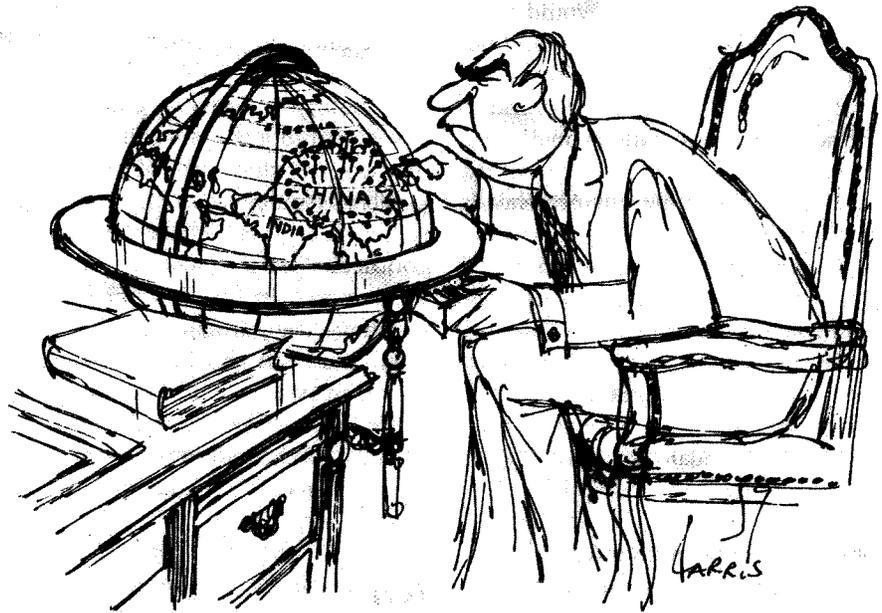


carries you away from all thoughtful intentions when you get into it.”

He was right, of course, as he had been right to oppose the deformation of Containment resulting in the Vietnam War, right to object to the equally feckless if fortunately less expensive invasion of Iraq, and right to score what he correctly perceived as a foreign policy compounding shortsightedness with arrogance.

As the last American soldiers exited Iraq, leaving behind a country ravaged by war and facing an uncertain future, as still other American military personnel prepare to begin withdrawing from an Afghanistan whose future evolution is even less predictable, and as Americans here at home seek to cope with the human and fiscal tolls to which both wars have contributed, it may be time to revisit George Kennan, not just as a historical figure, no less flawed than any other such figure, but rather as the uniquely farsighted prophet that he has proved repeatedly to be.

In a recent article in *Smithsonian* magazine, former *New York Times* editor Joseph Lelyveld writes, “As we enter the second decade of this struggle, we have gotten out of the habit of calling it



a global war. But it goes on, not limited to Afghanistan and Iraq. How will we know when it's over—when we can pass through airport security with our shoes on, when closing Guantanamo is not unthinkable, when the extraordinary security measures embodied in the renewed Patriot Act might be allowed to lapse?”

Writing to his nephew on the eve of the invasion of Iraq, Kennan mourned that “What is being done to our country today is surely something from

which we will never be able to restore the sort of a country you and I have known.” If the answer to Lelyveld's question turns out to be “never,” George Kennan sadly will have been proved prophetic once again. □

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The Strategic Importance of U.S. Forces in Europe

By LTC Chris Budihas

Because of a prolonged recession, the United States is currently grappling with a depressed economy, resulting in high levels of unemployment and an American population that questions where the nation's leadership is taking it. This domestic tension is set against an international backdrop of revolutionary movements across North Africa and the Middle East, a European Union that continues to bail out small member states like Greece and Portugal that mismanaged their economies, and a series of foreign natural disasters requiring international assistance, such as the massive earthquake causing the Fukushima nuclear power plant meltdown.

With all this rising domestic tension and global instability, U.S. governmental and senior military leadership is left to question: How much U.S. military force should we leave in Europe? This is a totally relevant question, which should not be answered in haste. A more important question is: How much U.S. military force can we not afford to leave in Europe? As they seriously debate budget cuts and deficit reduction, the nation's senior governmental and military leaders must realize the strategic importance of a forward presence of U.S. forces in Europe—forces that preclude conflict, build interoperable capabilities between allies that influence current and future joint multinational operations, and, most importantly, strengthen po-

litical-military (pol-mil) relationships that influence coalition building in anticipation of future contingencies.

The importance of U.S. forces in Europe can be easily misunderstood by both the average American citizen and historically ill-informed political leaders, as many may believe the need to keep U.S. forces forward-deployed is an antiquated Cold War legacy. Some members of Congress believe that, economically, it's time to bring the troops home. While on the surface this appears to be a logical decision, it's extremely shortsighted. Yes, bringing an Army brigade back to Fort Hood, Texas, or a Navy ship to Norfolk, Va., will inherently funnel U.S. tax dollars back into local economies, but at what strategic cost? The immeasurable void

these repositioned forces would leave in U.S. worldwide security should not be dismissed. These forces, which regularly deploy throughout the world to partner with many nations, may seem expensive on the surface. In reality, however, maintaining our presence is cheaper than either the cost of not having their pol-mil support when global crises arise in the future or worse, operating against them if we lose the current mutual cooperation we have now.

A second critical reason for U.S. forces' continued presence in Europe is that regular theater security cooperation activities and multinational exercises serve as a training medium to collectively determine our militaries' shortfalls and complementary capabilities. This is very important, as U.S. governmental leaders have realized through our current wars. Building coalitions in the prosecution of warfare is important from many angles, specifically for gaining and maintaining international legitimacy and support throughout the execution of the conflict itself. As we saw in the early years of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the disparities in our equipment's capabilities and/or doctrines can cause a number of unforeseen operational difficulties and, in some cases, unintended lethal consequences.

Through current theater security cooperation engagements, the United States greatly assists its allies in gaining greater military competency and increases collective understanding. Our historical core of European allies has grown since 1989, as the U.S. military built ties with many former Eastern Bloc countries. These ties are not necessarily unilateral in nature, as was observed in a recent multinational ex-

ercise in October 2011 in Grafenwoehr and Hohenfels, Germany, where 17 countries, many with no hostile military history, collectively conducted a successful month-long joint training operation. Such exercises build a comprehensive military capacity that brings real value when addressing global conflicts. Many of the nations that participated in the October maneuvers have also participated in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, are participating in peace support operations in the Balkans, and took part in the successful NATO operations in support of the Transnational Council government in Libya.

Multinational training not only increases interoperability and mutually supportive capacities but, more importantly, strategically molds and bonds global pol-mil relations to strengthen U.S. foreign relations. In a recent visit to the U.S. Joint Multinational Training Command at Grafenwoehr, the U.S. Army's 32nd Chief of Staff and Association of the United States Army President GEN Gordon R. Sullivan noted that our Army's partnerships with European-based militaries have facilitated U.N. and NATO members' willingness to participate in peacekeeping operations elsewhere. If the U.S. did not have such strong pol-mil relationships, then there would not be enough soldiers for the current mission in Afghanistan, forcing the United States either to fill those numbers with U.S. soldiers or, more dangerously, to go without them. Where would we have found nearly 30,000 U.S. soldiers if we did not have reliable European and NATO partners to fight with us in Afghan-

istan over the last 10 years, considering that much of our U.S. military has been in Iraq since 2003?

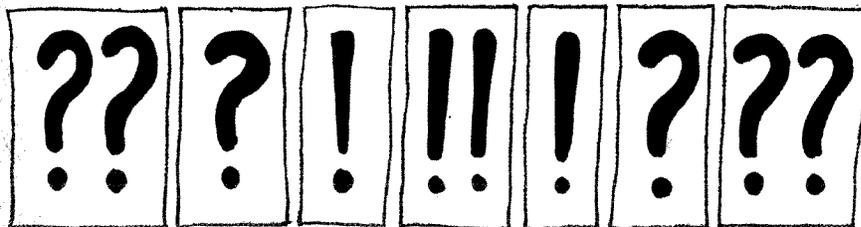
Drastically reducing our U.S. military presence in Europe will have second-order effects in future pol-mil relations and will negatively influence coalition building in the wake of future conflict. Our military has been an influential international leader, especially in Europe, since the Iron Curtain fell in 1989. Many nations shape their military force structure in some manner like the U.S. military, an internationally respected model of a professional military.

The fiscal investment the United States has in keeping its current nominal number of forces in Europe is well worth the cost. Our nation cannot afford to stop building on our existing international partnerships that will prepare us as a collective international force to take on whatever future conflicts may arise.

The governmental leadership's geopolitical problem is complex, much of it underlined by its struggling economy and a need for an enduring articulated foreign policy that guarantees security of its international efforts.

This present dilemma, however, cannot cause them to underestimate both the tangible and intangible importance of U.S. military forces being stationed in Europe as they determine where to cut the deficit that will inversely affect the Department of Defense budget. A U.S. force presence is not an archaic Cold War strategy but an important mechanism of strategic influence that precludes conflict, builds interoperability among militaries and enhances pol-mil relations that will influence future coalitions at the onset of conflict. □

THE SEVEN AGES OF MAN



JOSEPH FARIS

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This article is the opinion of the author.