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## America's Insatiable Appetite for Foreign Bases

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The Obama administration will be remembered for the extension of American military bases to the most far-flung parts of the world in a manner not seen since the early days of the Cold War.

The Pentagon, under Obama, drew up a plan for a worldwide network of military «hubs» with smaller dependent bases or «spokes» coordinating their activity with the hubs. One such hub is a large airbase being constructed by the United States in Erbil, in what is the all-but-declared independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq.

In February 2015, the Peshmerga Ministry in Kurdistan, the aspirant nation's de facto defense ministry, confirmed the establishment of the US base even as the Pentagon was denying it. The establishment of a US military base in a Kurdistan that is still recognized by the international community as a part of Iraq is a touchy subject for the Pentagon and Obama administration. The US has already gone down the slippery slope of establishing US bases in self-declared independent countries that are not recognized by the United Nations. For example, Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo, which remains unrecognized by Serbia, from which it was carved; Russia; China; Hungary; and Spain, is one of the largest US bases in Europe.

Recently, it became clearer what «spoke» bases would be built in the Middle East that would coordinate their activities with the US Central Command installation in Erbil. Taking advantage of the battlefield success of the Syrian Kurds, the US built an airbase in Rmeilan, which is now part of the embryonic Syrian Kurdish state known as the Federation of Northern Syria – Rojava. The Rmeilan base is designed as one of the spokes from the Erbil hub. The United States justifies its military bases in the largely unrecognized Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) territory and Northern Syria-Rojava by claiming the bases are needed to fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), an organization of America's making. However, anyone in the Middle East with common sense realizes that the new bases are to create zones of protection for US oil interests who want to exploit the oil reserves of both Iraq and Syria.

In a show of hypocrisy, the Pentagon maintains that it coordinated the establishment of the Erbil base with the Iraqi government in Baghdad. Yet, when it came to modernizing the 2600-meter-long runway at Rmeilan in northern Syria, it sought no permission from the central government of Syria in Baghdad. And many Iraqi officials scoff at the notion Washington asked Baghdad for prior permission to build its base in Erbil.

Another spoke for the Erbil hub is the not-so-secret US training base located in the northern Jordanian desert town of Safawi. At this base, US, Jordanian, British, French, and Turkish troops jointly trained Syrian rebel forces, many of which, when entering Syria, immediately defected to ISIL and its affiliates. Jordan's King Abdullah, at a January 2016 meeting in Washington with congressional officials, bemoaned the fact that Turkey was aiding ISIL in Syria and that Jordanian Special Forces units were required to enter Syria to clean up the mess caused by the Turks. Obama, who continues to maintain his friendship with Turkey's Islamist President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, canceled his previously scheduled meeting at the White House with Abdullah.

The Obama administration has had no desire to expose Erdogan as a supporter of ISIL, primarily because Washington wants to maintain its large airbase at Incirlik. Again, the maintenance of bases by the United States trumps all other concerns, diplomatic and even counter-terrorism issues included.

The United States Navy has long coveted the strategic Yemeni island of Socotra. Once part of the British Empire and more recently part of South Yemen, which permitted the Soviet Union to establish a key signals intelligence base on the island that sits right in the middle of the Gulf of Aden and the maritime routes through the Red Sea, Socotra is considered the crown jewel for any global empire. In February of this year, Yemen's Saudi-supported puppet president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi reportedly offered the United Arab Emirates a 99-year lease for the control of Socotra. The UAE capital of Abu Dhabi is the headquarters for Reflex Responses (R2), the private military company established by Erik Prince, the founder of Blackwater USA, a company that provided services to the Central Intelligence Agency and State Department during the American military fiascos in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan. Currently, US civilian paramilitary advisers command R2 mercenary units made up of Colombians, South Africans, and Chileans. These may be the first ground forces in Socotra to prepare the island for an American military presence.

Any agreement by the UAE to gain control of Socotra for 99-years, which suspiciously reminds one of the US 99-year lease on Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, a lease long since expired, would also open the island up to the problems usually associated with hosting American military bases. Aside from the people of Socotra suffering under a joint UAE-US suzerainty, at risk will be the island's protected world natural heritage site status. One thing that is always certain after the US leaves a military base, which is rare, are the mounds of trash and toxic chemicals it leaves behind. Pristine Socotra could become a toxic waste dump while serving as a virtual American aircraft carrier in the Gulf of Aden.

From the deserts of the Middle East, the Pentagon is also refurbishing the largely abandoned NATO base at Keflavik in Iceland. The US Navy plans to station P-8 Poseidon maritime surveillance aircraft in Keflavik to counter what NATO sees as a Russian threat. However, it is NATO that is expanding bases and building new ones, including American military personnel, in Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. In Asia, the United States is trying to convince the government of Okinawa to allow it to build a new air base on the Japanese island. However, Okinawa's government, tired of animalistic US servicemen preying, for decades, on the girls and women of Okinawa, wants the US out – period. If they ever so unfortunate to host a US military base, the people of Socotra only need to ask the Okinawans what American troops bring to an island culture in the way of rapes, assaults, alcohol, sexually-transmitted diseases, drugs, theft, and pollution.

Other islands in the Indian Ocean are also not safe from being exploited by the Pentagon's foreign base frenzy. The residents of the Cocos Islands, an Australian possession in the Indian Ocean located 2750 kilometers northwest of Perth, are concerned their pristine tropical corner of the planet will soon host a major military base, part of Obama's «Pivot to Asia», which is directed against China. Eager to challenge China in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean, the Pentagon is busy establishing new bases in Darwin, Australia; Singapore; and the Philippines, while maintaining its large base on Diego Garcia, an island ruthlessly stolen from the native Chagossians in order to make way for American nuclear submarines, cruise missiles, and B-52s.

The only good news about one new US base at Ice Camp Sargo in the Arctic is that it is located on an ice sheet. It will eventually be abandoned as the polar ice melts this summer.