Rebasing the Legions

President Bush's recall of troops from Europe and Asia is part of the strategic offensive, not a defensive retreat. The plan has been in the works since Rumsfeld became Secretary of Defense. Although, for the time being, it won't be coupled to the two division cut in the Army Rumsfeld wanted.

An Army brigade is coming out of Korea. I don't know if Marines will lose any of their Cold War bases in Okinawa. The bulk, 70,000 out of 100,000, are from the two Army divisions and support in Germany. The best reason for pulling the divisions is to free future deployments from European political restrictions. Good to have the airbases stay put in Europe. The worst negative is wasting the world-class firing ranges at Grafenwoehr and instrumented maneuver at Hohenfels on only one Stryker brigade (a brigade is one third of a division). Rebasing American divisions looks like recalling Roman legions, but it's different significantly.

I wrote a paper in 1992, 'The Centurion Strategy', after the fall of the Soviet Empire. WWIII, the Cold War, ended with the U.S. in the same strategic position as Rome after the defeat of the Carthaginians (146 BC). No peer competitor could arise before 2030, if then. Dissolution and civil war is a threat. The other danger is the multitudes beyond the borders of our civilization.

I projected the future 'barbarians' at the gates would be the 'Have Nots' against the 'Haves' of Western Civilization and Japan. Someone, I called him 'Gandhi with Guns', would articulate the 'have not' grievances. The movement might be based in Islam, but it could have another ancient civilization identity – India or other Asian or African. My bosses in the Army and the leaders of the Army After Next wargames (1997-2000) didn't buy this idea of a future global ideological struggle. Tant pis.

Furthermore, the U.S. doesn't have the Imperial ambitions or will of a Rome. Instead, the colossal size of U.S. power astride the world imposes Imperial responsibilities. Like it or not, the U.S. is in the Imperial Republic era of American Civilization. Our challenge is survive with Imperial power and thrive as a Republic. Rome couldn't do it.

The Romans completed the conquest of Britain in 43 BC. The two legions at that edge of the Empire were recalled in 410 AD – the same year Alaric the Visigoth sacked Rome. Rome retreated from the Barbarians.

In modern times, the Allies conquered Germany and Japan in 1945 to end WWII. The Allies split into the warring factions of WWIII from 1947 to 1991. WWIV, the Global War on Islamist Terrorism, came to America on 9-11-01. The U.S. is on the offensive against Islamist barbarians. New allies liberated from the Soviet Empire get it, even if U.S. Liberals don't.

I was in Romania this year working with their Ministry of Defense. The Romanians are enthusiastic about being new NATO allies. They lived history and see the future. Romanians joke “the Black Sea is their only good neighbor”. They want to be aligned with the greatest power in the world – for the first time since they were part of the Roman Empire. They can’t wait to build a U.S. base in their country. The Romanians suffer combat casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq in stride.

Meanwhile, the U.S. will take a decade to recall Army divisions. A decade from now, the Army starts fielding brigade after brigade of the Future Combat Systems - transformed into modular ‘Units of Action’. The ‘heavy’ divisions won’t be heavy at all.

Additionally, planting soldiers’ families at stateside bases for seven years at a time is good for the troops. Unfortunately, taking the Army out of Europe puts it at risk for force cuts from future air/sea/Marine forces advocates in power. Maybe, someday, the Army will learn the politics to preserve its force structure like Marines do. Because, the size of the Army is the biggest strategic problem facing the U.S.

The Army has the intellectual high ground. 100,000 soldiers are changing jobs for the new forces. 33 combat brigades are transforming to 43-48 Units of Action. Actually, the Army should be 60 Units of Action. My paratrooper buddy, Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI), proposes to add 30,000 troops (to 520k). The active Army should be more - 600,000 soldiers – at least.

When the day comes to go into North Korea or Iran, or any Muslim country that is a threat because of the Islamists, the U.S. will need a lot more Army.

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