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<https://consortiumnews.com/2015/12/19/challenging-us-overseas-military-bases/>

## Challenging US Overseas Military Bases

By Ann Wright

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Though the U.S. government denies that it runs an empire, it maintains a bristling global network of military bases unprecedented in world history, including some where the population strenuously protests the presence, as retired Col. Ann Wright noted in a speech on Dec. 15 in Okinawa.

I am honored to speak at this symposium in Okinawa about the need to abolish United States military bases around the world, and particularly here in Okinawa where you have been subjected to these bases for over 70 years following World War II.

From the beginning, let me state that I apologize for the continuing presence of some many U.S. bases on Okinawa and the trauma they have caused to the people of Okinawa.



A U.S. soldier in Afghanistan fires an MA-2, .50-caliber machine gun, in a training exercise at the U.S. base in Afghanistan's Farah province on Sept. 22, 2012. (Photo credit: U.S. Defense Department photo by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Lovelady)

I worked for nearly 40 years in the United States government. I served 29 years in the U.S. Army/Army Reserves and retired as a Colonel. I was also a U.S. diplomat for 16 years and served in U.S. Embassies in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan and Mongolia.

However, in March 2003, I was one of three U.S. government employees who resigned in opposition to President Bush's war on Iraq. Since then, I, as well as everyone on our Veterans for Peace delegation, have been publicly challenging policies of the Bush and Obama administrations on a variety of international and domestic issues including extraordinary rendition, unlawful imprisonment, torture, assassin drones, police brutality, mass incarceration, and U.S. military bases around the world, including of course, the U.S. military bases here on Okinawa

I was last here on Okinawa in 2007 with a delegation from the Japan chapter of CODEPINK: Women for Peace, a delegation that went first to Guam to witness the U.S. military build-up on that island and then here to Okinawa to join with the citizen protest against the U.S. proposal to build the runway of the U.S. Marine Base into the South China Sea.

Today I want to speak about the need to abolish foreign military bases around the world.

I returned two weeks ago from an international conference called "Abolition of Foreign Military Bases" in Guantanamo, Cuba. As you may know, the oldest foreign military base in the world is the U. S. Naval Base in Guantanamo, Cuba. The U.S. has maintained control of this military base for 112 years and claims the rights to the land in "perpetuity" through a lease obtained from a U.S. puppet government. The U.S. sends a check for \$4,085 per year for this lease, checks that the Cuban government has never cashed.

U.S. Military bases on soil other than the United States, provides the U.S. the cover to conduct illegal and criminal actions on those bases that violate U.S. law using the excuse that U.S. law does not apply.

The sordid history of the past 14 years of the United States imprisoning 779 persons from 48 countries on a U.S. military base in Cuba as a part of its “global war on terror” reflects the mentality of those who govern the United States – global intervention for political or economic reasons, invasion, occupation other countries and leaving its military bases in those countries for decades.

The infamous U.S. prison on the U.S. Naval Base has imprisoned detainees beginning in January 2002. After nearly 14 years of imprisonment in Guantanamo prison, 107 prisoners remain, 47 of them were cleared for release years ago and are still held, and incomprehensibly, the U.S. maintains that another 46 will be imprisoned indefinitely without charge or trial. Only 8 have been convicted of any crime.

(Because of U.S. government secrecy, precise numbers and details regarding Guantanamo prisoners have been hard to nail down. On Thursday, the White House said 48 of the remaining 107 prisoners can be “safely transferred,” but declined to comment on reports that the transfer of 17 may be imminent.)

Let me assure you, we in the United States continue our struggle demanding a trial for all prisoners, the closing of the prison in Guantanamo and the return of the land to the people of Cuba. The U.S. military base is of no strategic importance to the United States, but instead is used as the symbol of U.S. imperialism to the revolution of Cuba and the U.S. attempts over the past 60 years to overthrow the revolution.

Over the past 100 years, Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Grenada, Haiti, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Somalia, Djibouti, Diego Garcia have had the presence of U.S. military in their countries.

Today, the United States empire has over 800 U.S. military installations around the world. In his excellent, recently released book *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*, David Vine documents that even after hundreds of bases in Iraq and Afghanistan have been closed, the U.S. still has bases ranging in size from mega “Little Americas” to small radar facilities in more than 80 countries.

The United States has 95 percent of the world’s foreign bases. Although few Americans realize it, but certainly people outside the U.S. do, the United States likely has more bases in foreign lands than any other people, nation or empire in history. Currently, the United States has about half as many bases as it had in 1989, but the number of countries with U.S. bases has roughly doubled from 40 to 80.

When the Cold War temporarily ended with the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, there were 300,000 U.S. military personnel in Europe alone, and about 1,600 U.S. bases worldwide. In the 1990s, the U.S. military closed about 60 percent of its overseas bases in the 1990s, yet the overall base infrastructure stayed relatively intact. Despite additional base closures in Europe and to a lesser extent in East Asia over the last decade and despite the absence of a superpower adversary, nearly 250,000 military personnel are still deployed on installations worldwide.

Other countries have a combined total of about 30 foreign bases. Great Britain has seven bases and France five bases in their former colonies. Russia has eight military bases in the former Soviet republics and one in Syria.

You here in Okinawa already know that for the first time since World War II, Japan's "Self-Defense Forces" have a foreign base — in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, as does the U.S. and France. South Korea has a military base in the UAE; India has a base in the Andaman Islands; Chile has a base in Antarctica; Turkey and Israel reportedly have access to air bases in Azerbaijan.

There are also reports that China may be seeking its first base overseas — also in Djibouti, as it builds bases on manmade islands in disputed atolls in the South China Sea, logically in response to the Obama administration's "pivot" to Asia.

According to U.S. Department of Defense records, 70 years after World War II and 62 years after the Korean War, there are still 174 U.S. "base sites" in Germany, 113 in Japan, and 83 in South Korea. The U.S. has hundreds of smaller military installations in over 80 countries including Aruba and Australia, Bahrain and Bulgaria, Colombia, Kenya, and Qatar, among many other places.

The United States has built permanent base infrastructure in every Persian Gulf country except one – Iran. The U.S. government gets agreements with undemocratic and often despotic states like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Bahrain to build bases and in return remains silent to their human rights violations.

U.S. military bases in Iraq, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia have contributed greatly to increases in the radicalization of youth in those countries. Osama Bin Laden cited the U.S. bases near Muslim holy sites in Saudi Arabia as a reason al-Qaeda attacked U.S. embassies in East Africa, the Kobar towers in Saudi Arabia, the USS Cole warship in Yemen and the Twin Towers in New York City.

The smaller bases are known as "lily pads" (or more formally as "cooperative security locations") now found in Africa and Eastern Europe and which may provide a base for drones, surveillance aircraft, or pre-positioned weaponry and supplies.

U.S. military ports and airfields, repair complexes, training areas, nuclear weapons installations, missile testing sites, arsenals, warehouses, barracks, military schools, listening and communications posts, and drone bases, military hospitals and prisons, rehabilitation facilities, CIA paramilitary bases, and intelligence facilities (including former CIA "black site" prisons) are key parts of the U.S. government presence in other countries.

There are U.S. military personnel in about 160 countries, including Marines who guard U.S. embassies and deployments of trainers and advisors in many countries each year, including 10,000 U.S. trainers still in Afghanistan and 3,500 in Iraq.

Additionally, the United States is capable of moving a large mobile presence to any country with a shoreline. The U.S. Navy's 11 aircraft carriers are a floating military base of 5,000 personnel, dozens of aircraft, helicopters and landing craft.

As you know so well, President Obama's "Pacific pivot" has included convincing the South Korean government, which already has 83 U.S. military bases, to construct a naval base in the pristine waters off Jeju Island, South Korea, to homeport destroyers carrying the U.S. Aegis missile system — despite huge continuous citizens protests.

Your struggle here in Okinawa which has 7 percent of the 113 U.S. military bases in Japan to stop the U.S. construction of a runway at Henoko into coral heads in the waters off Okinawa, is an epic citizen struggle in which our Veterans for Peace organization joins.

The cost to the U.S. taxpayer for installations and military personnel overseas in 2014 was at least \$85 billion which is more than the discretionary budget of every government agency except the Defense Department itself. Adding the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. spends over \$156 billion in overseas programs.

You well know that here in Japan, you the taxpayers pay for the majority of U.S. forces stationed in Japan. As you know so well after 70 years of U.S. military bases, these bases bring into a community weapons of killing and destruction, and the mentality to use them. With that mentality comes increased rates of domestic violence with all too many families enduring a mentality of violence within the home brought back from the battlefield.

That violence is seen in the numbers of victims of sexual assault in the community as well as on the military base. On Okinawa, the incidence of rape of Okinawan girls and women has brought tens of thousands of citizens out to protest the U.S. military presence. During their time in the military, an incredible 30 percent of women in the U.S. military are sexually assaulted by fellow service members. Additionally, prostitution around U.S. military bases is rampant.

Besides violence toward humans, military bases contribute strongly to violence toward our planet. Military weapons and vehicles are the most environmentally dangerous systems in the world with their toxic leaks, accidents, and deliberate dumping of hazardous materials and dependence on fossil fuels.

Our Veterans for Peace delegation appreciates the opportunity to be here in Okinawa with you. We have been inspired by the citizen activists who daily go to Camp Schwab, Futenma and Takae to challenge the Japanese and United States governments.

We are deeply concerned about U.S. military bases here in Okinawa and we pledge our continued efforts to stop the U.S. construction of the runway at Henoko into the South China Sea — and to abolish U.S. military bases around the world.