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# “Being There” Matters—But Where?

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# “BEING THERE” MATTERS—BUT WHERE?

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Which parts of the world will be most important to the United States in the future? Where should the United States be ready to fight a war? During the Cold War the answers to these questions seemed obvious. The parts of the world that were most strategically important to the United States were the lands along the Nato–Warsaw Pact fissure in Central Europe, and Northeast Asia, where two allies, Japan and South Korea, abutted the two largest communist powers, the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China. Other parts of the world could become strategically important if events there involved a Soviet or Chinese client, or even a potential client. When this happened, that part of the world became, ipso facto, an area of great importance to the United States, leading sometimes to covert conflict and sometimes to large-scale fighting.

Today, if only because there no longer is a superpower for the United States to balance against, U.S. interest in some regions has diminished. This has, for example, been true with respect to Africa. While the United States and the Soviet Union played strategic chess against one another in the Third World, African countries were perceived as important. But once the chess game ended, the great powers lost interest in the rooks and pawns. Developments in Africa ceased having balance-of-power ramifications, so the United States and most other major powers started to pay less attention to them. Some other parts of the world, of course, remain of great interest to the United States, but now for economic reasons as much as, if not more

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than, traditional political-military balance-of-power reasons. One particular aspect of national security strategy—military forward presence—deserves reassessment in light of the shift that is taking place in security interests.

The driving factor in determining the requirements for routine, noncrisis forward presence ought to be reasoned, objective judgments by the president and Congress about the relative importance of the various regions of the world to the United States. Indeed, the challenge for national strategists is to determine whether the regions that are important to the nation today will be equally important tomorrow and, if not, to begin making the necessary adjustments in forward presence strategy. Meeting this challenge requires clear and objective thinking about where national interests may lie in the future. It requires thinking that is unencumbered by the traditional Euro-centricity of the American foreign policy establishment and media, or by the habit acquired in the Cold War of instinctively assuming that the national-interest glass in some regions is perpetually more than half full.

One way of forcing policy makers to take a more objective approach and limit the influence of nostalgic assumptions about military forward presence is to define specific criteria for determining the intensity of U.S. national interests. Until such time as the global balance of military power shifts and a serious global threat begins to emerge, the most sensible criteria are economic. For the purposes of reassessing American military forward presence strategies, the most telling statistics involve *interdependence*. The practical effect of adopting economic criteria would be to accord a higher priority to those parts of the world where economic interdependence with the United States is growing and a lower priority where it is diminishing.

Forward presence entails the deployment of military forces overseas on a full-time basis or on rotational cycles during noncrisis periods. When crises do occur in important regions, adjustments are often made in the pattern of forward presence deployments to signal high levels of concern or to deter military action by third parties. For example, in 1997 and 1998 military forces were deployed to Southwest Asia to increase the existing levels of forward presence in response to threatening gestures by Iraq against Kuwait. Another example occurred in 1996, when the United States deployed warships to the seas around Taiwan in response to escalated tensions between Beijing and Taipei. However, the principal focus of this article is noncrisis, routine forward presence—although crisis deployments such as these will be discussed.

Forward presence has two broad goals. The first is to help ensure regional stability and promote productive relations with the United States by demonstrating its national interest in a region or an individual state as well as its commitment to the defense of friends and allies. From this perspective, both routine forward presence during noncrisis periods and special deployments in response to crises are as much diplomatic-political functions as they are military. To maximize the yield from this perspective, forward presence should be allocated primarily to those parts of the world that will be most important to the United States in the future. That is to say, the United States government should do what any sagacious investor would do: it should invest more heavily in areas where the prospective returns are great and only sparingly, if at all, where the potential for profit is slight.

*With what geographic "units," then, should U.S. policy makers deal, if even Nato no longer defines a zone sufficiently cohesive and homogeneous in terms of American interests?*

The second broad goal of both routine and crisis-oriented forward presence is to improve the ability of U.S. military forces to fight and win wars that are not deterred. Forward presence does this by providing opportunities to promote interoperability between U.S. and friendly forces. Forward presence also increases the operational awareness by American military forces of the conditions (such as terrain, coastlines, currents, weather, and infrastructure) in parts of the world where they may have to fight. To maximize yield from the military perspective, forward presence should be concentrated in areas of the world that are both troubled by the risk of war and important to the United States. In other words, the prospective returns on investments in operational awareness and interoperability are greatest when and where there is a reasonable likelihood that these capabilities will actually be used in war. There is, obviously, little practical value to be gained by making substantial investments in interoperability or operational awareness in regions where the United States has no intention to fight because it has no important interests to defend.

The United States currently maintains high levels of forward presence in several parts of the world—Western Europe, the Mediterranean basin, Northeast Asia, and Southwest Asia. Numerous factors undoubtedly affect this allocation of forward presence resources. Alliance commitments are, of course, a main factor, but they are to a great extent discretionary. Treaties between allies do not ordinarily specify the exact levels of routine, noncrisis military forward presence that the allies will maintain in each other's territory. Rather, the treaties typically commit their signatories "only" to commit forces when war erupts. The North Atlantic Treaty of 1949, the founding document for the world's premier and longest-lasting military alliance, makes no mention of military forward presence.[1] The treaty commits its members to defend each other against attack and thus authorizes—but does not require any specific level of—U.S. military forward presence during peacetime.

## ECONOMIC INTERDEPENDENCE AND THE REGIONAL APPROACH

The aphorism that "trade follows the flag," if it was ever true, no longer holds, at least in the sense that U.S. businessmen do not now require diplomats or the military to pave the way before opening shop on distant shores. There are no exotic ports left for the fleet to open, no remote, fog-shrouded kingdoms for soldier-diplomats to intimidate into accepting Western merchants and merchandise. The businessman's way has already been paved, at least as much as military forward presence is capable of doing so. It is not physical access that keeps entrepreneurs out of some markets but rather doubts about the opportunities in those markets relative to others. Today, and even more tomorrow, the flag will follow trade. In that light, military forward presence can be a way of nurturing the political-military stability that is essential to continuing economic growth and political-economic reform. It can also be a tool for maintaining access to existing markets. The best places to apply that tool are the regions with which the United States is, or is becoming, economically interdependent.

Economic interdependence can be measured through statistics on trade flows and foreign investment. Thus the critical regions would be those that account for the highest proportions of American trade and foreign investment. All other things being equal, a region representing 20 percent of U.S. trade and investment ought to be accorded a higher priority in terms of military forward presence than one accounting for only 2 percent. Of course, "all other things" never stay equal over time; levels of presence should be adjusted to reflect the risk of instability in the high-priority regions. When the risk of instability in a high-priority region is low, relatively little military forward presence need be maintained. When the risk increases, consideration should be given to deploying forces.

Political-military alliances are, of course, important—but alliances are means to an end, not ends in themselves. It is well to remember this distinction between ends and means. No alliance lasts forever, and even when the form of an alliance remains intact, its substance may change. This has already happened to Nato. Once a mutual defense organization integral to the security of the United States, Nato has become a regional policeman without a central role in the defense of its North American members. Some of the positions taken by the United States in the mid-1990s appear to concede this point, at least indirectly. At the time, Clinton administration spokespersons correctly argued that even though the Cold War was over, membership in Nato was still in the national interest because it gave the United States "a seat at the table" of Europe. That is, it gave Washington an official platform from which to participate in European deliberations. In the mid-1990s the crucial European deliberations did not involve mutual defense issues; they involved the humanitarian crisis in Bosnia and the economic matters associated with Europe's nascent single economic community. Since the Clinton White House was (as the preceding administration was, and as the succeeding administration is) reluctant to participate directly in peacekeeping operations in Bosnia, it seems reasonable to conclude that the "seat at the table" was considered important primarily because it provided a way to ensure that U.S. economic interests were protected as Europe formulated community-wide economic policies and regulations.

With what geographic "units," then, should U.S. policy makers deal, if even Nato no longer defines a zone sufficiently cohesive and homogeneous in terms of American interests? In general, it is useful to think in terms of regions smaller than a continent, or than the lands encompassed by an alliance like Nato, or than the expanses of territory that have been assigned by the Unified Command Plan to each of the military's regional commanders in chief (or "CinCs," such as of the Southern or Central Commands). All such groupings are too broad and heterogeneous; for example, the Southern Cone of South America differs markedly from the rest of the continent in terms of its economic growth, the robustness of its democratic reforms, and the absence of active insurgency movements and border disputes. On the other hand, focusing on units as small as the individual nation-state is too cumbersome, and in any event, some economic relationships and diplomatic-security obligations are transnational.

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For these reasons, a regional approach is most suitable for the purposes of formulating requirements for forward presence. The regional "unit" further commends itself in that it would force strategists to look at priorities in new and different ways and thus avoid a pitfall all too common in long-range planning—implicitly assuming that the future will closely resemble today. Exactly how the regions should be defined will, of course, be a subject for debate; wherever the boundaries are drawn, incongruities and artificialities will result. The main point here is that geographical regions larger than states and smaller than such massive zones as continents or "CinCdoms" are useful units of analysis for determining U.S. national interests.

For the purposes of illustrating the regional approach to U.S. national economic interests and to the measurement of forward presence requirements, this article will focus on the Mediterranean Basin and South America.

The Mediterranean has been a major focus of American military forward presence, particularly naval, for nearly fifty years. Although the level of presence has been reduced since the height of the Cold War, the U.S. Sixth Fleet currently maintains eighteen to twenty ships in the Mediterranean and conducts several dozen military exercises annually with local navies.[2] Since individual ships rotate in and out of the Sixth Fleet on six-month cycles, between thirty and forty ships actually gain operational awareness of the Mediterranean and improve their interoperability with regional navies each year. For its part, South America is useful for the purposes of comparison, as that continent has traditionally received considerably less attention than the Mediterranean. For instance, the UNITAS exercise series, the principal naval forward presence activity in South America (annual exercises and port visits over a four-month period), involves fewer than half as many U.S. ships, aircraft, and personnel as are engaged in twelve months in the Mediterranean.[3]

## TRADE AND INVESTMENT

The economic interdependence between the United States and various parts of the world can be at least approximately measured through statistics on trade flows and foreign investment. The International Monetary Fund compiles data on the total value of U.S. exports to and imports from each nation in the world.[4] These data on bilateral trade flows can be aggregated for geographic regions or for any other grouping or category of states. The same can be done for statistics on the amount of U.S. investment in every other nation and the amounts that other nations have invested in the United States.

By these standards, two geographic regions stand out as being of major economic importance to the United States: Western Europe (Ireland, Great Britain, France, the Low Countries, and Germany) and Northeast Asia (Japan, China, and South Korea). For some regions the absence of economic importance to the United States is equally obvious. Central Africa (Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, Congo, and Kenya) is an example; the United States has no significant investment in or trade with that region. Most regions—including South America and the Mediterranean—fall between Western Europe and Central Africa in terms of the level of economic interdependence with the United States.

In the early 1970s, the entire Mediterranean Basin—that is, the countries with Mediterranean coastlines—accounted for approximately 10 percent of all U.S. trade (exports and imports combined). Since then, the Mediterranean's percentage has steadily declined. During the last five years for which data are available (1994–98), its share has been in the 6.8–7.3 percent range. The high end of the range represents a 25 percent reduction over nearly three decades, the low end a drop of fully one-third. These reductions in the relative position of the Mediterranean region reflect the dramatic increases that have taken place in U.S. trade with other regions, particularly the Pacific Rim and the other parts of

North America. These data suggest that despite significant increases in absolute values, relative to other parts of the world the Mediterranean region has become significantly less important in economic terms to the United States.

What is true for the Mediterranean is true as well for each of its subregions.[5] The subregions are North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt), the Middle East (Cyprus, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan—which has no Mediterranean coast but is usually considered a Middle Eastern state), and southern Europe (Greece, Italy, Malta, France, Spain, and Portugal). Albania and the successor states of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia-Montenegro) could also be considered as part of southern Europe. Since none of the latter states has substantial economic ties to the United States, their inclusion would have no substantial effect on the data for that subregion.

*The United States government should do what any sagacious investor would do: it should invest more heavily in areas where the prospective returns are great and only sparingly, if at all, where the potential for profit is slight.*

From 1991 through 1998, the Middle East and North Africa subregions accounted for only about 1 percent each of U.S. trade. This is not a post–Cold War phenomenon; these subregions have accounted for roughly the same proportion of American trade since 1970, apart from a blip in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Of the three Mediterranean subregions, only southern Europe represents a considerable amount of U.S. trade, about 6 percent. Yet that percentage was lower in the late 1990s than at any other time in the last thirty years. Over the course of the 1990s, southern Europe's share of all U.S. trade decreased by about 15 percent.[6]

Foreign-investment statistics tell a similar story. Most U.S. investment in the Mediterranean takes place in southern Europe. As a percentage of all American overseas investment, that in the North Africa and the Middle East subregions is negligible; each accounts for less than 1 percent of all U.S. foreign direct investment. With respect to southern Europe, the preponderance of U.S. investment is in three countries—Spain, Italy, and France. In 1990 about 9.5 percent of the total value of all U.S. foreign direct investment was in these three. Since then, the proportion has been steadily declining, to 6.8 percent in 1998.[7]

Not only do the trade and investment statistics suggest that the Mediterranean Basin has become relatively less important to the United States, but the figures actually overstate the region's economic standing. This is because the statistics assume that all trade with and investment in France, Spain, and Portugal can be considered "Mediterranean." France and Spain are, obviously, both Atlantic and Mediterranean countries, and a considerable volume of U.S. trade with and investment in those countries is "Atlantic" in character rather than Mediterranean. Portugal has no Mediterranean coastline, but it is a member of Nato and, perhaps for lack of a better alternative, has been considered Mediterranean by U.S. strategists; it is, for example, in the Sixth Fleet's area of responsibility. The American trade with France, Spain, and Portugal that flows through Atlantic seaports should be set aside when estimating the significance of U.S. economic interests in the Mediterranean; U.S. investment in those nations' businesses and infrastructure projects that are oriented toward the Atlantic or Western Europe should similarly be excluded. (An example would be a factory that U.S. investors build in northern France near the Channel tunnel so as to maximize its access to markets in England and the Low Countries.) The implication is that the United States may be able to accomplish its forward-presence objectives with France, Spain and Portugal through Atlantic-oriented, instead of Mediterranean, activities.

Figure 1 depicts the proportion of U.S. trade represented by the two subregions of South America. The data presented on this chart indicate that both subregions are more economically important to the United States in terms of trade than are the Middle Eastern and North African subregions of the Mediterranean. While not high relative to Western Europe and Northeast Asia, U.S. trade with each South American subregion is about twice as great as for either North Africa or the Middle East. Unlike those for the latter, the percentages for the Southern Cone subregions have increased during the 1990s. Until the very late 1990s, trade with the Andes-Caribbean subregion also tended to increase; the drop-off in 1998 may have been anomalous, a partial result of the civil war in Colombia (which will be discussed below). The Andes-Caribbean subregion of South America consists of Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana. The Southern Cone includes Chile and the MERCOSUR (common market) countries of Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay. As with Middle East and North Africa, U.S. investment in the Andes-Caribbean subregion is relatively insignificant as a percentage of all investment. On the other hand, American investment in the

**FIGURE 1**
**U.S. TRADE WITH SOUTH AMERICA**

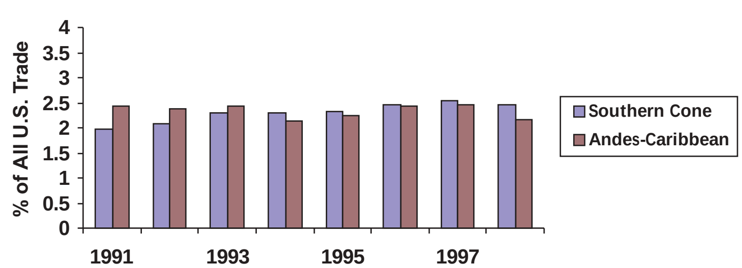
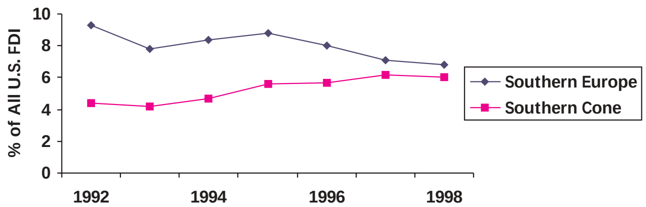


**FIGURE 2**
**U.S. FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT (FDI)**




Southern Cone has in recent years been increasing, presumably in response to political and economic reform. The value of U.S. investment in the three largest Southern Cone countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile) approaches the value of that in Spain, France, and Italy. As figure 2 suggests, the value of U.S. investment in the Southern Cone will soon, if recent trends continue, exceed that for southern Europe.[8] Increasing investment can be a precursor of increased trade volumes. Thus one might expect U.S. trade with the Southern Cone to surge in the future. Indeed, the long-term prospects for both investment and trade appear greater for the Southern Cone than for any Mediterranean subregion. This may be in part a consequence of the fact that unlike southern Europe, the Southern Cone may only now be entering the “spurt” phase of the economic development cycle—when annual growth rates are typically at their highest and greater than those of mature economies. Furthermore, the Southern Cone has more abundant and diverse natural resources than southern Europe; it also has a larger population and higher population growth rates. By 2020, the combined population of Brazil, Chile, and Argentina is expected to grow from 220 million today to 260 million. The combined population of Spain, France, and Italy is predicted to remain virtually flat over the next twenty years, at 160 million. Italy is expected to experience negative population growth rate during this period.[9] On the basis of these economic statistics, the priority for the purposes of forward presence of each of these five subregions would be as given in the table.

Assuming that the threat of war or instability were equal for all of these subregions, the most rational strategy would be to calibrate presence according to priority. Absent a crisis, there would thus ordinarily be roughly equal levels of military forward presence for southern Europe and the Southern Cone; very low levels would be maintained in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Andes-Caribbean. Because economic trends change gradually, policy makers can be reasonably confident that a region that is determined to be of

**SUBREGION PRIORITY**

| | |
|---|---|
| Southern Cone | medium (but increasing) |
| Southern Europe | medium (but declining) |
| Middle East | low |
| North Africa | low |
| Andes-Caribbean | low |

high priority in 2001 will almost certainly still be in 2004 and 2005. Equally, the status of southern Europe and the Southern Cone as medium-priority regions would not be expected to change dramatically over the short term. Thus it makes sense to base multiyear plans for routine, noncrisis forward presence on enduring interests. Adjustments can be made if threat levels increase.

## SECURITY THREATS

Predicting where and when an international incident will occur is a highly complex affair. Threats can develop quickly. That is why the United States has long maintained a large and sophisticated intelligence apparatus to identify trouble spots around the globe and to evaluate continuously the prospects for war and instability. Definitive assessments are, of course, beyond the reach of this article, but it does seem reasonable to assume that the probability of war is currently quite low in Western Europe, a high-priority region for the United States. Instability appears more likely in another high-priority region, Northeast Asia. Although the risk appears to be diminishing as North Korea opens itself to the West, until such time as the risk is significantly diminished, a high level of forward presence in Northeast Asia may make a strategic difference in terms of preventing war.

Of the two subregions in South America, the one that is more likely to experience instability is the Andes-Caribbean. Colombia is already consumed with a violent, anarchic civil war involving at least two major insurgent groups. The disorder has had ripple effects in neighboring Panama, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Brazil, effects that could well worsen. Cross-border conflict between well-armed Colombian paramilitaries and the military forces of neighboring countries is a distinct possibility, as is collaboration between the Colombian insurgents and criminal or rebel groups in nearby countries. This could have dramatic long-term consequences for American policy in the Andes-Caribbean region, as political and economic reforms are still quite fragile there. Conversely, the risk of instability in the Southern Cone is quite low. Democratic and economic reforms appear to have taken root, the territorial disputes between traditional rivals Chile and Argentina have been resolved, and the subregional nations are increasingly working together to address common challenges. For example, in 1996 Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay collectively pressured Paraguayan military officers into abandoning a planned coup against the elected government.[10]

In the Mediterranean, tensions between Israel and its neighbors continue to flare, but there are no indications that the tensions will lead to another general war in the subregion. It is, in fact, difficult to determine exactly what benefits military forward presence can bring in the Middle East that are not already being achieved by U.S. diplomats in sponsoring the peace process—more recently, attempts to restore the peace process—between Israel and the Palestinians. Furthermore, instability in the Middle East may simply be of the type that military forward presence is least likely to deter; that at least is what the historical record suggests. The Lebanese civil war of the early 1980s was only temporarily interrupted, not deterred or stopped, by the presence of the U.S. Navy offshore, or even by the "boots on the ground" of American, French, and Italian peacekeepers. Similarly, the *intifada* and the continuing violence that began in late 2000 in Gaza and the West Bank were obviously not deterred by U.S. naval forward presence in the eastern Mediterranean. Indeed, it may simply be unrealistic to expect Palestinian factions or extremists of any kind to forgive past grievances, relinquish claims for territory, or back away from their convictions simply because foreign warships routinely visit local ports, or because one indigenous navy or another can demonstrate its interoperability with the U.S. Navy in offshore exercises.

*Indeed, the challenge for national strategists is to determine whether the regions that are important to the nation today will be equally important tomorrow.*

It might be argued that due to the proximity of the Middle East to Southwest Asia, military forward presence in the Middle East contributes to deterrence in the Persian Gulf. If this is true, the opposite must also hold—that is, that the objective of deterring interstate conflict in the Middle East can be served by military forward presence in Southwest Asia.

As for North Africa and southern Europe, at present the risk of war also seems to be low. In southern Europe, most of the major interstate issues arising out of the dissolution of "greater Yugoslavia" have now been resolved, about as well as anything short of total war can resolve them. Furthermore, so long as military peacekeepers from Nato, with or without U.S. participation, remain on the ground in Kosovo and Bosnia, the contribution that other forms of military forward presence can make to deterrence seems marginal.

As noted previously, however, there is more to forward presence than deterrence or demonstrations of national interest. Forward presence also enables the U.S. military to acquire operational awareness—practical knowledge about conditions in a theater. It also allows U.S. forces to improve their ability to work together with indigenous military forces and with allied forces that are not resident in the particular subregion but operate there.

Plainly, the benefits of current operational awareness of in-theater conditions and confidence in interoperability with friendly forces are time-sensitive; they are obviously most valuable when there is a high likelihood of war and when the United States is very likely to become directly involved. Just as plainly, operational awareness and interoperability are less valuable when conditions are pacific. They are least valuable when the United States has no significant interests to defend.

In subregions where high levels of military forward presence are continuously maintained, the United States is in effect making a considerable investment in current operational awareness and interoperability with friendly forces. Setting aside national interests for a moment, that is prudent when the risk of war is continuously high (as it was during the Cold War) but profligate when the threat is thought to be low. It may even be excessive when low threat levels are assumed to be transitory, because most forms of military forward presence can be increased if and when threat conditions become more adverse.

Based on this brief tour of the security horizon in South America and the Mediterranean, it would appear that absent a new crisis the only zone where the threat warrants a higher level of presence than economic interests alone would dictate is in the Andes-Caribbean subregion.

## STRATEGIC COMMODITIES

Overall trade and investment statistics may obscure the significance of strategically important commodities to the United States. This could cause national strategists to underestimate not only the impact of a supply interruption on U.S. economic interests but also the contribution that military forward presence can make to preventing interruptions. Oil is the standard example, one that has particular salience given the recent spikes in oil prices as well as the tensions in the Middle East subregion.

There are two general aspects to the oil equation, production and distribution. It seems reasonable to presume that forward presence by the United States would tend to deter invasions of oil-producing states. That is to say, the presence of U.S. warships, air forces, and ground troops in a subregion can contribute to interstate stability by creating at least the perception that the United States is primed to defend oil-producing states from attack. This argues strongly for high levels of military forward presence in and around the Persian Gulf, due to the huge volume of production that might be lost in a war, and to the high costs of evicting an invader—as in Operation DESERT STORM. This same argument could be used to justify forward presence in other oil-producing or potentially oil-producing areas; none of the Mediterranean subregions fall into this category. Developments in the Middle East affect oil production by influencing the political decisions on oil output by Arab states in other subregions, but none of the states in the Middle East subregion as we have defined it (Cyprus, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel) is a significant oil producer.

An area that does fall into the category of a potentially important oil producer is the Andes-Caribbean subregion of South America. Venezuela is a major oil producer and shares a troubled and occasionally contested border with Colombia. Colombia, in turn, has both oil reserves and a domestic insurgency problem that could destabilize the entire region. Ecuador also has oil reserves and has already experienced spillover from Colombia's turmoil. (For example, in September 2000 an estimated fifteen thousand Colombians fled into Ecuador to avoid the fighting between the Colombian government and an insurgent force.)[11]

Oil distribution and pricing should, perhaps, be approached differently than oil production, at least in terms of evaluating the contribution that military forward presence can realistically make. Extensive naval forward presence in the Mediterranean did not keep oil prices low or supplies high during the 1970s, when two oil embargoes led to economic recession in the United States and Europe. Nor have high levels of forward presence of naval, air, and ground forces in Southwest Asia and the Mediterranean kept prices from sharply rising in 2000. Indeed, it is unrealistic to expect military forward presence of any kind to prevent sovereign states like Saudi Arabia and Venezuela from deciding to limit oil production in order to raise prices. Iraq may be the best example of the limited effect that forward presence can have in this respect. There has been an extraordinarily heavy military forward presence in and around Iraq for the ten years since the end of the Gulf War; large parts of Iraqi airspace are regularly patrolled by U.S. aircraft—a particularly intrusive form of presence made necessary by the international community's desire to protect minority groups inside Iraq. Yet even under these conditions, Iraq has manipulated its oil production in an attempt to inflate the prices paid by the West.

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Oil distribution to world markets can, of course, be disrupted in other ways. A state could mine or blockade a critical sea-lane. For example, during the Iran-Iraq War in the mid-1980s, sections of the Persian Gulf were mined by Iran, and Iranian Revolutionary Guards used captured oil platforms to attack tanker traffic near the Straits of Hormuz. (The U.S. response was to provide military escorts for the tankers.) Continuous military forward presence might deter such actions, but that is an expensive approach to what is ultimately a constabulary function. In comparison to the difficulties and expense of reversing production problems caused by the conquest of an oil-producing state, reversing distribution problems created by mining and blockades should be easy. It should be within the capacity of expeditionary forces from the United States or of local military forces that, in the Mediterranean, are part of the Nato structure and are more robust than their equivalents in many other parts of the world.

The bottom line appears to be that maintaining a continuously high level of military forward presence is not an efficient or effective approach to the threat of oil distribution problems. There is a more effective and perhaps more efficient approach—the strategic petroleum reserve. The United States built a strategic petroleum reserve for the express purpose of cushioning the effects of interruptions in distribution and of sudden price hikes. Investing in larger petroleum reserves is a better hedge against distribution problems and price hikes than is military forward presence.

## IMPLICATIONS

Until the global balance of military power changes—and perhaps even after it does change—the United States should measure its military forward presence requirements on the basis of economic criteria. Such criteria should be applied in a regional framework, so as to guard against nostalgic assumptions that the parts of the world that are important to the United States today will be equally vital in the future. The basic allocations would then be adjusted as conflict in particular parts of the world became more likely. The proposed approach implies that military forward presence resources may not presently be allocated in a way that properly reflects the emerging future.

The various levels of routine, noncrisis military forward presence can be thought of as a continuum ranging from continuously high to none. The United States maintains continuously high forward presence in Western Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Mediterranean. Forces permanently stationed in these regions conduct cycles of interactions with local militaries (for instance, in exercises, information exchanges, planning, port visits, and other, largely ceremonial, activities). At the other end of the spectrum are regions like Central Africa, where the United States routinely maintains no military forward presence. That is to say, military forces are neither permanently stationed in nor periodically deployed to Central Africa to demonstrate national interest, deter interstate conflict, acquire operational awareness, or improve interoperability with local forces.

Most other regions fall between these two extremes. The two South American subregions are examples. In the Southern Cone subregion, the level of military forward presence might be classified as intermittent—largely confined to periodic port visits, exercises, and information exchanges. Presence in the Andes-Caribbean is determined by U.S. involvement in the war on drugs rather than an overall strategy for the subregion.

If national interests were determined on the basis of economic interdependence, it would appear the United States should consider reducing the level of military forward presence it maintains in the Mediterranean Basin. The savings could be transferred to other purposes, including force modernization. The savings could also be applied to military forward presence in other regions, such as South America. Economic statistics suggest, in fact, that the Southern Cone will soon become as important to the United States as southern Europe—a Mediterranean subregion where particularly high levels of military forward presence are maintained—and that the Andes-Caribbean subregion has a particularly severe risk of instability.

NOTES

1. The text of the treaty is available on the World Wide Web: http://www.nato.int/doc/basictext/treaty.htm.
2. As of 27 November 2000 there were twenty-one U.S. Navy ships, sixty-six naval aircraft, and about sixteen thousand sailors in the Mediterranean. U.S. Navy Chief of Information, *Forces in the 6th Fleet Area of Operations*. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/news/forces6te.html.
3. Four ships participated in the Atlantic phase of UNITAS 2000; overall, approximately 3,500 personnel were involved, and fourteen ships. U.S. Southern Command, *Facts and Figures*. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: http://www.southcom.mil/PA/idxfacts.htm.
4. The statistics on trade were compiled by the author based on data in the International Monetary Fund, *Direction of Trade Statistics 1998 Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: IMF, 1998) and *Direction of Trade Statistics Quarterly*, March 2000.
5. These subregions are consistent with the groupings that the Sixth Fleet has employed in organizing its presence activities in the Mediterranean.
6. James F. Miskel, “The Future of the U.S. Military Presence in the Mediterranean,” *Mediterranean Politics*, Autumn 1998, p. 97.
7. Percentages calculated by the author based on data in the U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1999*, 119th ed. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1999), p. 797. Available on the World Wide Web: http://www.census.gov/prod/www/statistical-abstract-us.html.
8. Ibid.
9. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *World Population Profile: 1994*, Report WP/94 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1994), pp. A6–A7.
10. U.S. State Department, *Background Notes on Paraguay*. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: http://www.state.gov.
11. *Humanitarian Times*, 2 November 2000.