

THE WIDER WORLD

Israel's War: *Regional Implications for U.S. Military*

By Diane Chido
November 2023

There have been two previous Jefferson articles in this space, one a brief [history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict](#) and the other on the [geopolitical implications of the current war](#). This one is concerned with how to better understand the direct implications on the U.S. military personnel in the region and the potential for the war expanding beyond the geographic area of Palestine. First, we must have a sense of our military's mission and how it is organized.

Regular readers will have noted in the pieces on conflict in the [Horn of Africa](#), broader [Sahel](#), [Mali](#), and [Niger](#) that far flung places are of great interest to the U.S., as much as they are to China and Russia and many other countries. When we think about globalization, we might initially think of global shipping and our own consumer culture, or perhaps the instant communications that have been made possible through the internet and satellite technology. These are aspects of globalization, to be sure, but this piece is concentrated on the U.S. military deployed pretty much everywhere in the world.

There are geographic and ideational spaces in international affairs called “the global commons.” If we go back to global shipping, one of our primary interests is in keeping commerce and transport safe and moving at a predictable pace on the high seas. This was the responsibility of the British Royal Navy until after World War II, when this role fell to the United States coordinating with many global partners. In reference to the U.S. Navy, U.S. Joint Forces Command wrote in a 2010 strategy document, “The crucial enabler for America’s ability to project

its military power for the past six decades has been its almost complete control over the global commons.”^[i]

The global commons is defined in many forms, including, of course, the high seas, but also outer space, and the Arctic and Antarctica. Some nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations like Greenpeace also consider Earth’s environment to be global commons to further their ecological preservation efforts. Another is the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), an American nonprofit that ensures standardization, security, and stability in the global internet system.

The word “joint” in military parlance means a combination of at least two of our military branches: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard during national emergencies, otherwise, the Coast Guard is part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), not Defense. When “Joint Forces Command” issues a strategy document, it is referring to coordination and roles of all of the branches under control of the Department of Defense (DoD), also called “the joint force.” The president relies on advice from the joint chiefs represented by a top commander of each of these Defense branches, one of which is selected to be the joint chief, who coordinates the activities and the voice of the other chiefs.

When you find you cannot sleep and decide some light reading of Defense Department-issued documents might do the trick, you will also find the term “combined arms.” This refers to the coordination of any one or more of the members of our own joint force working in tandem with the force or forces of a partner nation or nations. Thus, our work with NATO comes under the designation of “combined” forces. In the case of the U.S. Navy protecting shipping under its dominance of the global shipping commons, it partners with others in “combined operations.”

United Nations operations are not considered “combined operations,” because we do not send troops or law enforcement personnel to U.N. missions; we only position advisers to monitor and observe operations to safeguard our investment in the organization as a whole.

Another way we participate in combat and “stabilization” activities around the world is through Security Force Assistance (SFA), which was mentioned in a July piece on [terrorism in the Sahel](#) that also pointed out that there are at least 8,000 American personnel stationed in that part of Africa alone. Under SFA arrangements, we provide personnel and materiel to partner nations to train and equip them to fight and to conduct stabilization operations. We provide them with loans as needed to purchase our services and equipment without us having to send our own soldiers to do the actual fighting. We also grow our military-

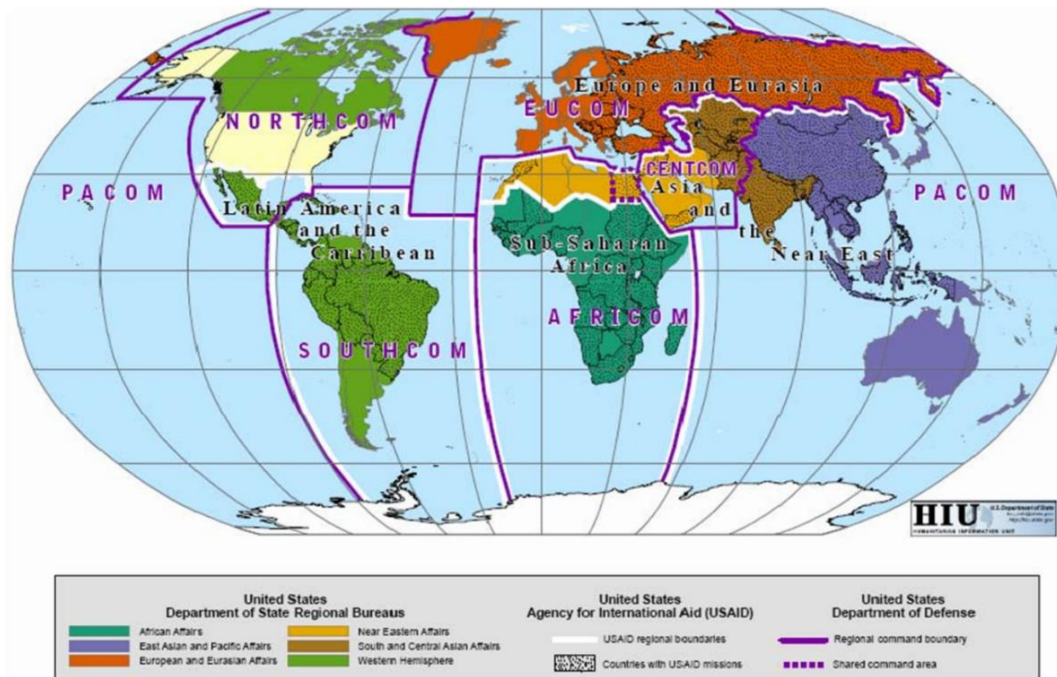
industrial complex providing billions of dollars to our budget and providing investment and jobs for our defense contracting and manufacturing firms.

We also have myriad treaty agreements with regional organizations like NATO and the African Union (A.U.), and sub-regional organizations like the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) and bilateral agreements with individual countries. In addition, we participate in international organizations like the High Seas Alliance. As an Australian general once said during her 2017 speech celebrating U.N. Day at the U.S. Army War College, “You guys are everywhere, and I mean *everywhere*.”

Just like the “joint” concept, when more than one U.S. government agency is involved in activities, it is called an “interagency” activity. The DoD has divided the world into geographic “combatant commands” as illustrated by the map.^[iii] Thus, the area of the Middle East is called Central Command (CENTCOM), North America is NORTHCOM, etc. There are a lot of challenges to coordinating these complex relationships, including at the most basic level, in definitions.

[i] The Joint Operating Environment (JOE), Strategy 2010, *U.S. Department of Defense* available [here](#) accessed on November 11, 2023

[ii] Zick, Michael, “Time for U.S. Foreign Affairs and the Interagency to Sharpen Its Regional Focus,” *Political Science*, November 11, 2012 available [here](#) with subscription, accessed on November 11, 2023



Map showing the geographic breakdown of U.S. military commands

For instance, the divisions used by the Department of Defense do not align with those of the Department of State, which considers Egypt to be in Africa but Defense treats it as part of the Middle East within CENTCOM.

As personnel and transports are constantly in motion, due to the dynamic international environment, it is difficult to provide precise numbers of troops and vehicles at a given moment in time, but the second map^[iii] is a useful snapshot from May 2023 indicating where the U.S. was deployed to give us a sense of the scale of our global reach. The map shows 742 military bases in 82 countries with over 170,000 of our total force of 2.2 million deployed abroad. The U.S. also has 11 of the world's total 43 aircraft carriers, which are essentially floating bases, as well as nearly 50 submarines of different types and 72 destroyers and 17 cruisers, not to get too deeply into the weeds, but just to illustrate the scale of our activity abroad.^[iv]

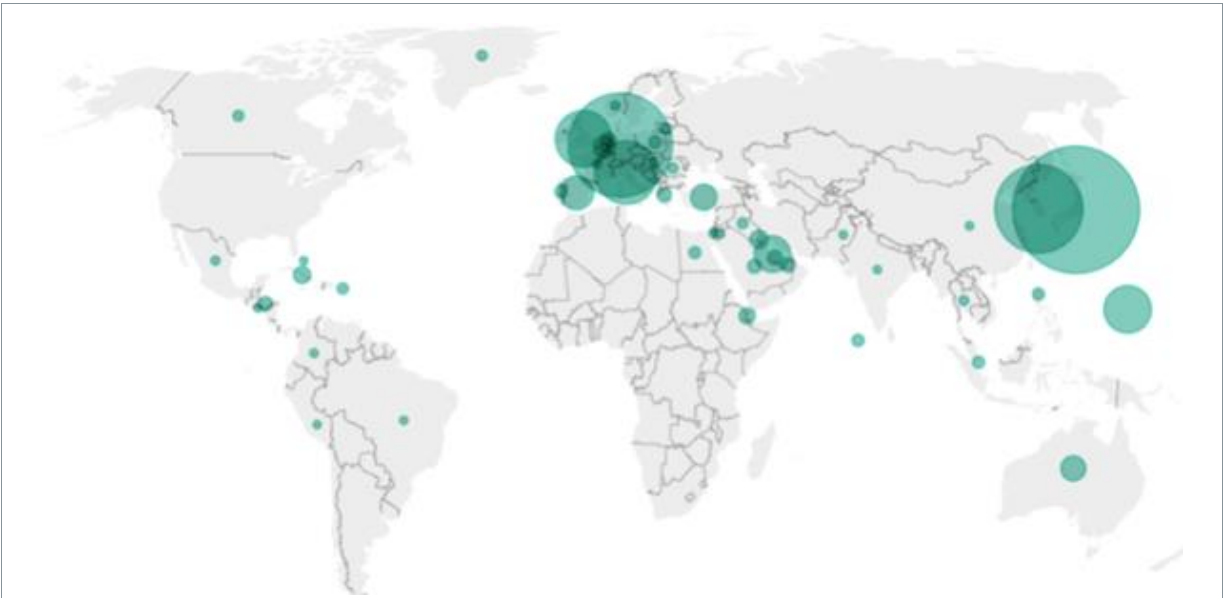
[iii] "US overseas military footprint," *IBON Foundation*, May 7, 2023 available [here](#) accessed on November 11, 2023

[iv] "How Many Ships Are in the U.S. Navy? A Breakdown," *The Depot*, October 19, 2022 available [here](#) accessed on November 11, 2023



Map showing locations of U.S. military bases abroad

Two-thirds of U.S. personnel (68%) are deployed to Japan (53,973), Germany (35,781), and South Korea (25,372) and these three countries host 312 of our 750 bases worldwide.



Map indicating global concentrations of U.S. military personnel

As of October 2023, Turkey, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia each had at least 10 bases. There are personnel deployed in 178 countries, many of which do not have U.S.-owned bases. The third map shows the concentration of U.S. deployment in terms of personnel around the globe as of September 2022 (smallest dots represent over 50 troops in each place). Let's also not forget those on Navy ships on permanent patrol such as the two U.S. aircraft carrier groups and their escorts now deployed to the Persian Gulf region, each of which has about 7,500 personnel.

One last item for definition is "stabilization." This is a concept often equated by critics with nation building and by supporters as peace keeping. While we are still actively fighting the Global War on Terror in many places around the globe, we are also supporting "stabilization operations." A five-week Jefferson series I conducted in 2018 went into great detail about so-called "stab-ops," but a brief explanation is ensuring a failing state or one emerging from conflict will not fall back into violence by not addressing the root causes of the original conflict and remaining grievances of the fighters, and ensuring the surviving population can grow into a secure, prosperous, democratic country.

In Afghanistan, we destroyed the Taliban within a month, but spent the next 20 years conducting stabilization operations on a population and meddling neighbors who did not want the country to be "stable" under our definition of it. In Iraq, we also toppled Saddam Hussein's government in six weeks but stayed for another eight years to stabilize the country and then returned in 2014 to deal with the Islamic State threat that was able to flourish because our stabilization

efforts in the region did not include Syria where the Islamic State originated and were not entirely successful in Iraq where it spread.

In July 2021, President Joe Biden announced withdrawal of combat troops from Iraq, but a contingent of 2,500 soldiers remained to train, advise, and share intelligence with Iraqi Defense Forces with approval of the Iraqi government. These have come under intermittent attack by Iranian proxy militias, intensifying to 40 attacks since the Hamas operation in Israel on October 7. The Pentagon has reported that “56 U.S. personnel have been injured in the attacks with traumatic brain injuries or minor injuries, though all have returned to duty.”^[v]

In Syria, the U.S. has no agreement to be there but has been the single largest humanitarian aid donor and has provided more than \$1.3 billion in stabilization assistance since 2011. This means that not all of it has been for humanitarian purposes but to support the Syrian opposition and to attack the Islamic State.^[vi]

[v] “Drone, explosive attacks target US forces across Iraq,” Reuters, November 9, 2023 available [here](#) accessed on November 11, 2023

[vi] “U.S. Relations with Syria,” Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet, *U.S. Department of State*, October 23, 2023 available [here](#) accessed on November 11, 2023



Map of the Levant and its neighborhood

There are about 900 U.S. personnel there and as of October 26, 2023, the Defense Department announced that another 900 would deploy to CENTCOM ^[vii] to support all operations across the region. This does not count the thousands of other personnel already assigned to CENTCOM, which includes

not only the Gulf region, the Levant (meaning, “the East” including Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria pictured in the fourth map), as well as Central Asia.

The bottom line is that we have a lot of people in harm’s way in Iraq and Syria in particular, as well as in our bases at Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, plus the aircraft carrier groups. These are potentially prime targets for Iran, which is likely the source of additional rocket attacks on U.S. bases launched in early October from Yemen, where Iran has been heavily engaged in opposing the Saudi-backed militias in the nascent civil war there since 2014. There were also attacks in October on U.S. personnel from Lebanon, where Iran also supports Hezbollah, a Hamas ally. Saudi Arabia is a strong U.S. ally but since its planned recognition of Israel was scuttled by the Hamas attack, it is not clear how involved they are willing to become to block Iran or to support their Palestinian allies against Israel.

In addition to the heat rising in the Middle East, the U.S. focus has settled there with many members of Congress strongly supporting Israel and threatening to reduce or eliminate support to Ukraine in upcoming budget talks. China is also watching and seeing our distraction. As noted in another previous piece, China, Iran, and Russia seek to overturn the 500-year Atlantic supremacy in global affairs and these intensive conflicts, in addition to fears for Taiwan’s continued sovereignty also play into their calculations. In October 2023, the U.S. State Department stated, “There is no military solution to the Syrian conflict.”^[viii] The same can be said of the crisis in Palestine and the possibility for fallout from the Israel crisis is a real one.

[vii] “U.S. Military Continues Focus on Supporting Israel, Ukraine,” *DOD News*, Oct. 26, 2023 available [here](#) accessed on November 11, 2023

[viii] “U.S. Relations with Syria,” *Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet*, *U.S. Department of State*, October 23, 2023 available [here](#) accessed on November 11, 2023

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diane Chido is an Erie native who spent her early career in Washington, D.C, returning to found DC Analytics, a research and analysis firm. She has taught Intelligence Studies at Mercyhurst University, Political Science at Gannon University, and Cultural Analysis at the US Army War College and has conducted research for numerous US defense agencies. She holds an MS in Applied Intelligence



Analysis, an MA in Russian Language, and a BA in International Relations and Soviet Studies.

[Subscribe to JES Publications Mailing List!](#)

[Support JES | Donate](#)

In Case You Missed It

[The Wider World | Geopolitical Fallout Follows Outbreak of War in Israel](#) written by President of DC Analytics **Diane Chido**

[Truth in Love | Bolton: Dream Beyond Your Reach!](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence **Dr. Parris J. Baker**

[Be Well | Weathering Cough, Cold, and Crud Season](#) written by health and wellness expert **Debbie DeAngelo**

[Book Notes #162 | Global Summit “Week Two”: A look at AI and the human future, ‘What’s Wrong with the Boys?’ and A 5-time Jeopardy Champion](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence **Dr. Andrew Roth**

[Color Television: It’ll Never Catch On](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence **Dr. David Frew**

Jefferson Educational Society | jeserie.org

