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House Armed Services Committee Hearing Focuses on Defense Department's Global Defense Posture Strategy

Washington, D.C.—Witnesses testifying before the U.S. House Armed Services Committee today provided an update on the Department of Defense's efforts to realign its forces around the world, which would reduce the amount of forward deployed forces in favor of lighter, more agile capabilities.

Ryan Henry, Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, characterized these efforts in his opening statement as "the most profound reordering of U.S. military forces overseas since the end of World War II and the Korean War." According to his written statement—submitted jointly with two other Defense Department witnesses—when the posture changes are complete, "the Department expects more than \$4 billion in annual recurring savings to accrue from BRAC [Base Realignment and Closure], and another \$1 billion from the BRAC-related global defense posture changes overseas."

Chairman Duncan Hunter's opening statement observed that today's hearing presented an opportunity to review the Defense Department's realignment plans, and "to assess whether it is prepared to address the many resulting requirements of those plans." Representative Curt Weldon (R-PA) read Hunter's statement and chaired the hearing in Hunter's absence.

Henry noted that "much of our in-place posture still reflects a Cold War structure—forward stationed forces configured to fight near where they are based. Now, nearly 16 years after the end of the Cold War, we know that the premises underlying our posture have changed fundamentally: our forces need to be able to rapidly project power into theaters that may be far from where they are based." Henry added that with regard to the ability to surge, "most times, we could generate from the U.S., where there are no political encumbrances, quicker than we could from overseas locations." Philip Grone, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Installations and Environment, added that the U.S. would still want access to some overseas bases for training and to position forces during surge operations.

U.S. presence in Europe will increasingly shift south and east in orientation, according to Henry, who added that "the U.S. has signed agreements with the governments of Romania and Bulgaria that will allow the U.S. access to facilities and training sites in those countries." Another major change, he said, involves "the return of two legacy maneuver divisions from Europe to the United States, replacing them with our transformational Stryker capability."

Part of the realignment will mean that U.S. personnel will be out of Iceland by September 30 this year. Henry noted that the U.S. is not leaving Iceland permanently, as some infrastructure would be left behind and U.S. forces would periodically exercise and operate from there.

Henry said that one of the most significant shifts will take place in the Pacific. In the Asia-Pacific region, he said, facilities and headquarters are being consolidated in Japan and Korea, and additional expeditionary maritime capabilities and long-range strike assets are being forward deployed in Alaska, Hawaii and Guam, which, Henry said, would “better enable regional and global action. Key to this effort,” he noted, “is reducing the number of American forces in host nations where those forces abut large urban populations.”

A key aspect of realignment involves the Japanese island of Okinawa, from which “considerable forces” will be removed. However, Rear Admiral William Sullivan, Vice Director, Strategic Plans and Policy, said that the U.S. is not abandoning Okinawa, and that significant forces would remain.

Representative Madeleine Bordallo, (D-Guam) said that Guam will receive some 8,000 U.S. Marines and their families, highlighting the role Guam will play; Henry echoed Bordallo’s observation, calling Guam “the forward line of presence for U.S. sovereign territory.” It was also noted that Guam offers more robust training opportunities, given that it is situated in a less densely population area.

Since the proposed realignments will ultimately result in a small percentage of U.S. troops permanently forward deployed, the result will be an influx of service members returning to bases in the United States. Several Committee members expressed concerns about how this influx would affect military quality of life, family support systems, and schools in particular. Representative Rick Larsen (D-WA) urged the witnesses to consider the Defense Department’s obligation to help local schools when numbers of students increase.

When asked about the involvement of other government agencies in the realignment process, Henry said that the Defense Department worked “hand in glove” with the State Department, especially regarding negotiations with host nations.

Before closing the hearing, Rep. Weldon asked the witnesses if they were aware of secret plans to establish permanent military bases in Iraq. In response, Ryan Henry said, “Nothing like that has come forward.”

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