

# Loss of sovereignty

When a state agrees to the presence of US bases on its soil it effectively agrees to act as a starting point for military actions, which can include invasions, bombing raids and covert operations.

Iraq, for example, was bombed for over a decade from places as far apart as Okinawa, Diego Garcia, Turkey, Italy and Germany. Colombian coca-farmers have their crops sprayed by planes taking off from Ecuador. Somalia was recently bombed from Djibouti and, in all likelihood, Diego Garcia.

Germany was officially opposed to the 2003 Iraq war, but that did not prevent the country from being used as a base for the transfer of large numbers of US troops, military materials and equipment. In 1986, Britain saw protests against the bombing of Libya from UK bases – not only because of the bombing itself, but because British politicians were not warned of the action in advance. And the US, which maintains a secret nuclear arsenal in six European bases, nevertheless retains the right to launch these weapons without consulting the host governments.

Opponents of US bases argue that using other countries' land as a launch-pad for military operations makes them vulnerable to attack for actions that they are not directly responsible for, and about which their populations have little say. Al Qaeda began life as a campaign against the stationing of US troops at bases in Saudi Arabia. And anti-base activists on Okinawa have argued that, despite the opposition of much of the population to US policies on nuclear arms and the "war on terror", the presence of huge bases there makes them a potential target for nuclear or terrorist strikes.

On US colonies such as Vieques and Guam, the military's decision to use their land has led to clashes between ideas of local versus national sovereignty. Local politicians and citizens oppose the bases for bringing about the destruction of local resources and cultures, but the US federal government and military are able to overrule them. At sites such as Okinawa, the Japanese national government has used political pressure and economic threats to prevent locally elected representatives from upholding local opposition to the US military presence.



## Turkey

Turkey hosts one of the most “active” US military bases. Incirlik was crucial in maintaining the Iraq no-fly zones in Iraq in the 1990s, in bombing Afghanistan and in occasional military covert operations in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Incirlik is also a nuclear base and spy station. As Nilufer Ugur-Dalay, a Turkish activist against US military operations in Turkey, explains:

“NATO was established in 1949 after the 2nd World War, but the inclusion of Turkey in NATO showed that the US had wider interests than the North Atlantic. It is not a North Atlantic country, but it bordered the Soviet Union. Turkey was also critically important for NATO's control over the Mediterranean, Aegean and Black Sea.

The inclusion of Turkey in NATO allowed the US the opportunity to settle on its soil. Military agreements, military bases, weapon depots followed, turning Turkey into imperialism's military post and a base for attacks.

“A number of military agreements were signed between the two countries as precursors to the establishment of bases. A 1980 treaty openly declared that the bases in Turkey would be used for attacks. On the date of the treaty the Ministerial Council of NATO passed a resolution stating that if NATO's authoritative organs considered a development in the Arabian Peninsula, Iran or the Gulf of Basra as being dubious, Turkey must abide by this decision. This was the heaviest obligation of the treaty. During the First Gulf War, this treaty allowed the bombardment of Iraq by US jets using the Incirlik base. In this sense the bases are means for the US to make threats against Turkey's neighbours.

“The Global Peace and Justice Coalition (BAK), the national anti-war campaign, achieved worldwide prominence when, on 1 March 2003, it succeeded in forcing the Turkish parliament to vote against the government’s attempt to allow US forces to use Turkish soil for the attack on Iraq. This was achieved as a result of a six-month long, country-wide campaign which mobilised hundreds of thousands and included countless meetings, press conferences, TV ads, delegations to parliament, local demonstrations and, finally, a mass demonstration in Ankara on the day of the historic vote in parliament. But the government did allow Turkish airspace to be used by the US when it dropped troops in Northern Iraq and, in 2005, the Turkish government passed a secret Cabinet Decree to allow the Incirlik military base to be used by ‘friendly and allied nations’ for ‘logistical purposes’, including the ‘transport of military materials and personnel’.

“BAK brought lawsuits against this use and authorisation as a violation of article 92 of the Turkish Constitution – which states that permission is required from the Grand National Assembly for foreign forces to be allowed onto Turkish soil. Moreover, the ‘foreign forces’ in question are in a state of war with one of Turkey’s neighbours.

“The Coalition has remained vigilant against any government attempt to get Turkey involved in the disaster in Iraq or to provide any help to the forces of occupation. It brings together an unprecedented variety of trade unions, NGOs, political parties and organisations and individuals of all shades of political opinion from across the country. The campaign will continue until the occupation is ended, the Incirlik base is closed down and the full contents of all secret military agreements with the USA have been made public.”

