe. The name of the game was containment, and 250.000 US soldiers were stationed at military facilities across West Germany to deter any acts of aggression by The Soviet Union and their allies (Cleaves 1991, p.227). The focal point of this mission was at the Fulda Gap, where a vastly outnumbered American force faced off against 90,000 Soviet troops right on the other side of the inner-German border (Uhl 2017, p.56). Given this disparity, a credible deterrent rested on the rapid dispatchment of airborne troops to US bases in the Frankfurt Area in the event of a Soviet invasion. Still, in the minds of US military planners, the logic of containment demanded the use of tactical nuclear weapons stationed at bases in Germany should this deterrence fail (Poppe 2017, p.274) (Hammerich 2017, p.4).

Later, we witnessed the official end of the military doctrine of containment following the fall of the Soviet Union in 199 (DoD 1993, p.iii). As has been noted, the perception of a significantly less threatening Russia fueled a massive drawdown of the number of troops in Europe during the 1990s. The largest withdrawal by far took place in Germany, but also Iceland and the UK saw significant reductions. Seen from a balance of threat angle, the US presence needed to balance out Russian forces in Europe was markedly lower than that needed to balance out the military might of the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies.

Still, with regards to the “Empire by Invitation” thesis, there was little change in the host countries’ willingness to have the US forces present following the Soviet demise. On the contrary and as outlined earlier, prominent voices in the UK, German and Iceland wanted to reduce or halt the planned reductions in the American basing presence. The three nations had related but different reasons for doing so. In the German case, defense considerations were surely part of it, but arguably the most important motivation was the

economic benefits of hosting US bases (Walker 1997). As for the British, it was plausibility about both. In addition, it was also about cementing their "special relationship" with the United States, which they seemingly viewed as essential in retaining a degree of global influence now that the sun had set on their own empire (Dumbrell 2006, p.73,132, 85-86, 132). As for the Icelanders, who had no military on their own, the US basing presence was considered indispensable to their national security (Thorhallsson et al 2018, p.547). However, as mentioned earlier, America in a sense became "An Empire by Insistence", as the Icelandic government managed to persuade the US to agree to a reduced deployment instead of a complete withdrawal (Thorhallsson & Vignisson 2004, pp.112).

On that matter and as previously outlined, a considerable basing presence in Europe was retained throughout the 1990s despite the drawdown and the disappearance of the Soviet threat. This was particularly evident in Germany, but also in Italy, and to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom. As has been argued, this can possibly be attributed to a measure of "residual containment" of against the prospect of potentially resurgent Russia in the future. Moreover, as we saw in the German case, the US basing presence may even to some degree have been about containment of Germany itself (Allen 2009).

Moving on, the Gulf War (1990-1991) marked an important shift in US basing policy in Europe. As has been outlined, this marked the first of many large-scale "out of theatre" operations staged from American bases in Europe in the following decade (Gehring 1998, p.261). In that respect, we have seen how European bases were extensively used to balance against threats emanating from Iraq and the Balkans during 1990s. As has been noted, Italy was particularly important in the latter regard, and was an outlier in that it saw an increase in US basing presence at a time where most countries faced reductions (Dian 2021, pp.45-47). Nonetheless, some new construction also took place in in countries where the overall presence diminished. Notably, this includes the UK, where the radar at RAF Fylingdales was upgraded to better balance against ballistic missile threats (Wainwright 2003) (Stockner 2004, p.14).

In our detour to Saudi Arabia, we explored the link between jihadist opposition to US bases in the country and the events leading up to 9/11. In a sense, this highlights the fallacy outlined by Kawana & Takashi (2021, p.2) of bases being treated as mere effects, not causes of larger happenings in international relations. While one should be careful to draw a direct causal link between the events of 9/11 and the American basing presence in the country, there is sufficient evidence to claim that it was at least part of the motivation for the vicious attack (Mizobuchi 2021, p.111) (Lewis 1998, p.15).

In that regard, we have examined how 9/11 and the subsequent war on terror reshaped US basing policy. As was discussed, the attack halted the Pentagons plans of a reduced US basing presence in Europe, and any overtures made by President Bush about America stopping being "the world's policeman" (Davis 2006, pp.200, 256). Instead, balancing against the terrorist threat would henceforth mean facing it head on.

As previously outlined, the "American Empire" had rarely been more welcome in Europe as in the first months after 9/11. Airbases across Europe were made available for US forces both prior to during the forthcoming invasion of Afghanistan. However, as has been argued, this was conceivably due to more than just sympathy for the American cause. Equally shocked by the terrorist bombings of 9/11 and facing their own issues with active terrorist cells, they largely shared the American perception that global jihadism and by extension, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, was a threat to be balanced against. Still, as we have seen, this stands in stark contrast what was the case with the 2003 Iraq War.

As formerly noted, the United States found itself in the curious position of being a "disinvited empire" when it was refused to use bases in Turkey as a launch pad for the Iraq invasion in 2003 (Holmes 2014, p.186). Thus, it saw itself forced to realign much of the staging of the operation to airbases in Germany. Yet, as discussed, the "American" Empire was not particularly welcome there either. Thus, in a move earlier described as more akin to empire by intimidation rather than invitation, they threatened punitive measures until the Germans conceded (Holmes 2014, pp.163-164, 169). The British, on the other hand, shared as we saw the assessment of the Iraqi threat as one that had to be balanced against (Jacobsen & Ringmose 2015, pp. 138-139. Thus, they willingly offered

to the Americans several airfields and intelligence facilities in the country for the duration of the Iraq conflict.

Moving on, we further examined how Pentagon instigated a new drawdown of US basing in Europe in accordance with the GDPR of 2004 (DoD 2022). In so doing, we witnessed how the Bush administration viewed many of the installations on the continent as relics of "cold war containment", and set about closing several of them, including the base at Keflavik in Iceland. (Thorhallsson et al 2018, p.547). All the while, we explored the simultaneous eastward thrust that the Pentagon was undertaking with regards to the establishment of new bases in Bulgaria and Romania. As we saw, the move was in part motivated by the strategic location of these countries along the Black Sea and closer to the warzones of the Middle East (Fields 2004, pp.82-83). However, we also found indications that it was spurred on by a wish for more permissive basing rights in the wake of the German and Turkish opposition to granting those in the war against Iraq (Fields 2004, pp.82-83).

In that respect, we found out that Romania and Bulgaria presumably had their own reasons for inviting in the American Empire. As was outlined, it seems that an American basing presence was an important tool for balancing against the potential threat of a resurgent Russia (Iliev 2008, pp. 13-14) (Mitrache 2009, p.208). We also saw that Russia was discontented by this development, and the frictions over this matter was one of many issues that President Obama wished to lay to rest when he announced his "reset initiative" with Russia in 2009 (Lachowski 2007, pp. 26-27) (Deyermond 2013, pp500-503)

As we witnessed, the initiative did contribute to a measure of détente with Russia, and reports allege that it led to reduced US nuclear deployments at bases in Europe (Schneider 2021).. As outlined, friendly relations with Russia was the mantra of the day, and the need to balance against Russia was downplayed by President Obama himself. (Cillizza 2022). However, this would change rapidly following 2014 Ukrainian Crisis.

As spelled out earlier, the events of 2014 seem to have marked the rebirth of containment as a US military doctrine. In response, the US quickly ramped up its presence in Eastern

Europe in the form of rotational brigades in Poland and the Baltic countries (Foerster 2017, p.179-180). Moreover, as outlined, significant funds were also set aside for the construction of new military facilities in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria (Gherasim 2017). The renewed logic of containment would also lead to the reopening of some cold war garrisons, including the Naval Station at Keflavik, which regained its old purpose of containing Russian aggression in the Northern Atlantic (Beardsley 2016).

Furthermore, we have also explored the The Suwałki Gap and its implications for US basing policy. In that respect, we have seen that it carries a great deal of resemblance to its cold war counterpart as the new weak spot in NATO´s containment posture. On that matter, we have discussed how the US has already established a minor presence to bolster the Suwałki Gap´s defenses (Vandriver 2022a)..Still, to the eastern European allies, this was not enough. In that regard, we peaked into Poland´s 2018 proposal for the establishment of a permanent American base in Poland to be named "Fort Trump". In that respect, we discussed whether this was not just an attempt at "Empire by Invation", but a try at "Empire by Manipulation" by appealing to President Trumps alleged narcissistic tendencies in the naming of the base (Jureńczyk 2021 p.85. Anyhow, as outlined, a permanent American base in Poland became a reality 2022, when President Biden announced the stationing of the V Corp in Poland in response to Russia´s full-fledged invasion in February of this year (Vandriver 2022b).

In the end, we investigated what the future of US basing in Europe might look like. On that point, we found that the DoD (2022) was already making significant investments in new long-term basing projects on the continent. Furthermore, we discussed the prospects Finland and Sweden joining the NATO alliance and discussed what impacts this might have on US basing policy in the years to come. In that respect, we determined that it is conceivable that the US will have some sort of basing presence in the two countries in the future, be that on a rotational or permanent basis, and concluded that this could boost the US efforts at containing Russian aggression in the Baltic Basin (Diesen 2022) ((The Independent 2022).

Now that the long answers are out of the way, it is time to also give some short answers to the research questions, hence:

1. *What are some of the main trends of how the United States has developed its network of military bases in Europe in line with geopolitical changes since 1989 until today?*

Broadly speaking, the patterns come across in this study points to five distinct geopolitical events within the given timeframe that seem to have impacted American basing policy in Europe in the most. The first and most significant one is the end of the Cold War. For decades, American defense planning and force posture had revolved around containing the Soviet Union. Hundreds of thousands of US troops were stationed at bases in Europe ready engage their Soviet foe at minimal notice. When the Soviet Union ceased to exist on Christmas day 1991, this large US force also lost its raison d'etre. Accordingly, the United States instigated a massive drawdown he likes of which had not been seen since the Second World War. The legacy of this move still lives on, as the US troop and basing presence has never neared its Cold War numbers since.

The second geopolitical event is the 1990-1991 Gulf War. The event marked the beginning of an era whereby American bases in Europe would be used as springboards to balance against threats out of theater on a large scale. This new purpose would extend beyond missions of the 1990s in the Persian Gulf and the Balkans and has remained an integral part of US basing strategy in Europe to this day.

The third geopolitical event is 9/11 and the subsequent war on terror. In both wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, US bases in Europe were used extensively for out of theatre balancing. Furthermore, the conflicts arguably provided a lifeline against further downsizing in the European theatre for the time being. However, the most enduring legacy of this era is arguably the move east commenced under the 2004 GDPR. In fact, many US bases in Eastern Europe later upgraded and expanded by later presidents were first built under President George W. Bush´s second term.

The fourth geopolitical event is the 2014 Ukraine Crisis and the Russian annexation of Crimea. This rogue action seemed to have been the renaissance of the containment doctrine as an instrument of US basing policy. In the next years, a steady buildup of American forces in several European countries was commenced, significantly increasing the American basing presence on NATO´s eastern flank. This new containment posture paved the way for new deployments to old allies, such as the reopening of the Keflavik base in Iceland in 2016 or the dispatchment of US marines to Norway in 2017.

The fifth and final geopolitical development is the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine. Rarely has US basing policy in Europe seen such dramatic changes in mere months. Just since last year, US troop numbers on the continent has been bolstered by 40000, 20000 of whom have been dispatched since February of this year. Furthermore, the Pentagon has indicated that it will invest significant amounts in new basing structures in Europe. Thus, it certainly seems that containment of Russia an overarching principle over US basing policy in Europe in the foreseeable future.

2. *Why do sovereign European states allow the presence of US military bases on their soil?*

In short, there seems two main reasons for why sovereign European states willingly host American bases. The first and most obvious one is that is that it provides an important security guarantee. The Soviet Union up until 1991, and Russia particularly after the armed conflict with Ukraine begun in 2014, have been seen as potential existential threats to liberal democracies and market economies in Europe. Further, the United States is broadly perceived as a good-intentioned state. For the host country, having a vast presence of US forces on its soil is seen to bear with it a limited risk of these forces being used to pressure the host country politically or militarily.

In Europe, therefore, the US basing empire appears quite clearly to be one built on invitation. Additionally, internal US aims of containing the ideological, political and military influence of the Soviet Union, and later Russia, has made the US willing to accept the invitation, despite the heavy economic burden it has entailed on American taxpayers.

Following the renewed tensions in Eastern Europe in the 2000s, and particularly after outright armed conflict broke out in Ukraine in 2014, the pattens have to no little extent returned to those seen before 1989. While one of the most important focal points for a potential armed conflict before 1989 was the Fulda Gap, the developments particularly in the 1990s lessened the importance of the US bases in Germany. Today, with a Russian state that is not just threatening its European neighbors, but that is actively waging war against one of Europe's largest countries, the importance of US bases in Europe is arguably back to the levels seen before 1989 – if not higher.

In this sense, what appeared for some years to be a one-way ticket, turned out to become a return ticket and a round-trip - back to the central European plains.

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