Big Screen Empire: What Foreign Films Reveal About the Perceptions of U.S. Military Bases in Affected Host Nations

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BIG SCREEN EMPIRE: WHAT FOREIGN FILMS REVEAL ABOUT THE PERCEPTIONS OF U.S. MILITARY BASES IN AFFECTED HOST NATIONS

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

by

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Abstract


Existing scholarly literature on U.S. military bases in foreign nations does not adequately take films depicting such installations into account. This master’s thesis is a corrective for this oversight. Recognizing the utility of foreign films featuring American military bases or troop presences, this thesis examines them in light of scholarly work on these installations. Of particular importance in this analysis are the periodization of U.S. basing favored by Robert Kaplan and the categorization of varieties of antibase protest favored by Kent Calder. Using these two writers as an analytical framework, as well as histories of U.S. basing and military occupations, it is possible to view these films as primary sources for these occupations. While depictions of Americans as individuals vary across films, generally U.S. occupations are viewed negatively by the non-American filmmakers examined. Local authorities of host nations are equally criticized for complicity in the crimes committed by the occupiers.
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Introduction

Military bases and garrisons have been a prominent feature of U.S. interactions with the rest of the world, especially allied nations, since the end of the Second World War. For nearly as long as this network of bases has existed, it has been subjected to extensive study by American commentators. Works on the issue have generally criticized the global U.S. military presence, although a noteworthy bloc of supporters of these bases emerged after the September 11 attacks. Simultaneously, such facilities have been depicted in cultural materials of many nations hosting U.S. troops. These cultural portrayals have not featured prominently in many of the monographs, anthologies, or articles on issues of U.S. basing. This is surprising given that popular movements or resistance against basing have existed in most host nations. It is the contention of this master’s thesis that “base films” represent a way to explore popular responses and perceptions towards U.S. bases. These films are sources for discerning causes of resentment towards U.S. bases and troop presences abroad. This is significant, as popular movements opposing bases have rarely succeeded. Indeed, they have failed in nations with the largest concentration of U.S. installations, such as Germany, Japan, South Korea, and Turkey.

Germany, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, Romania, and dozens of other nations host U.S. installations, with many experiencing periods of fierce opposition to these bases, usually after a U.S. soldier commits a highly visible crime. The most infamous example is the 1995 gang rape in Okinawa, when three American soldiers kidnapped and raped, or
attempted to rape, a 12-year-old Okinawan girl.\(^1\) This crime prompted mass protests, with the aim of totally ejecting U.S. bases from the Japanese island, which did not succeed. For Okinawans, however, the 1995 gang rape, while horrible, was not an isolated incident, but another outrage in a series of outrages, going back through the entire history of the occupation of Okinawa. These outrages include the murder of a Japanese woman by a U.S. soldier in 1957\(^2\) and continued beyond 1995, with protests erupting in 2016 after a U.S. civilian base worker murdered another Japanese woman.\(^3\)

Real-life incidents of base-related crime are horrifying, unsurprisingly featuring in many popular portrayals of U.S. troops, including film. In Japan, American soldiers have been depicted as either violent rapists or disinterested bystanders to such acts in Japanese cinema since at least the 1960s. Films such as *Pigs and Battleships* and *Gate of Flesh*, considered here, portray similar situations to the highly publicized rapes. Political relations and basing history with the U.S. vary among host nations, yet as in these Japanese films, a clear pattern of negative opinions regarding U.S. troops in these nations is clearly evident in most of the examined films. More evident is a pattern of local authorities, such as politicians or law enforcement officers from the host nations, being depicted in equally negative terms. This is due to their perceived indifference or hostility to the interests of their own peoples in favor of the American troops. Such perceptions are almost inevitable given the duration of the U.S. base presences worldwide. “The


relationship between the U.S. military presence and the non-U.S. citizens under its security umbrella is inherently contradictory. Although the host population may be fully enfranchised citizens of their own government, they are at the same time disenfranchised by the U.S. presence. They have virtually no say in what the United States does on their territory, U.S. officials are not elected, and only rarely are U.S. personnel tried in local courts for any crimes they may commit.” Powerlessness of locals in relation to the U.S. presence is a common theme which these seven films, though separated by geographic locale and time, nevertheless share, to varying degrees.

For the purposes of analyzing films relating, directly and indirectly, to the problems, or merely the presence, of U.S. bases in a country, a framework must be established. This thesis relies on a framework of periodization of the base presence worldwide influenced by the work of Robert Kaplan and Kent Calder. Kaplan is an American journalist who has written several books on the U.S. military abroad, based on travels with servicemen in various outposts of what he is unafraid to call an American empire. Calder is an American academic who has written on the issue of base politics, as well as the nature and causes of antibase protest. Both are generally supportive of the extensive network of overseas outposts by the U.S. military, making them part of a broader, less critical trend in base historiography, which emerged in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks.

The periodization of the U.S. base presence is based on the postwar eras of U.S. imperial expansion favored by Robert Kaplan in his 2005 book *Imperial Grunts*. Kaplan

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gives a good account of the American empire and those charged with manning smaller-sized bases worldwide. The two relevant periods of U.S. basing are what Kaplan terms “the Garrison Era,” and the “Second Expeditionary Era.” The Garrison Era corresponds to the Cold War, “in which large, permanent frontier garrisons surrounding the Soviet Union were built in places like West Germany, Turkey, and the Korean Peninsula.”

Kaplan’s Second Expeditionary Era corresponds to U.S. activity after the September 11, 2001 attacks, with a global military presence having an “emphasis on mobility and the dispersion of forces, to deal with the twin threats of radical Islam and the rising power of China.”

This thesis examines films made during both eras, though the origin of base presences in many nations, particularly Germany, Japan, South Korea and Turkey, lies firmly in the Cold War Garrison Era.

Kaplan is useful in rationalizing the periods of basing; Calder is useful for examining reasons why U.S. bases are resisted. In his 2007 monograph *Embattled Garrisons*, Calder uses three classifications for opposition to U.S. bases—Ideological, Nationalistic, and Pragmatic. Films in which American bases or U.S. soldiers are portrayed occasionally contain ideological protest as Calder defines it. Most, however, are critical of bases on what Calder terms nationalistic or pragmatist grounds. Nationalistic opponents “oppose bases primarily on cultural grounds, or due to perceived violence they impose on national sovereignty.”

This is evident in the German film *Europa*, the Turkish film *Valley of the Wolves: Iraq*, and the Romanian film *California Dreamin’*. Conversely,

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8 Calder, 84.
pragmatists “object to bases due to the way they function—crime and environmental pollution are among their typical concerns.”9 This is evident in The Host, as well as the Japanese films Pigs and Battleships and Gate of Flesh. The Host, the two Japanese films, and California Dreamin’ contain elements of both. Specific U.S.-local interactions differ across host nations, but these trends exist, thematically contiguous across both decades and continents.

Considering Kaplan and Calder’s arguments as complimentary is valuable as a basis for examining foreign films for depictions of the U.S. military presence in different host nations. Many bases established in Kaplan’s Garrison Era (the Cold War) are still active. The production of films in these host countries is one common factor between the Cold War and post-Cold War environment. Study of Cold War-era films allows viewing perceptions of the U.S. presence when it was firmly entrenched against the perceived Soviet threat. Study of post-Cold War-era film is also important, as the Soviet rationale for the bases no longer existed. Movements to eject U.S. forces from nations, such as in the Philippines in 1991 and Saudi Arabia in 2003, while occurring for specific reasons, were more easily accomplished without a clearly defined worldwide enemy. Films from after the Cold War and the early twenty-first century therefore reflect continuing and new anxieties about U.S. bases.

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9 Calder, 84.
An Overview of Basing Since 1945

The U.S. practice of establishing military bases on conquered territory did not begin in 1945. The Spanish-American War of 1898 famously gifted the United States with several new outposts, fit for a global empire, such as colonies in Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines, as well as the Cuban naval base at Guantanamo Bay. With the exception of the Philippines, the U.S. retains these sites up to the present. All of these possessions continue to house bases, weapon test areas, troop concentrations, airfields, and in the case of Guantanamo, one of the world’s more notorious prisons. While these bases are undoubtedly significant, they are all on U.S. territory, and the U.S. can do with them as it wills, similar to the military bases within the fifty U.S. states, from Fort Benning to Pearl Harbor.

The end of the Second World War in 1945, however, was a watershed moment for U.S. basing, permanently expanding the scope of these outposts. The victorious United States did not claim permanent colonial possessions from the war. In the eyes of some commentators, this made U.S. actions after the war more remarkable. “Although previous imperial powers deployed their troops to colonial possessions, no other hegemonic power was able to convince sovereign states to play “host” to an enduring military presence during peacetime.” C.T. Sandars chooses the term ‘leasehold empire,’ “because it graphically underlines the novelty of the American global security system.”

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was unique in this regard, particularly in contrast to the Soviet Union, which forcibly imposed the presence of its army on its new eastern European satellites. “From 1945 on, the presence of the occupying Soviet armed forces in the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany), for example, was never subject to any treaty.”\textsuperscript{12} The Red Army simply arrived in 1945 in the process of crushing the last of the German armies, and never left, until the aftermath of the Cold War fifty years later.

The Cold War was the primary rationale for establishing the American base network after 1945. Even with demobilization of much of the armed forces immediately after the war, Kaplan’s Garrison Era soon emerged, necessitating, in the minds of defense policymakers and officers, the “large, permanent frontier garrisons surrounding the Soviet Union” in Western Europe and Northeast Asia.\textsuperscript{13} These were regions of the world brought under U.S. control via victory over the Axis. While the USSR aspired to a base network girdling the world, for the U.S. this was actually feasible.\textsuperscript{14} According to John Gaddis in \textit{The Cold War}, the maintenance of large occupation forces in Europe was not a foregone conclusion in 1945, but perceptions of the USSR shaped, and eventually strengthened, the desire to garrison the world, starting with Europe. In particular, Soviet acquisition of the atomic bomb in 1949 upended American strategies on European recovery. “Without its atomic monopoly, the Truman administration would have to consider upgrading conventional forces, possibly even stationing some of them permanently in Europe, a contingency not provided for in the North Atlantic Treaty.”\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12} Chalmers Johnson, \textit{Nemesis}, 172.
\textsuperscript{13} Kaplan, \textit{Imperial Grunts}, 13.
\textsuperscript{15} Gaddis, \textit{The Cold War: A New History}, 35.
The U.S., while perhaps not intending to garrison Europe from the outset after 1945, nevertheless had the basis to do so given the continuing occupation of Germany (depicted in von Trier’s *Europa*), which would last until 1955, followed by (West) Germany’s integration into the Western defense bloc. Even then, U.S. troops would stay on German bases, many of which still stand, including the massive Ramstein Air Base, one of the largest overseas U.S. installations.

The onset of the Cold War prompted greater U.S. base commitment in Europe and North Africa, as well as to an emergent base network in Northeast Asia. The U.S. occupied Japan after its surrender in 1945, and this occupation (depicted in *Gate of Flesh* and *MacArthur’s Children*) ended, with Japanese national sovereignty restored, in 1952. The victory of Mao Zedong and the Chinese communists, as well as the Korean War, only increased the U.S. base establishment in the region. U.S. troops have remained in South Korea ever since the 1953 armistice. Despite the end of formal occupation in Japan in 1952, the U.S. military presence remains (depicted in the film *Pigs and Battleships*), codified by a U.S.-Japan Security Treaty in 1960. The island of Okinawa was directly controlled by the U.S. until 1972, and the U.S. Seventh Fleet continues to be based out of the port of Yokosuka, on Tokyo Bay, to this day.

Western Europe and Northeast Asia have, from the 1940s onward, constituted the largest concentrations of U.S. bases worldwide, which helps explain the penetration of this foreign troop presence into the film culture of these regions. The end of the war in 1945, the beginnings of the occupations, and interactions with American troops are all elements present in *Europa* (1991), *Gate of Flesh* (1964), and *MacArthur’s Children* (1984). Not only do these films depict critical moments in the histories of Germany and
Japan, moments of their utter defeat in destructive global war, but they are of continuing relevance given the continuing U.S. troop presence in these nations. However, while Western Europe and Northeast Asia have remained basing concentrations into the twenty-first century, the U.S. has never limited itself to those regions when stationing troops around the world.

Although films from Germany, Japan, and South Korea are prominent among depictions of U.S. bases, the presence of Turkish and Romanian films help illustrate the breadth of the base presence worldwide in the early twenty-first century. After the September 11 attacks, the 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States, while sketching new American military policy generally, devoted space to the issue of basing, and what role it would play in the new post-9/11 world. It was specific in advocating an expansion of the base network beyond its traditional concentrations. """"To contend with uncertainty and to meet the many security challenges we face, the United States will require bases and stations within and beyond Western Europe and Northeast Asia, as well as temporary access arrangements for the long-distance deployment of U.S. forces.""""16 Some of these new bases would be small outposts in places like Africa, which Kaplan would visit, or new bases set up in eastern Europe, in what was once the communist bloc. Other bases outside Western Europe and Northeast Asia would be holdovers from the Cold War Garrison Era, such as the American-used facilities in Turkey, a longstanding U.S. ally.

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Unlike the defeated Axis powers, who were powerless after their defeat and had to accept the military bases of their conquerors, Turkey was an ally after 1945. The common threat which helped to catalyze an alliance was the Soviet Union, as Turkey was part of Stalin’s conception of an expansion of Soviet influence. In 1946 Stalin demanded “territory and bases to be used for the joint defense of the Turkish Straits.” Famously, this pressure on Turkey, concurrent civil war in Greece, and U.S. fears of Soviet involvement in the region overall, led to the Truman Doctrine, resulting in massive financial support for these two nations. Nur Criss asserts this foundation of solidarity against a perceived Soviet threat allowed for a great deal of Americanization in Turkey post-1945 as the result of an increasing U.S. presence. “Many middle-class apartment buildings in Ankara and Izmir had at least one American family resident…Similar, though more limited informal contacts took place in Turkish provincial cities where U.S. military bases were located. During this anxious Cold War time, the United States was widely treated as a heroic benefactor, and the Soviet Union was denigrated.”

Although the U.S.-Turkey relationship, including the base presence, described by Criss, began well, the end of the Cold War (and the perceived common threat of the Soviets) and the onset of the Iraq War in 2003 brought complications. The souring of the Turkish-American alliance is the historical backdrop for the 2006 film Valley of the Wolves: Iraq, one of the more violently unambiguous films considered here. “Its plot piles a wild revenge scenario atop a real snafu: the accidental 2003 NATO arrest of

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18 Criss, “Turkish Perceptions of the United States,” in What They Think of Us, 53.
several Turkish officers, with the detainees seen on TV in Abu-Ghraib-style hoods.”19 As Idov goes on to note, this incident was never a major news story in the U.S., but for the Turks, this was unsurprisingly a major insult. The response of the United States in the event of several of its soldiers being arrested like criminals at the hands of a purportedly allied military—Turkey was a longstanding NATO member and a Cold War ally—may only be imagined.

American bases in South Korea began in the Garrison Era, along with those in Germany, Japan, and Turkey. These bases originated during the Korean War, though they survived the Cold War, and by the mid-2000s, drew cinematic criticism as well. The clearest example is Bong Joon-ho’s *The Host*, a response to one of the most objectionable aspects of the treaties the U.S. uses as legal frameworks for its occupations—lax environmental standards. The 1960 U.S.-Japan SOFA contains the explicit provision that the “United States is not obliged, when it returns facilities and areas to Japan on the expiration of this Agreement or at an earlier date, to restore the facilities and areas to the condition in which they were at the time they became available to the United States armed forces, or to compensate Japan in lieu of such restoration.”20 The 1966 SOFA concluded with the Republic of Korea contains a nearly identical provision. This creates a legal situation absolving the United States of responsibility for ecologically damaging actions taken at its bases. This does not preclude the U.S. from offering *separate* restitution for damages incurred, however. After Americans dumped formaldehyde into

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the Han River in South Korea, the event which inspired *The Host*, the American military pledged itself to spending $100 million to ensure that leaks of dangerous chemicals would be avoided.\(^{21}\)

While *Valley of the Wolves* and *The Host* are concerned with particular issues on the surface—the Turkish film with the “hood incident” and the Korean film with the dumping of formaldehyde into Seoul’s Han River in 2000\(^ {22}\)—they are ultimately concerned with the loss of sovereignty and a lack of accountability over Americans who operate at will in these countries. This lack of accountability is often permitted and abetted with the connivance of various local authorities. The 2007 Romanian film *California Dreamin’* does this as well, albeit in a slightly subtler fashion, with the perspective of a nation which did not host U.S. military bases until Kaplan’s Second Expeditionary Era. The plot of *California Dreamin’*, however, is set during the 1990s Balkan wars, prior to the U.S. base presence there. While real-life events provide the narrative starting point for many of these films, the filmmakers take clear creative liberties with crafting a storyline, generally revolving around the themes of loss of sovereignty, placing these films into the category of nationalistic antibase protest. *The Host*, with its grounding in a real, if exaggerated, environmental concern, also falls into the category of pragmatic base protest under Calder’s schema.

The Romanian film *California Dreamin’*, out of the films considered, is unique in that it was released very early into the U.S. basing presence in Romania. Romania, having existed as a member of the Soviet-allied East Bloc for the duration of the Garrison

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Era, or Cold War, only became open to penetration by U.S. basing in the post-9/11 world, the Second Expeditionary Era. Since 9/11, the U.S. has “established operational basing and training relationships with Bulgaria, Romania and Poland. U.S. forces used the Constanta port in Romania and the Burgas airfield in Bulgaria to support Operation Enduring Freedom operations in Afghanistan, and to provide KC-135 Stratotanker in-flight refueling support for U.S. operations against Iraq.” In addition, the former Soviet satellites were, in Calder’s view, “markedly more supportive of Bush administration strategic purposes than the “Old Europe” further west.”

California Dreamin’, released in 2007, came directly on the heels of Romania’s new basing agreements. Romania, along with Bulgaria, “cut deals in 2005-2006 to host American military forces on their territory, and have been eager to expand the presence of U.S. forces…Romania will host 1,500 troops.”

Despite differences in the origin and duration of American presences, the seven films considered here are all responses to this same phenomenon of the U.S. global base network. Given the extensive nature of that network, a discussion of these films cannot be considered a definitive accounting of its reach, its impact on those forced to live in proximity to it, and of responses to it. The stories which are hinted at through these films, and attitudes expressed, are endless. Despite vastly different settings and periods of these films, there are continuities which reflect common anxieties about U.S. bases and potential problems stemming from them. This is unsurprising given their scope and endurance worldwide. It is worthwhile to note these trends, as a method to understand

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23 Calder, Embattled Garrisons, 55.
24 Calder, 55.
25 Calder, 55-56.
potential objections to the continuing base presences in the future. Objections to these bases will exist in the future, which is unavoidable given the continuing worldwide basing posture. According to the Department of Defense’s Base Structure Report for the U.S. government’s fiscal year 2018, “DoD manages a worldwide real property portfolio of that spans all 50 states, 8 U.S. territories with outlying areas, and 45 foreign countries. The majority of the foreign sites are located in Germany (194 sites), Japan (121 sites), and South Korea (83 sites).”\(^{26}\) Given this concentration, it is appropriate that Germany, South Korea, and Japan especially are well-represented among the films considered, though they are hardly alone in hosting U.S. troops. Bases give disparate nations a common experience, and will continue to do so, for so long as these installations exist.

Historiography of the U.S. Base Presence Worldwide

American scholars have critically examined the base issue, as well as its relation to a perceived “imperial” role for the U.S., for decades. Overall, throughout the historiography, during both Kaplan’s Garrison Era and Second Expeditionary Era, criticism far outweighs praise of the base network and problems arising from it. However, during the Second Expeditionary Era, a group of scholars emerged as firm defenders of the base network, while the criticism concurrently became much sharper. Regardless of whether a monograph or article is critical or supportive—like Calder, to name one—of the overseas American presence, these works provide necessary context for analysis of the primary sources—the films. There are multiple examples of such literature, published since at least the 1950s, representing a wide range of opinion on base-related issues. Others works on U.S. foreign intervention and policy mention U.S. basing, or an overseas military presence, in more tangential, but equally important ways.

An early example of critical commentary on bases during Kaplan’s Garrison Era is William Appleman Williams, who wrote two tracts on the imperial nature of the post-1945 U.S., The Tragedy of American Diplomacy and The Great Evasion. Tragedy never discusses the ubiquity of U.S. bases, yet asserts the U.S. had imperialistic designs on the world. This would be maintained, in part, by the base system. “Even before they formally entered World War II, American leaders assumed that the United States would emerge from the conflict in a position to extend, stabilize, and reform the empire of the open door. Roosevelt’s assumption that Anglo-American forces would police the world for a “transition period” after the defeat of the Axis was given overt expression in August 1941
[in the Atlantic Charter].”\(^\text{27}\) As Gaddis noted decades later, the U.S. was firmly in a position to do just this in the aftermath of its victory over the Axis in 1945. This policing of the world, to use Williams’ phrase, had the additional aspect of creating the frontier garrisons around the USSR which Kaplan describes. There was, however, little that was ‘transitional’ about the period when American forces would police the globe from a base network, something which continues today.

While *Tragedy* omits the issue of bases themselves, it provides an important piece of context to understanding the Romanian film *California Dreamin’*. While not directly relevant to the overall plot of the film, flashbacks make clear that Doiaru, the principal Romanian character of the film, had hoped, along with his family, that the United States would liberate them in 1945, saving them from the communists. This never happened, and Romania became a Soviet client state, but Williams explains why. “Significantly, too, Roosevelt had *not* abandoned, at the time of his death, the intention of reasserting American power and influence in eastern Europe. It was suggested to him that the United States should file a vigorous protest over the Soviet action early in 1945 of reconstituting the Rumanian Government along pro-Soviet lines. Roosevelt did *not* reply that the basic issue should be forgotten. His position was quite different. *He said merely that the Rumanian episode, because it involved supplies for the Red Army that was still fighting Germany, did not offer the best kind of ground upon which to take a stand.*”\(^\text{28}\) Roosevelt, it can be surmised, did not wish to destabilize the Allied coalition while the war was still being prosecuted. Post-1945, however, the Red Army was firmly established in Eastern


\(^{28}\) Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 223.
Europe, and it likely would have been necessary to force them out to weaken Soviet influence. *California Dreamin’* makes clear, of course, that the Romanians did not see such ‘larger’ considerations, and saw themselves as having been abandoned by the Americans.

*The Great Evasion* more explicitly discusses Williams’ attitudes towards the American empire, or what he termed “administrative colonialism.” For Williams, this implied “effective control by an outside minority, through force and threat of force, of alien territory and population, and by the concurrent establishment of economic predominance.”  

Williams then asserts that “the current American relationships with Okinawa, South Korea, and Vietnam follow the main outlines of such administrative colonial empire.” The publication of *The Great Evasion* was firmly within the Garrison Era, with continuing stalemate on the Korean Peninsula and the rapid escalation of the American war in Vietnam after the 1964 Tonkin Gulf incident. Williams’ critique of the American relationship with Okinawa was even more prescient, as the island was still under direct U.S. military control, with Japan not regaining its sovereignty over it until 1972, twenty-seven years after the Marines had conquered it at the end of the Pacific War. The island is still a major concentration of U.S. bases to this day.

Williams helps to set the tone for much of the subsequent critical commentary on U.S. bases, describing it as a form of imperialism. The U.S. base presence continuously being referred to as imperial, and the U.S. as an empire, are common themes among the

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critics of these installations during both the Garrison and Second Expeditionary Eras. In the intervening years, little has changed, except in Vietnam, among the examples Williams cites of administrative colonialism, particularly regarding the bases. Williams differentiates administrative colonialism from formal colonialism, highlighting limited emigration to the subject area. “Its object is to provide a military force in being in support of the leadership necessary for the effective control and management of the political economy of the subject society. The emigrants thus comprise an absolute and a relatively small group of army and naval personnel, political administrators, and economic directors.”

Regarding current U.S. bases, almost sixty years later, his analysis remains prescient. Although dependents live with service members around several larger U.S. bases in allied nations, smaller bases and those in war zones are limited to military personnel.

U.S. bases worldwide, and their usefulness, were scrutinized as part of a much broader critique of militarism in American society by at least 1970. That was the year—at the height of the Vietnam War—that James Donovan, a retired colonel of the Marine Corps, published his book Militarism, U.S.A. In it, he makes a remarkable argument for regarding the United States as “a militaristic and aggressive nation embodied in a vast, expensive, and burgeoning military-industrial-scientific-political combine which dominates the country and affects much of our daily life, our economy, our international status, and our foreign policies.” From the opening pages of his book, Donovan asserts that the massive overseas troop presence is a part of this problem. “American armed

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31 Williams, The Great Evasion, 39.
might is on frontier guard duty; patrolling the air and seas, or stationed on foreign shores around the world…There are over 1,200,000 U.S. fighting men stationed overseas at 2,270 locations in 119 countries.”

Donovan’s book is an almost perfect example of Garrison Era criticism of the U.S. base network. What makes his book significant is that it was written when superpower confrontation was still in full force, and when the U.S. was fully mired in, and only just beginning to extricate itself from the Vietnam War. The ring of garrisons around the Soviet Union Kaplan described thirty years later had been fully built up, and would endure. Even then, a retired Marine colonel took issue with the base network. “Over the years, the real purposes of many of these overseas bases has changed from tactical and strategic locations of military value to elaborate American housing and logistic installations away from home. They provide locations and facilities for some units that would have no reason for existence if based in the United States, and they furnish justification for interesting and attractive overseas travel and adventure for the troops and their families. A large amount of the foreign deployment of American forces has become a customary and programmed requirement rather than the product of current strategic needs.”

In effect, Donovan is accusing the foreign base network of falling victim to its inertia. The bases exist, and therefore they simply continue to exist. Donovan admits many bases are “a large investment in long-standing overseas establishments at locations no longer of direct value or importance to national security.” With this rationale, unwillingness to negate costs sunk into a military base overseas would help to

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34 Donovan, Militarism, U.S.A., 54.
perpetuate its existence, even in the event that the usefulness or purpose of a base had expired.

Donovan’s book was not the last of the Garrison Era base critiques, albeit one of the most noteworthy. However, Donovan was never focused solely on the bases themselves, but rather what he regarded as a culture of militarism in the U.S. generally; bases were merely a particular symptom of this. Other monographs dedicated to the specific issue of stationing American troops overseas did come out before the end of the Cold War. Daniel Nelson’s *History of U.S. Military Forces in Germany*, published in 1987, charts out the progression of U.S. garrisons in Germany during the Cold War. He is not inattentive to the various complaints made against such bases, such as crime, noise pollution, or agitation among U.S. troops, yet takes no firm stand in opposition against them. The publication of *History of U.S. Military Forces in Germany* in 1987, however, precluded the book from taking into consideration the REFORGER 88 exercises, when German civilians were controversially killed during NATO war games, one year later, in 1988. That incident was later analyzed early the next year by the American *Monthly Planet* magazine.

REFORGER 88, one of a series of ‘Return of Forces to Germany’ readiness exercises, is an issue intimately tied up with U.S. bases. Throughout the Garrison Era, U.S. installations in Germany became launch points for U.S.-NATO military war game exercises, geared towards halting a feared USSR-Warsaw Pact invasion of Western Europe. The 1988 exercise, one of the last held before the fall of the Berlin Wall and Iron Curtain, was particularly noteworthy. As the *Planet* noted, it was “the largest in the 20-year history of these autumn maneuvers. It involved 125,000 ground troops (103,000
were American) and about 30,000 tracked and wheeled vehicles. The U.S. 5th Corps defended against the invading U.S. 7th Corps in full-scale mock battle covering over 16,000 square miles of central and southern Germany."  

The article notes several incidents of damage incurred to the private property of German citizens as the U.S. tanks practiced maneuvers in farmers’ fields and on residential streets. This was allowed to proceed, largely unchecked, due to the Status of Forces Agreement. Even before the end of the Cold War, opponents of U.S. basing knew these were the linchpins upon which the military presences rested. The U.S.-West German SOFA specifically states that:

“Troops may cross over private property, temporarily occupy it or intermittently close it off” without approval of the owner.”

This is only one example of using of a SOFA to justify military action in a host nation. The damages incurred to the private property of foreign nationals, in this case Germans, is also a further basis for pragmatic opposition to U.S. basing under Calder’s rubric.

The end of the Cold War in 1991 brought Kaplan’s Garrison Era to a close. The gigantic bases in Western Europe and Northeast Asia, built to contain the USSR, now entered a new age without that communist superpower. Their original purpose no longer existed. Donovan had even asserted that many had lost their original purpose over two decades prior. Analysis of the Cold War-era bases, and resistance movements against them would, however, continue into the 1990s. The 1990s would also see both an expansion of the U.S. base network into new areas, as well as contractions as the end of the Cold War led to evictions of U.S. troops and closure of bases. These evictions, such

37 Aldridge, “U.S. Military Exercises in West Germany,” 15.
as from the Philippines, would not always be permanent, particularly after the
inauguration of Kaplan’s post-9/11 Second Expeditionary Era in the twenty-first century.

A major examination of Garrison Era U.S. basing, and a critique of that basing
generally, was published the year the Soviet Union collapsed. Joseph Gerson and Bruce
Birchard’s *The Sun Never Sets...Confronting the Network of Foreign U.S. Military Bases*,
an edited anthology, takes a global approach to the base network, with chapters
identifying and examining examples of the U.S. presence in multiple regions of the
world, including Europe, Asia, the Middle East, as well as Central America. Unlike
Donovan, for whom bases were one aspect of a larger issue, or Nelson, who focused
entirely on Germany, Gerson and Birchard focus solely on the bases across the entirety of
the planet. What is also immediately of interest is the title—*The Sun Never Sets*.... It
utilizes the famous phrase historically applied to the now-defunct British Empire in its
heyday. The word “empire” has been used in description of America’s foreign relations at
least as far back as Williams in 1964. Donovan even explicitly compared the U.S. base
presence worldwide to the Roman legions.38 Imperial rhetoric, or the label of “empire” as
criticism would become a common and recurring theme in American writings about the
nation’s bases, particularly during the Second Expeditionary Era. It was then that terms
such as the “leasehold empire,” “empire by invitation,” or “military empire” were coined
or used.

Gerson and Birchard’s contributors effectively conveyed not only the scope of the
base network, but also how it secured the support of some in the face of widespread anti-

base protests. Particularly noteworthy is how local authorities served to further U.S. interests in host nations. Laura Simich, listed as an anthropologist, contributed a chapter the anthology on the reaction in Comiso, Italy to the establishment of a base there for NATO nuclear missiles. The Sicilian town was vehemently opposed to the base, mainly on what Calder would identify as pragmatic grounds. “Many assumed the Mafia would take advantage of opportunities in construction, land speculation, drugs, and prostitution.”\(^{39}\) There were numerous protests, both by locals and representatives of the larger international peace movement, but all of that was unable to prevent the base from being established. “The authorities displayed their power more bluntly during the mass protests of August 6-9, 1983. Members of the national police force seriously injured and hospitalized protestors who had blockaded the gates of the base, leaving local people afraid to join further protests.”\(^{40}\) By 1985 the missile base had been established, and Simich is clear that the only persons to really benefit from its presence were those tied up in local power structures. “No more than a dozen local people, most with the right party or family connections, received contracts for services and maintenance.”\(^{41}\) Local authorities and power structures are frequently depicted on film as providing support for a U.S. base presence, meaning that host populations are generally aware of their own nation’s complicity, in various ways, in the problems of U.S. bases.

Sustained scholarly commentary on Garrison Era basing continued after Gerson and Birchard into the twenty-first century Second Expeditionary Era. Examples include


\(^{40}\) Laura Simich, “The Corruption of a Community’s Economic and Political Life,” 83.

\(^{41}\) Simich, “The Corruption of a Community’s Economic and Political Life,” 84.
Thomas Maulucci and Detlef Junker’s edited volume *GIs in Germany* (2013) and Amy Austin Holmes’s *Social Unrest and American Military Bases in Turkey and Germany* (2014). Maulucci and Junker, as the title of their anthology implies, deal with various facets of the U.S. presence in Germany, location of one of the more extensive Cold War base networks. Holmes conducts a valuable comparative study of U.S. German and Turkish bases, as well as protests against them, particularly in the Cold War period. Unfortunately, these authors did not devote serious attention to the phenomenon of anti-base *film* specifically.42 This overall lack of attention paid to cultural responses to basing is a common historiographical trend in works on U.S. basing generally.

By the beginning of the new millennium, American commentaries on the base presence worldwide were growing. The 1990s had witnessed retrospective reviews of Garrison Era basing such as Gerson and Birchard, as well as retrospectives on U.S. interventions, such as William Blum’s *Killing Hope* (1994). Such retrospective books would continue to be written. However, as the U.S. entered a new era of global military engagement after the declaration of the Global War on Terrorism in 2001 and the inauguration of the Iraq War in 2003, new base presences would be established in new host nations, and older, Garrison Era controversies in longstanding host nations would persist. While previous U.S. rationales for bases changed with the downfall of the Soviet Union, the installations themselves remained focuses for nationalistic grievances and sources of crime and instability in their host communities. Films depicting these new

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bases and relations with new American troop presences would show, however, that they continued to enjoy local support, shielding them from the worst of popular displeasure.

The end of the Cold War was not the end of U.S. basing. The 1990s and the post-9/11 Second Expeditionary Era represented a new phase of American involvement in the world. This era witnessed publication of extensive critical commentary on bases and basing. Three important critics of U.S. basing in this time are Chalmers Johnson, David Vine, and Daniel Immerwahr. Johnson’s *Blowback* (2000), *Sorrows of Empire* (2004), *Nemesis* (2006) and *Dismantling the Empire* (2010) are all strident critiques of U.S. basing, CIA interventionism, and U.S. military aid to undemocratic regimes.43 David Vine’s *Base Nation* (2015) and Daniel Immerwahr’s *How to Hide an Empire* (2019) are two recent volumes highlighting what they see as problems with basing and, in Immerwahr’s case, with U.S. international influence generally.44 These books, along with *American Empire* (2002) and *The Imperial Tense* (2003), which were written and edited, respectively, by Andrew Bacevich, take a generally dim view of U.S. interventionism abroad, which became a hallmark of the post-Cold War period, from the Balkans, to Somalia, to Haiti.45 Interventions in the Balkans specifically led to new bases, and those conflicts would serve as a backdrop for the later Romanian film *California Dreamin’*

(2007). In addition, the very titles of these books represent the apotheosis of imperial rhetoric as criticism of U.S. policy and the base network. These critics of empire explicitly viewed the bases, and the policies that maintained them, as negative things.

Of all of the early twenty-first century critics of American imperial foreign policy, none was more prescient on the base issue specifically than Chalmers Johnson. He authored what he eventually came to call the ‘Blowback trilogy,’ which began with his 2000 book *Blowback*, and continued with 2004’s *The Sorrows of Empire* and 2006’s *Nemesis*. In each of these books, he is focused on highlighting various aspects of what he uncompromisingly calls an “empire of bases.” His works are invaluable assets for anyone seeking information on American military bases abroad. Analysis of films which have American military bases as a setting or background element would be impractical without the historical context and sympathetic view of those living in the environs of these bases which he provides.

The concept of “blowback,” which Johnson makes the title of his 2000 book, is a useful notion for understanding his opposition to bases. Blowback, as Johnson defines it, was initially a CIA term, used to describe reactions “to clandestine operations carried out by the U.S. government that are aimed at overthrowing foreign regimes, or seeking the execution of people the United States wants eliminated by “friendly” foreign armies, or helping launch state terrorist operations against overseas target populations. The American people may not know what is done in their name, but those on the receiving end surely do.”46 The U.S. base network easily falls into this definition. While many

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bases are obviously public, not least because of less than harmonious relations with local populations, many bases are not. Aspects of the Status of Forces Agreements are often not publicized at all, or not until long after they went into effect. Many Americans are likely unaware of the extent of the foreign presence of their military worldwide. The foreign films which depict those military garrisons, along with other, more generalized films depicting “the ugly American,” may, in a sense, be considered a form of blowback, unintended consequences of American policy decisions taken over decades with various justifications.

Whereas Donovan is one of the more strident critics of American foreign military bases from the Garrison Era—the height of the Cold War—Johnson is the most strident base critic in the new Second Expeditionary Era. In 2004’s *The Sorrows of Empire*, he lays out his evaluation of the base network more bluntly than most, serving as a good indicator of critical scholarship on this issue. “The only truly common elements in the totality of America’s foreign bases are imperialism and militarism—an impulse on the part of our elites to dominate other peoples largely because we have the power to do so, followed by the strategic reasoning that, in order to defend these newly acquired outposts and control the regions they are in, we must expand the areas under our control with still more bases.”  

[47] This is an echo of Donovan’s sentiment, that even if a U.S. base had an original purpose, changing conditions might render that purpose obsolete. The base, however, would remain. As the films from around the world which depict them indicate, much resentment has built up as bases have not left.

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Despite prolific writings by Johnson and other critics of empire in the early twenty-first century, the Second Expeditionary Era also produced a prolific corpus of work supportive of the base presence and U.S. interventionism abroad generally. This support was voiced in a period of two protracted wars in the Middle East, continued basing in Western Europe and Northeast Asia, and the post-Cold War creation of new bases in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. These supporters of the base network include Anni Baker, Robert Kaplan, Desmond King, and Kent Calder, who generally accept that the United States is entitled to maintain bases for the betterment of international security. Kaplan and Calder in particular are concerned by what they see as twin threats of Islamic terrorism and an ascendant China. Calder notes in his Embattled Garrisons that such threats make bases necessary. Kaplan devotes multiple books to the subject, including Imperial Grunts (2005) and Hog Pilots, Blue Water Grunts (2007).\(^{48}\) Kaplan focuses on various micro-level situations of small teams of U.S. personnel embedded with foreign counterparts to stop militants, narcotraffickers, or other threats. He emphasizes the positives of such missions, and confirming their imperial nature. As Kaplan notes, “Imperialism was less about conquest than about the training of local armies.”\(^{49}\) Both the supporters and the critics of basing and foreign military aid recognize this. The importance of *local support* for a U.S. military presence is also a major recurring theme, both in the Cold War and post-Cold War-eras of basing, arising in films from nations as diverse as Romania and South Korea.


Separate from the division of scholarship between critics and supporters of U.S. basing and American empire, the Second Expeditionary Era also saw the introduction of the concept of base politics. Prominent in both Kent Calder’s *Embattled Garrisons* (2007) and Alexander Cooley’s *Base Politics* (2008), this term is beneficial in understanding complex relationships among U.S. personnel on a base, the local citizens living in its environs, and the state authorities of the host nation. “‘Base politics’ is defined here as the interaction between ‘basing nations’ and ‘host nations’ on matters relating to the status and operation of local military facilities in the host nations, together with related transnational interactions involving nonstate actors.”

In the cultural media which have emerged in host nations critiquing American bases, it is possible to view all elements mentioned in Calder’s brief but effective definition. When examining films featuring bases, I include interactions between private citizens of host nations and U.S. personnel as transnational interactions with “nonstate actors,” regardless of Calder’s original intent.

A critical piece of Calder’s argument was, as previously mentioned, his classification of three specific varieties of antibase protest—ideological, nationalistic, and pragmatic. This study examines cultural materials, specifically non-U.S. films, depicting American base presences in light of these varieties of antibase sentiment. What emerges from such a study is that these three forms of protest do not exist in isolation from one another. A film objecting to U.S. bases primarily on pragmatic grounds may also have nationalistic undertones. Calder’s categories of antibase opposition should never be

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considered absolutes for analyzing non-U.S. films featuring American bases, rather as a general rubric.
The Culture Angle: A New Way of Looking at the Global Base Network

The works of Williams and Donovan, Johnson and Vine, are indicators that the issue of the U.S. stationing its military forces in foreign nations, with whom we are not at war, and for extended periods of ostensible peacetime, has been a thoroughly examined subject. Much of the commentary has been openly critical, continuing up to the present. What also becomes obvious is that how these presences are depicted in film specifically is generally lacking in commentaries, even critical ones, on these installations. Typically, films which deal, directly or indirectly, with the problems of local interactions with military bases are simply lumped into the much broader category of films and other media critical of the United States. This is an unfortunate reality of the historiography on U.S. basing, as films depicting these widespread installations provide a valuable insight into how they are perceived, either positively or negatively, by the people who are forced to live in their vicinity.

In commentaries on U.S. bases from the Garrison Era, discussion of those films which were critical of U.S. bases in their countries of origin were generally not discussed. Donovan, for instance, was not interested in a cultural examination of how the U.S. and its bases were understood by the world at large. Rather, he included brief, but damning, indictments against the bases as part of his larger critique of what he perceived as militarism in U.S. society as a whole in the midst of the Vietnam War. For him, the bases were damaging to the United States because they were no longer necessary on military grounds, and simply continued to exist through inertia, and therefore remained budgetary burdens on the U.S. taxpayer. Nelson, writing in the late 1980s about the previous
decades of U.S. military occupation in Germany, was cognizant of discontent regarding the U.S. bases there, and crimes committed by American servicemen against German civilians, but that, and by extension any cultural manifestations of this discontent, was never a central concern. Such authors, and others, do provide historical context for understanding foreign films depicting U.S. bases as primary sources, but they do not deal with these films themselves.

The situation is marginally better in the post-9/11 Second Expeditionary Era. Various authors in this era do take time to mention the existence of films critical of U.S. bases in various host nations. Calder references *The Host*, released a year before his *Embattled Garrisons* was published, if only to lament the fact that, as “if pressures from politics and economics were not enough, America’s embattled garrisons in Korea are under siege from the cinematic world as well.”\(^{51}\) For Calder, films such as *The Host* are negative things, which make it more difficult for the U.S. to maintain its sprawling base network in the face of pop culture demonization, as well as grassroots activism and host government complaints. This follows from Calder being among those scholars and base commentators, such as Robert Kaplan, who are enthusiastic supporters of U.S. involvement in the post-9/11 world. David Vine, a critic of U.S. basing, offers an even more oblique reference to *The Host*, criticizing the real event which partially inspired it, but offering no commentary on the film itself.

One of the most direct, substantive references to the issue of films dealing with U.S. military occupations was not written by an American commentator in either the

Garrison or the Second Expeditionary Eras, but rather a Dutch journalist in the 1990s.
This was an oblique reference in Ian Buruma’s 1994 *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan*. This book discusses how memory of the Second World War, and of the crimes committed by the former Axis nations, are processed in Germany and Japan, decades after 1945. Buruma writes two sentences on the issue of Japanese films depicting the U.S. post-1945 occupation of the country. One small reference—almost a throwaway line—carried massive implications. Buruma describes how Japanese “movie audiences had a pornographic fascination for the seamy side of American military bases: the crime, the prostitution, the raping of innocent Japanese women. If the mushroom cloud and the imperial radio speech are the clichés of defeat, the scene of an American soldier (usually black) raping a Japanese girl (always young, always innocent), usually in a pristine rice field (innocent, pastoral Japan), is a stock image in postwar movies about the occupation.”

Buruma undercuts himself by failing to list any specific titles of films to which he refers. The researcher is thus left with tantalizing possibilities regarding a subset of Japanese film from the postwar decades—decades which birthed some of the greatest filmmaking Japan has ever produced—but no list of specimens to examine. The same researcher might then turn to film critics. Films on the Criterion Collection’s website will often include short video essays with an in-depth discussion of that film. However, these critical discussions, despite some references to social and historical context of a film, cannot devote themselves entirely to specific issues of how military bases are portrayed.

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Film critic Tony Rayns, for example, provides a thorough examination of Imamura’s *Pigs and Battleships*, including what he argues is its very negative depiction of Americans. However, he does not explicitly link this critique to other Japanese films of the time or from later decades, or to films from other nations which have hosted U.S. bases. A sampling of several films across nations and decades demonstrates key thematic continuities which go beyond a single film, or even a single director.

A comparative analysis of a healthy sampling of films is necessary to identify the various common themes, and correct the lack of such an analysis. Discussion of these films should not be limited to film critics and cultural historians, but be examined directly in relation to the bases by historians of those bases themselves. Common themes in these films include the dependency of the host population on the presence of foreign (U.S.) troops, the occupying forces as a hinderance or an oppressive force in the lives of the host population, the protection of the foreign (U.S.) bases by dependable local allies, who act against the interests of, or in opposition to, their compatriots in the host nation. A film might depict only one of these themes or depict several. Significantly, these base films can be both critical of U.S. base presences and portray Americans in a positive or indifferent light. There are several American rapists in more than one of the films analyzed, while other films take time to distinguish between Americans as individuals and the problems created by an American base or troop presence in a particular country.

While examining films which have been produced by host nations of U.S. bases, it must be remembered that these films are not objective depictions of facts. The opening of *Pigs and Battleships* begins with a title card explicitly informing the audience that the events of the film are intended to be fictional. None of these films are literal chronicles of
events, and should not be treated as such. However, when taken in the context of the vast historiography written on the U.S. base presence worldwide, they can effectively reveal popular attitudes, perceptions, as well as what filmmakers, and possibly audiences, felt were the most important, and therefore worth recording, aspects of the foreign military installations in their nations. The host nations whose films are considered, which includes Japan, Germany, South Korea, Turkey, and Romania, all had extremely different initial encounters with U.S. bases. Their films, however, reveal similar experiences and concerns.
An early example of a feature film which has a U.S. military base in a foreign country as its backdrop is Shohei Imamura’s 1961 picture *Pigs and Battleships*. This film is a highly critical view of the American naval base in the port city of Yokosuka, on Tokyo Bay. The U.S. acquired the extensive installation during the postwar occupation of Japan, retaining it to the present as the home port of the U.S. Seventh Fleet. Under the rubric of antibase protest established by Calder, this film may best be categorized as a pragmatic protest against the American presence. It highlights the perverse and unhealthy dependency that the local Japanese, particularly the local criminal element, have on the functioning of the base there. It demonstrates how the authorities of the host nation are marshalled to the defense of U.S. bases in the face of negative impacts or popular resentment. Imamura’s work also viscerally demonstrates the human cost of these bases, in the form of a particularly disturbing scene of the rape of a local Japanese woman by three drunk U.S. sailors from the base. The powerlessness of the Japanese in relation to the American occupiers, and their Japanese allies, is a key component of the film.

Before it is possible to understand the film as a portrait of its time in the history of U.S.-Japan relations, it is necessary to establish immediate social and environmental context. As Calder notes, ideological and nationalistic opposition to bases “have origins far transcending the specific circumstances of individual bases and their surrounding environments. But pragmatic protest flows directly from local conditions, making it crucially important to understand such elements of base ecology as population density...
Pigs and Battleships is specifically grounded in Yokosuka, drawing its particular atmosphere, and its ability to comment on the U.S. base presence, from that. Film critic Tony Rayns, in a 2008 interview on the picture, argued that it represented Imamura’s fascination with crime and the lower orders of society. In Yokosuka, the director felt that he had found a window into that world—with a twist. “In Yokosuka it was somehow raw—more raw. And the presence of foreigners, especially powerful, strong foreigners, not to mention the fact that they have, you know, huge warships anchored just offshore, made it all the more intense, somehow more vivid, more immediate.” The films uses this atmosphere to highlight the unhealthy interactions between the base and local population.

Equally important to the significance of Yokosuka is the historical background of the film. Rayns, to his credit, recognizes the charged atmosphere of the film’s release, only a year after mass protests against Japan’s security relationship with the United States. Chalmers Johnson, however, gives a more detailed analysis. The formal U.S. occupation of Japan ended in 1952, but that was not the end of American interest in Japan as a Cold War partner. China could no longer be counted on to serve as an anticommunist bulwark, after it underwent a successful communist revolution. “The U.S. government now devoted its energies to defending Japan and building it up as an East Asian alternative to the Chinese revolution.” Johnson argues that this was a decision the U.S. made in its own interest and perceptions of Cold War reality. “Needless to say, the

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53 Calder, Embattled Garrisons, 85.
United States did not consult the defeated Japanese people about these decisions or about the decision to cultivate the remnants of that country’s unquestionably anti-Communist wartime establishment.”  

The U.S. therefore relied on Japanese political leaders who were amenable to U.S. demands and making Japan its strategic partner, even if those policies overrode the wishes of the Japanese people, who had to live alongside U.S. bases.

The Japanese political establishment, particularly elements receptive to U.S. interests, was willing to become a full-fledged Cold War partner. Japan would be the Northeast Asian section of Kaplan’s “ring” of garrisons surrounding the Soviet Union. Some among the Japanese population objected. “Such policies actually led to an anti-American revolt in 1960. In the largest mass demonstrations in postwar Japanese history, protestors surrounded the parliament building and demanded that lawmakers not ratify a renewal of the Japanese-American Security Treaty.”  

Contemporary writers knew elements of this protest were likely politically motivated. After 1945, “the widespread but unorganized peace sentiment, that became legal with the surrender, initially aided in making acceptable the American Occupation and its early reforms.” Specifically, they supported the American drafted pacifist constitution. However, “when policy shifted to aligning Japan with the West in the Cold War, this sentiment became an obstacle to the rearmament of Japan at a faster pace. Since the Occupation, the opposition Socialists and Communists…mobilized and exploited this sentiment in numerous organizations which

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56 Johnson, Blowback, 23.
57 Johnson, Blowback, 23.
together constitute the peace movement.”\textsuperscript{59} That would include organizations opposed to the ratification of the Security Treaty. Other Japanese peace movements, such as those seeking to ban atomic weapons, had contacts with the Soviet-backed World Peace Council in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{60} Regardless, the massive 1960 demonstrations against treaty ratification, sincere or otherwise, went unheeded by the state. “Using its rigged majority, the conservative party forced through ratification, keeping American troops in Japan, and the political system never again fully regained the trust of the public.”\textsuperscript{61} One year after these protests, discontent, and breach of trust between government and governed, Nikkatsu released Imamura’s \textit{Pigs and Battleships}, which confronts the American presence, the response to the presence, and the role local Japanese authorities play in maintaining the \textit{status quo} of the Yokosuka base and its surrounding areas.

The 1960 protests were a clear indication that many Japanese did not want to remain in the military orbit of the Cold War-era United States. It is this sentiment which heightens the irony of a central theme in \textit{Pigs and Battleships}: almost complete orientation of life around the reality of the U.S. base. It is possible to see this in microcosm via the main character of the film, a minor gang member (\textit{yakuza}) in Yokosuka named Kinta. The “main” plot of the film is Kinta and the activities of his street gang, the various schemes and less-than-legal business ventures that they operate on the crowded, neon-lit streets of Yokosuka. A majority of these schemes rely almost entirely on the U.S. base. Kinta, whether working for the gang, or even dreaming of a life beyond his criminal associates, cannot escape conceptualizing his dreams or endeavors

\textsuperscript{59} Totten and Kawakami, “Gensuikyo and the Peace Movement in Japan,” 833.
\textsuperscript{60} Totten and Kawakami, 835.
\textsuperscript{61} Johnson, \textit{Blowback}, 23.
without reference to the base, or himself somehow being connected to serving the interests of the base.

When the audience is introduced to Kinta, the primary male protagonist of the film, his first action is to steal the cap of an American sailor, of which there are many on the streets of Yokosuka. Thus baiting the sailor to chase him down, Kinta leads him to a hidden brothel behind a restaurant, where several Japanese women are servicing American clients. Kinta taunts the sailor as he is chased down an alleyway, promising that the man can acquire a prostitute for only 1,000 yen, and rhetorically asks him “Can you get a woman in your own country for less than a carton of Luckies?” Kinta, luring the sailor to the brothel, promptly collects payment, showing his tacit acceptance of abetting in ‘selling’ his countrywomen to this foreign soldier for less than the price of a pack of cigarettes. Thus begins the pattern of Japanese characters attempting to exploit the base presence for financial gain. This perverse dependence is exemplified by the pigs which give the film half its title.

Kinta’s gang is involved in numerous criminal activities and moneymaking schemes throughout the film. This includes violent extortion of small business owners, as well as murder, and the subsequent attempts to cover it up. The scheme most heavily featured, however, is the attempt by the gang to establish a pig farm. This, like everything else, comes to depend on the nearby base. To feed the pigs at this farm, the gang members require slop, or scraps. As Kinta explains to his girlfriend Haruko, the gang is making a deal to get free scraps from the U.S. base with which to feed the animals.

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Rather unsubtly, the film is explicitly saying that the Japanese are relying on discarded scraps from the Americans in order to operate a business. Reinforcing the inferior position of the Japanese relative to the Americans, Kinta points out that, “Unlike our scraps, theirs are nutritious.” The gang goes on to make the deal for the scraps with Sakiyama, who is described as a Japanese-American civilian who works at the base.

The pigs at the gang’s farm are not the only ones who are left to feast on the scraps and garbage that the American base produces. In addition to the scraps for pig feed, Sakiyama later adds expired American military rations to the deal. Having expired, they presumably would have been thrown into the garbage on the base as being unfit for U.S. sailors to consume. Sakiyama, however, likely sensing a further business opportunity, sells them to the Japanese criminals. In exchange for this expired food, he also demands an additional 1,500,000 yen in payment. The base presence therefore gives the Japanese criminal element in Yokosuka the opportunity to pay exorbitant sums for the “privilege” of literally purchasing garbage food, for both swine and man.

As the film progresses, the key character drama comes from the disagreements between Kinta and Haruko, who desires for Kinta to get out of his gang, and try adapting to a legitimate, hardworking lifestyle, such as having a factory job. Kinta, however, desires to do anything except that. Even when Kinta tries to imagine what he might do for work, he always manages to link it in some way to the existence of the base. He declares to Haruko that when he gets some money, “I’m gonna have a nice suit made, and use my connections to become a band manager. There’s a party somewhere on base every day.

63 *Pigs and Battleships*, directed by Shohei Imamura, 4:56.
I’ll send the band and get kickbacks.”64 As with both the pig scraps and expired rations, Kinta envisions a fundamental dependence on the base’s existence to make a living, if albeit more stylishly as a band manager.

Later, after the relationship between Kinta and Haruko deteriorates, Kinta imagines another career he would like to establish for himself, one that is also almost entirely dependent on the continued maintenance of the U.S. base in the city. Kinta, seemingly out of nowhere, announces to Haruko that he would like to become a pimp. “I’ll squeeze money out of dumb Yanks. I’ll open a whorehouse and make easy money. Who needs a factory job?”65 Having experience with luring American sailors to underground brothels at the opening of the film, Kinta clearly knows that the Americans from the base will pay for sex with local women, and he expresses no qualms about exploiting this for financial advantage. With this scheme, he displays a willingness to exploit the bodies of his countrywomen in order to achieve financial remuneration from the members of a foreign army. Haruko is clearly upset by Kinta’s attitude, and responds to him by insinuating that she could also make money by agreeing to sleep with American GIs.

Kinta: And you’ll fuck GIs for money.
Haruko: Yeah, and rake in the greenbacks.
Kinta: I’ll find customers for you.
Haruko: Okay! Get me big black ones, as many as you can.
Kinta: Don’t let them stretch you too loose!
Haruko: And then I’ll go to America.

64 Pigs and Battleships, 18:25-18:40.
65 Pigs and Battleships, 1:01:17-1:01:25.
Kinta: Careful you don’t get the clap. International whore!  

The heated argument between Kinta and Haruko is rich with detail for understanding how these two average Japanese youths have internalized the American military occupation of their country. As Johnson noted, ratification of the bilateral security treaty between the U.S. and Japan was done under suspect circumstances in the Japanese legislature, and clearly without real mass popular support. The treaty faced mass opposition, in fact. In light of that very particular social context, the attitude of these two characters may best be understood as, if not resignation to the continued presence of U.S. bases, then an inability to now imagine their lives without that near-constant presence, bringing with it the possibility for both inconvenience as well as possible profitability. The characters understand, on some level, that how they would profit from the base would be destructive, as evidenced by their use of these elaborate hypotheticals in an argument.

Kinta’s base-dependent dreams are the most often elaborated upon, but he is hardly the only Japanese character who sees the path to profit and affluence as running through the U.S. presence. Towards the end of the film, the other members of his gang pressure Kinta to serve as the ‘fall guy,’ taking the blame and submitting to be arrested by the police for a murder one of the other members committed. Kinta, understandably, is unenthusiastic about the prospect of going to prison. His gang leader attempts to persuade him that he will be richly rewarded if he takes the fall, protecting one of the higher-ranking members. “You’ll be one of our top men when you get out, with your own

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66 *Pigs and Battleships*, 1:01:33-1:02:07.
whorehouse and money to spare.” It is a minor detail, but it is worth examining. Again the audience sees that the interminable nature of the American presence is assumed. Even if Kinta spends years in jail for a crime he did not commit, his fellow yakuza attempt to bribe him with owning his own brothel, which will likely never lack American clients so many years later.

Despite the extreme dependence of men like Kinta and his gang on a continuing U.S. base presence for their ongoing pig farm and brothel schemes, a more flagrant commodification of Japanese women is perpetuated by Haruko’s family throughout the course of the film. While Haruko is clearly Kinta’s primary romantic interest in the film, and two are obviously attached, it is established early on that Haruko’s mother has attempted to arrange other romantic options for her daughter. These other options are financially beneficial to the mother, at Haruko’s expense. “A sailor paid 30,000 for her, and her mother’s already spent it.” This is the most blatant example in the film of Japanese economic dependence on the U.S. base—a mother essentially pimping her own daughter to a U.S. sailor. The English subtitles use the word “sold” to describe Haruko’s condition relative to the sailor, implying a situation for her which resembles slavery.

In her actions regarding her daughter and her on-screen attitude, Haruko’s mother may be the most unsympathetic Japanese character in the film. When she is first depicted, forty minutes into the film, her household is shown to be much more privileged, likely due to her ostentatious spending of the 30,000 yen she received for “promising” her daughter to an American. She has many cans of food, large Hershey’s chocolate bars, and

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67 Pigs and Battleships, 1:29:30.
68 Pigs and Battleships, 15:09.
enough cigarettes to distribute some to her neighbors. One of her neighbors is shown to obsequiously ask for a cigarette, before bowing, and making her children bow, before taking her leave. The lifestyle of a majority of the Japanese characters is depicted as economically unstable, with small, cramped, and unsanitary living arrangements. Later in the film, Kinta and Haruko’s acquisition of a can of preserved pineapples is treated as a significant event. The largesse of Haruko’s mother, and how she appears to flaunt her new creature comforts to increase her standing in her neighborhood, therefore takes on additional significance. She received this fantastical bounty of food and consumer goods via a dependent relationship with the American occupiers. By the time *Pigs and Battleships* was released, World War II had been over for sixteen years, and the formal occupation of Japan had ended nine years previously. The Japanese are still shown, however, as economically insecure, with generally ramshackle living conditions. Haruko’s mother found a path out of this situation through American indulgence, though at the price of her daughter’s autonomy.

What sets the character of Haruko apart from everyone else around her is that she rejects, by the end of the film, the idea of creating a life predicated on dependence on the U.S. base. The ending of the film is a scene of Haruko resolving to leave her family behind. Even as her mother bemoans her walking away, while the American to whom she was “promised” comes to collect her, Haruko runs away from it all, and departs Yokosuka. Kinta having died in a gunfight with his gang after refusing to take the blame for murder, there is nothing left in the port city for Haruko. As a result, she leaves, her future very much uncertain, but away from what is depicted as the corrosive American presence.
Another principal theme of Pigs and Battleships, aside from the crippling dependence on the bases economically, is the complicity of the local authorities in maintaining the security of the American occupation. This theme will arise in the majority of the films considered here, and it is worth examining it in-depth in each case. As a manifestation of pragmatic protest under the criteria established by Calder, the ways in which local authorities, particularly organizations such as police forces, municipal governments, and similar institutions work to preserve the status quo of the American base presence varies from nation to nation. It is, however, a common theme, and fully on display in Imamura’s film.

According to Johnson, after successfully ensuring ratification of the 1960 U.S.-Japan security treaty, Japan’s right-wing Liberal Democratic Party held power for decades afterwards, while “leaving the actual governance of the country to the state bureaucracy, ensuring that any impulses the citizenry might have had toward self-government would atrophy.”69 In Imamura’s Yokosuka, the only presence of the Japanese state evident is the street-level bureaucracy of the police. The nature of this presence is highlighted via two events in the plot of the film. The first event is a joint raid conducted on a brothel early in the film, carried out by both Japanese police officers and uniformed officers of the U.S. Navy’s Shore Patrol, who are essentially military police regulating the sailors from the base. The second event is when the Japanese police arrest Haruko in an alleyway after she was raped by three American sailors, and was in the midst of an assault by those same sailors. These two events manage to demonstrate both an extremely negative attitude toward a coercive arm of the Japanese state, as well as an

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69 Johnson, Blowback, 23.
understanding that the U.S. base, and activities of the U.S. forces in the city are protected by Japanese authorities.

When the brothel where Kinta collects money is raided, the American shore patrol and the Japanese police essentially split the task. The SP men load the U.S. sailors onto a truck, and presumably drive them back to base. The Japanese women on the other hand, are herded into the back of a Japanese police van and driven off, presumably to jail. One of these Japanese women expresses outrage at being arrested. She is violently thrashing about, and it takes two officers to restrain her and corral her into the van. Her dialogue is instructive, as it demonstrates a clear conception of why she is engaged as a prostitute, and again highlights the economic dependence on the American presence that the film is attempting to portray.

What are we supposed to do? Business is bad. The soldiers on this base are a bunch of misers. When a battleship comes in, you [addressing a Japanese policeman] raid us and take our last yen. How can we support our men?…They get violent because they’re hungry! You make things worse for all of us.70

This particular woman continues to resist until she is thrown into the back of the police van. Her outburst at the policeman is illuminating in several ways. The context of the film indicates that it is set near the contemporary present of 1961, and the Japanese in the environs of the Yokosuka base are depicted as still living in challenging economic times. These women are portrayed as having no recourse except prostitution as a means of financially supporting their male partners and families. In this context, the Japanese police become oppressive figures for interrupting what, for these women, is an instrument

70 Pigs and Battleships, 3:10-3:35.
of their survival. Prostitution may be a crime, but the women are only responding to the appetites of the U.S. sailors on base, and are being punished for this. In contrast, the film gives no indication of the fate awaiting U.S. sailors rounded up during these raids. When they are taken away, however, they are depicted as less angry and more annoyed, or inconvenienced, which might be interpreted as indicating a lack of fear of severe punishment.

The second event in the plot of Imamura’s film which demonstrates the extremely negative regard in which the Japanese police are held is their arrest of Haruko after her rape. Approximately one hour and nine minutes into the running time of the film, Haruko, depressed at her inability to convince Kinta to leave his gang, and becoming thoroughly intoxicated at a nightclub frequented by several U.S. soldiers and sailors from the base, is taken to a rented motel room by three sailors. While drunk, Haruko clearly resists the three men after they throw her onto the bed and climb on top of her. The film does not show the actual rape being committed, but the next shot of Haruko lying unconscious on the bed, in a state of undress, after hearing her screams, makes the message clear. Having awoken to hear the three sailors showering together in the next room, Haruko attempts to make her escape from them. First, however, she is caught by a sailor as she is stealing the money from his uniform pocket.

After stealing the money from an American sailor, one of her rapists, Haruko is chased down the street by him, as well as the two other rapists. The three men catch up to her in an alleyway. The three sailors, in nothing but their underwear, assault Haruko, repeatedly striking her. Meanwhile, two U.S. Shore Patrol officers generally stand back and let this action proceed. In the chaos, two Japanese policemen arrive on the scene and
arrest Haruko, dragging her away to the police station. She was held at the station overnight and released the next day, walking out of the station in the midst of an American military parade. The fate of her three rapists after the SP men escort them away is unaddressed in the film.

The rape of Haruko, while an unsettling piece of filmmaking, as well as a condemnation of the American presence and its effect on the ordinary people of Japan, is noteworthy due to its equally condemnatory attack upon the institution of the Japanese police. When a woman, or any person, for that matter, is the victim of both a rape, and a very public assault, they might logically assume that the law enforcement agencies of their community would protect them, and not drag them away from the scene of the crime, and put them in jail for an evening after what was obviously a traumatic experience. *Pigs and Battleships* is not the only postwar Japanese film to depict the rape of a Japanese woman at the hands of the American military personnel in Japan, but this particular example makes it clear that the local Japanese authorities are as culpable as the American rapists in perpetuating this hostile environment.

As mentioned, a key component of the film is the powerlessness of the Japanese vis-à-vis the Americans. This is highlighted by the dependence shown by the *yakuza* on scraps from the base to sustain the pig farm, the collaboration between Japanese policemen and American Shore Patrol troops to raid brothels, inevitably leading to the arrest of Japanese women, as well as by Haruko’s rape and assault by three U.S. sailors. Another key example is the Japanese acceptance of this state of affairs throughout the entirety of the film. Kinta’s elderly father attempts to intercede in the assault of Haruko by the sailors, and is angrily shoved out of the way by one of them. A woman bystander
argues that it is not worth getting involved. “It’s her own fault. She stole their money.”

This woman has been assaulted, and yet her countrymen can dismiss this as her own doing for stealing pocket money from the occupying army. This is a condemnation of both Japanese society as it exists around these bases, as well as the personnel on the base itself.

Rayns agrees on the issue of the film’s condemnation of Japan in general, arguing that “the film’s title, Pigs and Battleships, is not an accident. The battleships are American. The pigs are Japanese…This is a film that defines contemporary Japan as a pigsty. First as a moral pigsty, as a social pigsty, as an economic pigsty, and finally, at the climax of the film, as a literal pigsty, when the pigs run amok through the streets.” Just as the gangsters are dependent on the base for scraps for their pig feed, the implication is that Japan is dependent, in various ways, on the U.S. bases in the country. Heightening the symbolism, Kinta, who spends the film dreaming of ways to profit from the base, and working to manage the base-dependent pig farm, wears a jacket with the word “Japan” stitched across the back of it.

The negative depiction of Japanese gangsters as dependent on U.S. bases, and a Japanese woman attempting to sell her daughter to an American to gain money and comfort for herself make it impossible to categorizing this film as nationalist under Calder’s definition. From the perspective of its relation to the U.S. military presence in Japan, it is pragmatic protest against unsavory conditions in which persons residing around the Yokosuka base must live. This is noteworthy, as the film’s release in 1961

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72 “Tony Rayns on PIGS AND BATTLESHPIS,” 6:45-7:15.
was during the “era of high-speed growth” that Gary Allinson argues had begun by 1955. In that context, the dependence of criminal elements and greedy individuals on the U.S. presence may be interpreted as counterproductive to Japan. Haruko leaves Yokosuka at the end of the film to take a factory job, a potential reference to increasing economic growth, however unglamorous. Such a job, however, “in terms of the world the film has represented of course it is a bright future, [be]cause it represents a way out of a circle that has self-perpetuating violence and tends to trap the people who are caught in it.” That circle of violence, of course, is one that encompasses the U.S. occupation, and is in many ways dependent on it. That is conveyed through the Japanese characters in Imamura’s film.

A contrast to the clear focus on the Japanese in Imamura’s film is the comparative narrative absence of meaningful American characters. Imamura’s film highlights both the pervasiveness and the impersonality of the U.S. occupation of Japan. A viewer of Pigs and Battleships is struck with how often Americans appear onscreen—there are always small groups of U.S. sailors or Shore Patrol officers in every establishing shot. Imamura gives the Americans in his film virtually no dialogue, and almost no action. They are, in a sense, part of the background, establishing the normality, or banality, of the occupation. The most important instance in the film where the Americans take an active role is when the three U.S. sailors rape Haruko. This, naturally, is the clearest representation of how the U.S. base presence directly impacts the daily lives of ordinary Japanese—thereby

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74 “Tony Rayns on PIGS AND BATTLESHIPS,” 8:50-9:05.
cementing Imamura’s work as an example of pragmatic opposition to bases as Calder defines it.
*Gate of Flesh* (Japan, 1964): In an Age of Economic Advancement, A Look Back at a Vicious U.S. Occupation, with Japanese Divided Amongst Themselves

_Pigs and Battleships_ was not the last Japanese film to engage with the issue of the now-permanent U.S. occupation of Japan in the 1960s. Director Seijun Suzuki’s film *Gate of Flesh* was released, again by Nikkatsu, in 1964. While _Pigs and Battleships_ was set contemporary with its actual production timeframe of the early 1960s, _Gate of Flesh_ is explicitly set nearly two decades prior to the time it was made. The film takes place during the immediate aftermath of Japan’s defeat in World War II, in the ruins of Tokyo. Despite its setting, the release date places it firmly in Kaplan’s Garrison Era. Under Calder’s rubric of antibase protest, _Gate of Flesh_ can be described as both a nationalist protest against the U.S. presence in Japan, as well as pragmatic protest against U.S. forces. Nationalistic base opponents are those “who oppose bases primarily on cultural grounds, or due to the perceived violence they impose on national sovereignty.” In the case of Suzuki’s work, his nationalist opposition to the United States is motivated less by abstract notions of Japanese sovereignty, but by his own experiences in the wartime Japanese military. As a piece of pragmatic protest, the film is generally similar to _Pigs and Battleships_, depicting an unhealthy dependence of the Japanese on the American presence, and bemoaning the practical consequences of proximity to a U.S. base, including rapes and breeding of crime.

75 Calder, *Embattled Garrisons*, 84.
To understand how this particular film developed with the tone and themes that it did, it is crucial to understand when it was made, as well as by whom. Like *Pigs and Battleships*, *Gate of Flesh* was produced in the years following the renewal of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, and the continuing U.S. presence in Japan. Who made the film is also important. The director of *Gate of Flesh*, Seijun Suzuki, did not write the screenplay, as the film was based on a preexisting novel by Taijiro Tamura. Suzuki also made the picture not as a personal passion project, but because he was contractually required by Nikkatsu. Nevertheless, his negative attitudes towards the United States, which were shaped largely by his wartime experiences, are integral to a clear understanding of the extremely critical portrayal of Americans throughout the film. In a filmed interview which Suzuki gave in 2005, he elaborated on how these attitudes developed.

I served in the war. I was sent to the Philippines first. Just one week before the Americans landed there, we pulled out of Manila. We were attacked by a Grumman fighter just as we were pulling out. And we were thrown into the ocean. I swam for six or seven hours to get out of the water. So America was a country I hated, to tell you the truth, in my heart. My wartime experience was all about fleeing. Japan was losing the war, so we weren’t on the offensive. So to me, fighting in the war meant fleeing. Because of that wartime experience, my feelings towards America weren’t friendly at the time. So that may have been reflected in the movie.⁷⁶

This admission is a remarkably candid reflection on the development of anti-American sentiments by this film’s director. With this admission, it becomes possible to view the film as a vessel for Suzuki’s antipathy towards the United States, almost two decades after the end of the war. This is not a nationalistic anger which is preoccupied

with large concepts like Japanese national sovereignty. Rather, it is, as Suzuki bluntly describes it, the nationalism of a grudge. As he goes on to say, “You see the American flag repeatedly in the movie, and it is shown sort of as the symbol of my grudge.”77 This provides a contrast with Pigs and Battleships, where the Americans were a negative influence, but more heavily relegated to the background. There was never as much open antipathy towards U.S. servicemen themselves as that found in Gate of Flesh. Nevertheless, Suzuki’s film still conveys a clear understanding of the larger consequences of the U.S. presence overall.

Suzuki’s personal attitudes towards Americans explain much of the overt and heavily emphasized American-related imagery in the film. Pigs and Battleships opens dramatically with a shot of an American flag, accompanied by a musical cue which is a variation on the opening of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” In most establishing shots, particularly of the streets of Yokosuka, there are always several U.S. sailors in uniform walking about. Gate of Flesh is much more blatant and prolific in its use of symbols, such as the American flag. Suzuki admits using the U.S. flag as a symbol of his personal antipathy towards the Americans. More important, however, is Suzuki’s portrayal of interactions between American and Japanese characters. The Japanese characters are shown to be much more antagonistic towards the occupying Americans, much more than in Pigs and Battleships. This antipathy is set against the much bleaker backdrop of immediate postwar Japan.

77 “From the Ruins: Making “Gate of Flesh”,” 18:37-18:42.
Beyond Suzuki’s personal feelings regarding the Americans, the setting of *Gate of Flesh* in the immediate aftermath of the war, during the formal U.S. occupation of Japan, is significant. “World War II did not really end for the Japanese until 1952, and the years of war, defeat, and occupation left an indelible mark on those who lived through them. No matter how affluent the country later became, these remained the touchstone years for thinking about national identity and personal values.”78 Thus did John Dower, in his magisterial account of the seven-year period of direct U.S. rule over Japan, describe the postwar environment. The defeat which Japan had suffered at the hands of the Allies meant the country had to begin anew. The Germans referred to 1945 as “Year Zero,”; this term was equally applicable to postwar Japan. Dower notes that Japanese responses to the disasters of defeat and occupation were never uniform. “Prostitutes and black-market operatives created distinctive, iconoclastic cultures of defeat…Portmanteau concepts such as “love” and “culture” were discussed obsessively…Tens of millions found themselves longing for material affluence of the sort their American overlords so conspicuously enjoyed.”79 These attitudes are reflected in Suzuki’s film.

The postwar setting in the shattered remnants of what was Tokyo is where the Japanese characters interact with their new American occupiers. Directing the film in the mid-1960s, Suzuki projects his own anger, and doubtless the continuing resentment fostered in the aftermath of the 1960 protests, onto the Japanese-American relations of the mid-1940s. Like most characters from *Pigs and Battleships*, the main Japanese characters are from the lower classes of society. *Gate of Flesh* is the story of a

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relationship which develops between a commune of Japanese prostitutes in Tokyo and a returnee soldier, formerly of the Japanese imperial army. These characters are the vessels, via their on-screen experiences and actions, for a variety of anti-American commentaries, harshly critical of the occupational presence.

The desolation of the postwar environment allows for a full exploration of the elements of the film which fall under Calder’s definition of pragmatic protests against the bases, including crime and economic dependence. Maya, the female protagonist of the film, is shown early on to be destitute, reduced to stealing food from a street vendor to survive. However, this act only leads to her being beaten in the middle of the street by an enforcer of the local gang, as Japanese and American soldiers alike look on in curiosity or indifference. In an attempt to secure material well-being, Maya resorts to joining what can only be described as a prostitute commune, which lives in a bombed-out building. They operate over a clearly defined territory, relying on a specific local gang for protection, while simultaneously not having a pimp. According to their leader, Sen, there is one principal rule which the members of this commune must not break. “Never give it to a guy for free. This is a business, and our bodies are our merchandise. If anyone starts giving it away, we’ll all be ruined. Catch you doing that and you’ll be sorry. We’ll beat you within an inch of your life.” These prostitutes are quickly established as a close-knit group, with extremely high standards for group loyalty, as well as ties to the criminal underworld and a commodified view of sexuality, one that leaves no room for ideas about love.

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The major interactions that these prostitutes have in the film are with the principal male protagonist, Shintaro Ibuki. Ibuki is shown to be a returnee Japanese war veteran, who fought for Japan in China. Much like the prostitutes, this made him someone who existed on the margins of society. “For a great many ex-soldiers and sailors, the greatest shock of returning home lay in finding themselves treated, after all their travails, as pariahs in their native land…many ex-servicemen found themselves regarded not just as men who had failed disastrously to accomplish their mission, but also as individuals who had, it was assumed, participated in unspeakable acts.” Dower notes that some among these returned war veterans, hated and rejected, turned to crime to provide sustenance. Shintaro is a fictional representation of this. His introduction in Gate of Flesh is his escape from an U.S. military installation. The audience is later informed that this was a robbery of an American military supply warehouse.

While both Maya and Shintaro are reduced to criminal activity—prostitution and robbery respectively—in order to survive, Maya has been more severely impacted by the occupation of Japan by U.S. forces. Maya is the victim of another rape portrayed in a base film, and her rape scene of Gate of Flesh demonstrates the complete disregard for the lives of those Japanese in the environs of their bases by American occupying forces. Unlike the rape in Pigs and Battleships, the audience is not shown, however indirectly, the rape itself, but rather its aftermath. Three U.S. soldiers are shown driving away from a field, just outside the fence of a U.S. installation in Japan. They were prompted to leave by the arrival of a jeep carrying two MPs and a black American priest. The MPs are completely uninterested in Maya’s plight. “It’s a Japanese girl. It’s none of our business.

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81 Dower, Embracing Defeat, 60.
Let’s go…A Japanese girl’s been raped up there, father. It's none of our business.” The black American priest elects to remain behind and tend to the rape victim, lying in a field. He does so against the advice of the MPs, who proceed to leave the scene of the crime as quickly as possible.

Unlike Haruko in Pigs and Battleships, Maya was not chased down in a public alleyway and beaten by her assailants after her rape. Nevertheless, just as the SP men did not intervene to halt the sailors in that alleyway from attacking her, the MPs in Gate of Flesh were uninterested in offering any aid to a woman in distress directly in front of them. In Pigs and Battleships, the principal American characters were Haruko’s rapists. This served to demonstrate the brutality that the occupation entailed, and continues to entail, for women in those areas around U.S. installations. Gate of Flesh has many more active American characters, including these two MPs. Those characters are not guilty of rape, but they made no attempt onscreen to help Maya, or even to identify or arrest the U.S. soldier-rapists. It was ambiguous in Pigs and Battleships whether those U.S. sailors who frequented brothels or assaulted Japanese women were punished; in Gate of Flesh, the response of the MPs makes it unambiguous that they are not. It is this experience that explains Maya’s subsequent behaviors vis-à-vis American characters who populate the film.

Both Maya and Shintaro engage in violent hostility towards the American personnel depicted in the film, something which is almost entirely absent from Pigs and Battleships. In the case of Maya, her previous rape at the hands of U.S. soldiers is a

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82 Gate of Flesh, directed by Seijun Suzuki, 8:00-8:15.
straightforward explanation. While she engages in the work of a prostitute, Maya is explicitly shown never accepting an American client. When a uniformed American soldier accosts Maya in the street, offering to hire her services, she responds by slapping him in the face and running away, with the man in pursuit. Eventually, the soldier is surrounded by the prostitute commune on a bridge, and the women then beat him with their purses as he cowers on the ground, while raising a cry of “No Yanks.” Most of the commune prostitutes demonstrate an aversion to sleeping with Americans, and they are shown to be particularly hostile to Japanese women who are depicted as going out of their way to sleep with Americans. They refer to them as GI whores, and characterize them as nothing but trash. This is generally consistent with how scholars have understood the treatment of women who willingly provided sexual services to the U.S. occupiers. “A more typical response among the Japanese angered by women who associated with GIs was to ostracize them. They were called ‘gaudy’ and ‘disgusting.’” The women who associate with GIs in Gate of Flesh are definitely depicted this way.

The case of Shintaro is an even more extreme instance of Japanese resistance to the occupation. From the dialogue, the audience is led to understand that Shintaro was involved in the robbery of a U.S. post exchange (PX) warehouse in Yokohama. He was accompanied by other returned Japanese soldiers, as well as some GI accomplices. This theft is shown onscreen to be a failure, with Shintaro and the others being chased off the base by MPs. The audience is then told that Shintaro murdered one of his GI accomplices, thereby making himself a target of the occupational authorities. Shintaro is

83 Gate of Flesh, 21:00-21:25.
therefore a veteran, an ostracized group in postwar Japan, engaged in criminal activity
directed against the U.S. occupation in Japan. He then murders an American soldier and
falls in with a group of prostitutes who are gang-affiliated and violently reject most
opportunities for sexual liaisons with Americans and disdain those women who
shamelessly advertise their sexual availability to the U.S. troops.

The rape of Maya by U.S. troops and the robbery of the U.S. warehouse by
Shintaro are clear reflections of Calder’s criteria for pragmatic protest against bases. The
fact that the U.S. Army is in Japan is what made Maya’s rape possible. After their own
soldiers so egregiously violated a citizen of the occupied nation, the attitude of the
depicted U.S. MPs reflects American indifference. Just as they left Haruko to be dragged
away by Japanese police like a criminal after a traumatic event in *Pigs and Battleships*,
these Americans in *Gate of Flesh* would not help her. It is also possible to attribute the
warehouse robbery as a consequence of the U.S. occupation, as the Japanese are shown to
be destitute. Postwar Tokyo is accurately depicted as the desolate ruin it was, while the
U.S forces are shown to have abundant food and other supplies. Several members of the
prostitute commune are shown buying American canned pineapples on the black market.
Shintaro is very fond of them. When the gang which controls the commune’s area of
town is shown bringing in “American stew,” this is treated as a major occasion, as this
stew is described as heartier and better than anything the Japanese have to eat. Shintaro
reveals that he stole penicillin from the PX warehouse, which would be helpful to many
ordinary people, as well as extremely lucrative to sell on the black market.

While the economic dependence of Japanese living in their environs on the bases
is not as central a focus in *Gate of Flesh* as it was in *Pigs and Battleships*, it is present.
Shintaro claims to have stolen penicillin from the PX warehouse. This would have been an enormously valuable commodity in the context of postwar Japan. As Sarah Kovner explains in her book on the U.S. occupation troops and Japanese sex workers, penicillin was difficult to obtain. “In 1945, a shortage of penicillin for U.S. civilians caused Washington to prohibit the use of U.S. penicillin on Japanese and Koreans. They also forbade sharing technical literature on how to mass-produce penicillin, deeming such information a state secret.”85 In this context, and the atmosphere of desperation generally, the robbery of the warehouse depicted onscreen becomes understandable. Shintaro makes a deal to sell the penicillin to the local gang in the area, accepting an advance payment from the gang leader. However, the prostitute leader Sen, as retribution for Shintaro planning to leave Tokyo and begin a new life with Maya, informs the gang that Shintaro intends to renege on the deal. As a result, the gang contacts the MPs, offering to help them hunt Shintaro down. He is found and immediately killed by the American troops.

*Gate of Flesh* may be best described as a tragedy. Shintaro is killed, and Maya is left alone with no method of survival or support. The tragic ending to the love story between the two Japanese protagonists was brought about by the actions of other Japanese, specifically the vicious prostitute Sen. She seeks to maintain her commune of prostitutes with her extremely nihilistic view of sexuality as something to be sold, with love excluded from consideration. It is with her, and her remaining coterie that the film ends. Shintaro is dead, and Maya is left to her own devices offscreen. This is an ending which lacks any hope for a positive outcome.

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85 Kovner, *Occupying Power*, 43.
As with so many of the films considered here, the American occupation and base presence are integral parts of the film, if only elements in the background. Maya would never have been raped by U.S. soldier if they were not in Japan. When doubt is cast on whether Shintaro has been honest in his dealings with a criminal gang, that gang immediately contacts the U.S. occupying army, whose troops then shoot him down in the street, without any attempt to arrest him. The Americans themselves are shown to be either rapists or indifferent. This negative portrayal is attributable in part to Suzuki’s nationalism of the grudge. Indeed, the film ends with a panning shot, away from Sen and her fellows on the street, to a wide shot of the ruined cityscape with an American flag conspicuously waving over it. As previously mentioned, the depiction of the American flag is reflective of Suzuki’s critical stance on the U.S. The implication, from such blatant imagery and the plot of the film generally, is an understanding of a U.S. installation’s fostering of crime, and a mutually accepting relationship between the base and local criminal elements. This is a perfect example of pragmatic protest according to Calder’s definition.

While providing a firm critique of the U.S. occupation of Japan, and a sense of dismay with postwar Japanese society, *Gate of Flesh* is also interesting in its inversion of Ian Buruma’s generalizations about Japanese films about the occupation. As mentioned, postwar Japanese “movie audiences had a pornographic fascination for the seamy side of American military bases: the crime, the prostitution, the raping of innocent Japanese women.” Gate of Flesh certainly fulfills these criteria in its depiction of the occupation. Suzuki is explicit that the film was intended by Nikkatsu to be almost pornographic in

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86 Ian Buruma, *Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan*, 52.
quality. “From the studio’s standpoint, they wanted an erotic movie. Women get stripped naked, tied and hung up by the wrists and get beaten.”87 These scenes, which take place in the context of one or another of the prostitutes, Maya included, violating the sacred rule against injecting emotion into sex, are immensely erotic. Shintaro treats one of these beatings as a riveting spectacle. The film also takes time to depict the crime, the prostitution, and the rapes which Buruma argues were so titillating to moviegoers.

Gate of Flesh, along with two other Japanese films considered here, Pigs and Battleships and MacArthur’s Children, defy the generalizations which Buruma laid down. “If the mushroom cloud and the imperial radio speech are the clichés of defeat, the scene of an American soldier (usually black) raping a Japanese girl (always young, always innocent), usually in a pristine rice field (innocent, pastoral Japan), is a stock image in postwar movies about the occupation.”88 The three Japanese films considered here lack these clichés. Pigs and Battleships and Gate of Flesh do depict the rapes of Japanese women by the soldiers of the occupation army, however in both instances the U.S. rapists are shown to be whites. In addition, only one of the two rapes, that in Gate of Flesh, actually occurs in a field, though not a rice field. Buruma seriously undercuts his argument on this particular issue by failing, in his book, to give examples of the films to which he is referring.

In Gate of Flesh, defiance of Buruma’s generalizations goes further. Neither Imamura nor Suzuki show the rape of Japanese women by a black U.S. soldier, but Suzuki depicts a Japanese woman, Maya, seducing and (presumably) sleeping with a

87 “From the Ruins: Making “Gate of Flesh”,” 0:37-0:45.
88 Buruma, The Wages of Guilt, 52.
black American priest in his film. It is an unsettling scene. Previously in *Gate of Flesh*, the priest had been the one person who had demonstrated kindness to Maya, staying to care for her after her assault, when the American MPs simply walked away. From his dialogue, the audience may infer that he briefly convinced her to convert to Christianity and attend church. The priest finds her again when she is engaged as a prostitute. Predictably, he is upset at this development in her life, and attempts to take her with him to a church service once more. Essentially, Maya rapes *him*. Her seduction of the priest parallels her earlier rape scene. The same monotone drumbeat music score plays, and Maya is once again lying among the weeds on the ground, only this time, she forcibly pulls the priest down on top of her. A Japanese woman raping a black American man is as contrary to Buruma’s generalizations as possible.
MacArthur’s Children (Japan, 1984): Continuing Preoccupation with the Origins of Occupation Decades After Rebuilding in a Post-Growth Era

By the mid-1950s, it was understood that Japan was finally overcoming the extensive economic devastation wrought by the Second World War and entering a period of economic expansion, and the beginnings of prosperity. Pigs and Battleships and Gate of Flesh were products of this time of growth. As Pigs and Battleships specifically demonstrates, prosperity was not universally enjoyed, as lower-class residents of Yokosuka are shown to be in an economically precarious position. After these films were released, however, Japanese recovery continued at even greater levels. “By 1968 Japan’s Gross National Product surpassed that of West Germany and Japan became the second largest economy in the free world. This spectacular progress was accompanied by marked changes in the socioeconomic structure of the society. Industrialization pulled large numbers of the population out of agriculture, forestry, and fishing, and into secondary industries such as construction and manufacturing.”[^89] This was a complete reversal of the ruin to which Japan had sunk at the end of the war.

The formal U.S. occupation of Japan ended in 1952, though American forces remained garrisoned in the country, forming part of the ring of bases encircling the Soviet Union. The San Francisco Peace Treaty officially ended the Second World War between Japan and the United States. Japan was also obligated to sign a new defense pact, as well

foreswear attempts to trade with the new People’s Republic of China.\textsuperscript{90} “The U.S.-Japan security treaty and a related “administrative agreement” that accompanied it also turned out to be more inequitable than any other bilateral arrangement the United States entered into in the postwar period. The Americans retained exceptional extraterritorial rights, and the number of military installations they demanded was far in excess of what anyone had anticipated.”\textsuperscript{91} These extraterritorial rights, as well as the installations, would survive the popular unrest surrounding the renegotiation of the security treaty in 1960s and continue to the present, remaining a source of tension and conflict.

The Americans held on to Okinawa as a military colony until it was returned to Japan in 1972. Of course, while Japan became less economically dependent on the U.S. in real life, and foreign trade balances reflected this, the pragmatic concerns regarding a continuing occupation remained as relevant as ever. However, in the world of film, the beginning of that occupation remained a subject of depiction four decades after it began. The earliest stages of the U.S. arrival in Japan after the surrender in 1945 were dramatized onscreen in the 1984 picture \textit{MacArthur’s Children}, directed by Masahiro Shinoda. This film depicts end of the Second World War and the upheavals that it generated through the eyes of schoolchildren. These children witness the return of defeated Japanese soldiers, the arrival of the American occupation forces, the arrest of alleged war criminals, and the growth of the black market.

Based on Calder’s definitions of antibase protest types, \textit{MacArthur’s Children} may be considered a hybrid of nationalist and pragmatic protest, much like \textit{Gate of Flesh}.

\textsuperscript{90} Dower, \textit{Embracing Defeat}, 552.
\textsuperscript{91} Dower, 552-553.
As in the case of Suzuki and Imamura’s films, Shinoda demonstrates the negative impact that the end of the war and the introduction of American ideals, or gross corruptions of them, made on Japanese society. This primarily takes the form of greater licentiousness and the growth of a criminal element through the black market, where a few profit from the devastation and privation which was common in the aftermath of the war. The American soldiers depicted in the film, while not generally violent, and not depicted as rapists as in the two Japanese films from the 1960s, nevertheless represent a new dominant force which compels the youthful protagonists, willingly or unwillingly, to abandon their past, and confront a period of uncertainty.

The altered, English-language title of the film, *MacArthur’s Children*, as well as the archival footage used in the opening title sequence, are likely pieces of nationalistic protest themselves. Upon returning to the United States after his stint commanding UN forces in the Korean War, and subsequent dismissal from command by President Truman, MacArthur, former Army commander in the Pacific War, and former U.S. viceroy over occupied Japan, testified before Congress regarding the occupation. In his testimony the general, whatever his rhetorical intentions, severely insulted the Japanese people. MacArthur compared the Anglo-Saxon and German ‘races’ to grown men of 45 years of age. He compared the Japanese race to a twelve-year-old boy, hopelessly immature compared to the Americans and Germans.92 “The phrase came like a slap in the face and marked the beginning of the end of the MacArthur mystique…these words in their starkness awakened people to how they had snuggled up to the conqueror. Suddenly,

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92 Dower, 550.
many felt unaccountably ashamed.”93 While MacArthur does not feature prominently in Shinoda’s film, his presence is felt in the archival footage during the opening credits. Over the American jazz standard “In the Mood,” the title sequence depicts MacArthur’s arrival in Japan after the surrender, as well as his speech onboard the USS Missouri at the signing of the peace. This footage is juxtaposed with images of the postwar destruction of Japan, and the destitution of the Japanese people. MacArthur came to Japan with his army, and the film focuses on the changes in several children’s lives in the aftermath.

Being regarded as nothing more than children by their former occupational master was difficult for the Japanese to accept. “After all, the Japanese had routinely spoken of themselves as MacArthur’s children…The entire occupation had been premised on acquiescing in America’s overwhelming paternalistic authority; and even as sovereignty drew near, even as the nation was being rehabilitated as a Cold War partner, the Americans never had any real expectation that an equitable relationship would be the result.”94 MacArthur’s Congressional testimony, according to Dower, forced the Japanese to confront their new subordinate position. As demonstrated by subsequent events, such as the renewal of the security treaty over mass protests, the retention of Okinawa for two decades, and the unbalanced nature of the U.S.-Japan SOFA, this subordinate position has persisted. It persisted past 1952, past 1960, past 1972, up to the present, with films to accompany it, chronicling Japanese grievances against this continuously evolving occupation.

93 Dower, 551.
94 Dower, 551.
Despite the racist and reductive characterization with which MacArthur left the Japanese people in the early 1950s, by the 1980s, when Shinoda’s film was made, the U.S.-Japan alliance did not lack defenders. Former Japanese prime minister Nobusuke Kishi, speaking in 1980 at a commemoration of the renewal of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty’s twentieth anniversary, praised the alliance as necessary for Japanese economic recovery at that time. “In all these years, Japan was securely protected, thanks to the Japan-US Security Treaty. Hence the Japanese, without having to worry about the security of the country, could concentrate on economic activities. Today, again in terms of GNP, the scale of Japanese economy has grown to almost one half of the American GNP.”95 Kishi goes on to largely dismiss the widespread protest against the renewal of the security treaty in 1960. While Johnson refers to those demonstrations as the largest in the postwar history of Japan, Kishi speaks only of “an untoward incident in Japan as some Japanese who opposed the treaty staged violent and intense demonstrations. They surrounded the Diet building every day.”96 In spite of this “unfortunate business,” Kishi asserts, the U.S.-Japan relationship remains strong.

By the time Shinoda was making his film, however, other commentators noted that the U.S.-Japan alliance was on a more unsure footing. Despite the relatively benign depictions of the Americans themselves in *MacArthur’s Children*, there is still a sense of uncertainty about them, filtered through the lens of the beginning of the occupation. Writing in 1981, Charles Maechling discussed what he saw as a ‘brittle alliance’ between the U.S. and Japan. He noted that Japan had recovered from the Second World War to

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become the most important economy in Asia. “Japan also fulfills a vital military role for the United States, as potential staging area, repair base, unsinkable aircraft carrier, and gatekeeper to the maritime exit routes of Siberia.” These are the functions which Kaplan no doubt had in mind when commenting on Japan’s usefulness as a basing location to aid in the surrounding of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, his Garrison Era. Maechling is critical however, of how then-current U.S. defense postures essentially defined whether Japanese security would actually be protected in the event that superpower tensions flared in the Far East.

Under the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty, the United States in effect assumes responsibility for the defense of Japan in time of war. Since nuclear weapons are expressly excluded from Japan’s military arsenal, the prime deterrent against aggression from the Asian mainland is the American nuclear umbrella and the presence of U.S. aircraft and naval units in the Western Pacific. Japan’s defense posture therefore depends on whether the United States chooses to confront Soviet aggression or incursion in the vicinity of Japan itself or in the surrounding periphery—whether it chooses a forward strategy with preemptive strikes or relies on blockade and a mobile defensive.

In a sense, continuing dependence of the Japanese on the U.S. for matters of national defense constitute another fashion in which Japan is reduced to the status of a child, requiring protection of an adult. It is appropriate that a film such as MacArthur’s Children was released during this period. The film features a group of fifth-grade schoolchildren who, rather than passively resign themselves to occupation, decide to resist. Their efforts are unsuccessful, but are an important depiction of Japanese opposition to the occupation, which, at the time, was entering its fifth decade under a

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different name. The attempted resistance of the Japanese children to the arrival of the Americans is manifested primarily in two significant events. The first is an attempt by a group of schoolboys to form a ‘home guard’ for the island of Awaji where the film is set. These boys take turns keeping lookout for the arrival of American troops, boldly claiming they will resist an American attempt to land on the island. The second instance is the resistance, led by the schoolgirl Mume, to American-mandated health policy.

From the opening of the film, there is no doubt that the Japanese have lost the war. The film begins with the schoolchildren and their teachers listening to the emperor’s radio broadcast announcing the decision to terminate the war. Two children, Ryuta and Saburo, are adamant that the Americans should not be allowed to land on Awaji. It might best be described as analogous to Red Dawn, but with younger children, no guns, and a more benign occupying army. Ryuta and Saburo, along with a handful of classmates, cover for one another sneaking out of their classroom, so that they might go to the highest points on the island to watch for any approaching American ships. When the Americans eventually do come to Awaji, of course, there is nothing that these children can do to stop them from landing. In the end, the occupational force which is sent to the island is small, numbering only two jeeps, and less than twenty soldiers.

Overall, the U.S. occupation depicted in MacArthur’s Children is the most unobtrusive and least visible out of the depictions of occupation in the Japanese films considered here. U.S. troops are not a ubiquitous presence in every establishing shot, as they are in Pigs and Battleships, or as lecherous and uncaring as they are generally shown to be in Gate of Flesh. The main reason the Americans came to the island of Awaji in the context of Shinoda’s film was for the purpose of destroying the coastal defense artillery
batteries on the island. After Ryuta’s grandfather, the head policeman of the island, informs the Americans where the guns are located, they are quickly and efficiently blown up. The Americans then simply loiter around the village. They very quickly become an object of fascination for a majority of the schoolchildren. In one particular scene, one which echoes the themes of dependence evident in the earlier films, and a word which might still describe the U.S. occupation of Japan in the 1980s, the soldiers shower the children with chewing gum and Hershey’s bars. This is a literal representation of children unhesitatingly accepting largesse from an adult.

Shortly after the American troops arrive on the island, the children are given a lecture by Komako, their schoolteacher, on the subject of proper behavior in the face of this occupation. This speech, which is very self-contained, and made the focus of the film for nearly 90 seconds, is the most deliberate, purposeful statement made about the occupation itself. The speech is very nationalistic, exhorting the children not to be ashamed, and not grovel before the conqueror.

Japan is under occupation. The Army of Occupation is on this island. But our souls are not under occupation. Therefore don’t have low opinions of yourselves. Don’t sneak around. But on the other hand, don’t butter up to them. These are the rules that you must observe. Our spirit…will never be occupied. Be very fair…and keep your heads up high. Live straight…

While the attempt by the schoolboys to prevent the landing of the American soldiers on the island is a failure, another act of resistance by the children against the Americans, this time led by Mume, a girl who transfers to the school, is more successful.

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99 MacArthur’s Children, directed by Masahiro Shinoda (Orion Classics, Pacific Arts Film Corp., Inc., 1984), VHS, 47:00-48:15.
Mume journeyed to Awaji early in the film with her father, a former officer in the Imperial Japanese Navy. Her father is concerned that the Americans will arrest him as a war criminal given his wartime record, a fear which later turns out to be justified. One day, at the end of school, as the children rush out of the building, they are hosed down with the disinfectant DDT under the supervision of the American MPs. The audience can hear the Americans explaining that “It’s General MacArthur’s idea. You Japanese are so dirty. Infested with lice. That’s why typhoid is so rampant.”¹⁰⁰ Mume objects to this impromptu delousing, with its unflattering assumption regarding the Japanese people. She responds by leading the rest of the children down to the wharf, where she jumps into the water to rinse away the residue of the DDT powder. With this act, these Japanese children exercised agency. They did not care what an American general thought was good for them; they decided that for themselves.

Obviously, a handful of Japanese schoolchildren could never stand against the American occupation army, but they symbolically rejected their subordination and retained some sense of pride. They accomplished this act of resistance by playing a group of U.S. soldiers in a baseball game. Komako, the schoolteacher, had been inspired during the course of the film to start a baseball team made up of students. Her husband, a crippled returnee Japanese soldier, had been a star baseball player as a student in prewar Japan. The children, though living in postwar economic insecurity, used materials they had available to make a bat and baseball gloves. Komako speaks with an American officer, and from the context, it is clear that she knows him in a pleasant, personal manner. The two of them arrange a baseball game between Japanese fifth-grade

¹⁰⁰ MacArthur’s Children, directed by Masahiro Shinoda, 1:20:15.
schoolchildren and American soldiers. This fictional baseball game, which the Japanese came close to winning, was an opportunity to redress a perceived historical imbalance against the Americans. Japan was rendered helpless in the aftermath of the Second World War, and forty years later was still dependent on the U.S. for its defense. By depicting Japanese children facing American soldiers in a competitive act, *MacArthur’s Children* succinctly depicts the exercise of agency and defiance in the face of this helplessness.

In the context of the film, the sense of Japanese helplessness vis-à-vis the Americans was reinforced immediately before the game by the news that Mume’s father had been executed by the Allies in Singapore for his alleged war crimes. Saburo then argues that the children should not deign to play against the Americans, these murderers of Mume’s father. Mume herself agrees to play, insisting that they will win. The Japanese children are unable to outright defeat the U.S. team, but with the unexpected aid of a dog they come close. After Mume hits a ball, it is grabbed by a dog in the jaws, preventing the Americans from catching it to get the Japanese players out. “Baraketsu [Saburo] planned to win by any means. But the dog changed all that. The dog helped us to even the score. And Masao ruled a draw. Later on, everyone said that the dog must have been…the reincarnated spirit of Mume’s father.”¹⁰¹ For a moment, the film depicts a sense of satisfaction; the Japanese children avoided losing to the American soldiers, and there is a feeling of surprise and wonderment produced by the narration and the editing. The feeling does not last, however, as the film ends, like the others, with a bittersweet tone.

While the Japanese children avoid a loss in the baseball game against the Americans, the reality of the occupation and of the relative powerlessness of the characters remains. The film ends on a profoundly melancholy note, with Mume having to leave Awaji island, to live with her brother in Tokyo after the execution of her father. The inhabitants of the island are saddened by this. Similarly to the ending of both Pigs and Battleships and Gate of Flesh, the film ends with no satisfying resolutions for the Japanese characters. In each film, a character has experienced loss or suffering. Pigs and Battleships offers some optimism that Haruko might build a better life away from Yokosuka, but this is only after the harrowing events of the film. Gate of Flesh ends with explicitly depressing themes, with the death of Shintaro and the uncertain fate of Maya, as the American flag flies over the scene as the only constant. As Mume departs Awaji at the conclusion of MacArthur’s Children, there is a similar sense of melancholy. This atmosphere is violently shattered by music at the end. Gate of Flesh ends with an American flag as a reminder of the U.S. occupation. MacArthur’s Children ends, just as it began, with the American song “In the Mood.” The impact is similar, jarringly reminding the audience that the occupation lives on, largely unchanged. So it has remained, off-screen as well as on.

Regarding the Americans as individuals, MacArthur’s Children has one of the more subdued and benign portrayals of the films sampled here. Neither the rapists or psychotic mass murderers they are depicted as elsewhere, they are generally pleasant background figures. The American officer who leads his men into Ryuta’s home to speak with his grandfather even takes the time to explain to his men that in Japan, it is customary to take off one’s shoes in a house. He then orders them to stop tracking their
feet across the floor. American MPs, such a visceral symbol of American indifference in *Gate of Flesh*, are relegated to bit parts escorting Mume’s father away for trial. Even when an entire team of American soldiers (comprised of both white and black soldiers, suggesting either different units or a historical anachronism, as U.S. military desegregation would not be ordered until 1947) comes to play the children in baseball, they are hardly given a single line of dialogue. As with the other Japanese films, and these base films in general, the individual Americans are less important than the constant *presence* of occupation.
*Europa* (Denmark, Germany, France, 1991): Lars von Trier looks at the Beginnings of Occupation in Germany at the Dawn of the New World Order

Japan has certainly made a number of impressive base films, but is hardly the only nation in the world to accommodate a large and enduring American presence. For the duration of Kaplan’s Garrison Era, through the Second Expeditionary Era to the present, Germany remained and remains a stationing post for thousands of U.S. troops. Much like Japan, the purpose of the American troops in their multiple bases was to serve as a piece of the containment of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Western Europe was, along with Northeast Asia, a key area for the ‘large frontier garrisons’ meant to encircle the USSR. Unsurprisingly, as in Japan, the American occupational presence, which extended past formal occupation ending in 1955, simply became a piece of the background in Germany.

*Europa*, created by Danish filmmaker Lars von Trier, makes use of the American presence in Germany as a canvas upon which to tell a story. The film is set at the beginning of the American occupation of Germany following the Second World War, much as *Gate of Flesh* and *MacArthur’s Children* take place in the aftermath of Japan’s surrender in 1945. Von Trier’s film breaks with convention among the others discussed here by making its protagonist an American. The film follows an American who comes to postwar Germany, from there witnessing the wreckage left by the war, the American occupation, as well as the ways in which that occupation affects the lives of the Germans in the film. With one major exception, the American characters other than the protagonist have extremely small roles. *Europa* might best be described as pragmatic critique of the
American presence in Germany, according to Calder’s rubric. The occupation serves as a milieu in which the characters can act out the filmmakers’ ideas, though it is possible to view the film as a potential commentary on the time it was made.

The film potentially represents attitudes towards the U.S. at a key moment of transition. Released within a year of German reunification and the end of the Cold War, it parallels a souring of German attitudes on basing and implications of the U.S. military presence through the 1980s. It challenges ideas of a benign U.S. role in German affairs. The actions which the film’s American protagonist take directly cause the conflict.

*Europa* obliquely represents a culmination of accrued resentments against the U.S. presence in Germany, which were inevitable given the decades of occupation. It was not a sudden process; there were German protests against removal of American troops from West Germany in 1963. A possible answer for the change in how the U.S. military was perceived was the decision to install NATO missiles in West Germany in the 1980s. Amy Austin Holmes, in her study of base protests in Turkey and Germany, argues protest against moving Pershing II missiles into the Federal Republic was a critique “against the war-making capabilities of NATO and the United States in particular, that existed on German territory.” Similar to protest elements in Japan however, the intentions of the peace movement were not purely altruistic. Tony Judt, for example, argues “the British and West German peace movements of the time were thoroughly penetrated by Soviet


and East German intelligence."104 Thomas Rid, writing in 2020, further argues the issue that the KGB and the Stasi were heavily involved in manipulating Western European peace movements.105 Such penetration, however, cannot fully invalidate real public concerns regarding the deployment of U.S. forces in Europe.

The end of the Cold War represented a challenge to the U.S. presence in Germany, as it was the presumed threat of a Soviet-Warsaw Pact invasion through the Fulda Gap that provided the rationale for the U.S.-NATO forces to remain in Central Europe. It provided the rationale for the U.S. to station intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe, against the wishes of thousands of Europeans. However, by the end of the Cold War, it was being recognized by both Europeans and commentators on the bases that NATO infrastructure was being used for purposes other than those originally intended in the North Atlantic Treaty. “In the absence of any remotely credible danger of a Soviet invasion, U.S. NATO bases in Europe are more clearly seen as staging areas for “out-of-area” operations. The “threat” has been moving steadily “out-of-area.””106

Johnstone and Cramer cite European opposition to use of NATO facilities for military actions supporting Israel in the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars, as well as opposition to their use during the 1986 bombing of Libya. In 1990-1991, the largest use of European bases in support of a non-European U.S. war was the deployment of U.S. forces in

Europe to the Persian Gulf to evict Saddam Hussein’s army from Kuwait. While many units never returned to Europe, most bases remained.

*Europa* crystalizes around ambiguities regarding the mission of Americans in Germany, or “the heart of Europa,” as Max von Sydow’s opening narration puts it. The film, interestingly, is a story about what happens when a lone American, not a member of the occupation army, but an American nevertheless, travels into Germany after the war. This protagonist, Leopold Kessler, takes a job as a sleeping car conductor at a German railroad line. He interacts with a strange world of Nazi partisans, Germans collaborating with the occupation, as well as his countrymen in the occupation itself. With his various interactions, the film reveals an interesting commentary, most likely unintended, on the violence bred by the occupation, the necessity of collaborators, and the contradictory nature of the occupation. What binds these three different subjects together is how the American occupation creates and exacerbates these problems.

Von Trier’s film, made at the end of the Cold War, set at the end of the Second World War, is explicit that for some Germans the war is not over. Throughout the film, the American occupiers are extremely preoccupied with what are referred to as werewolves. Rather than the prosthetic wolf-monsters of B-horror films, the term werewolf in this context refers to Nazi partisans who continue to resist the Allied armies in Germany even after the surrender of 1945. While obviously never enough of a threat to end the Allied occupations, the Americans, unsurprisingly, are determined to apprehend them. A member of the U.S. Army, Colonel Alexander Harris, comes to Leopold to enlist his aid against these partisans. “I know about your AWOL. I’ve come to ask you to do us a small favor…Well, your job with the railways could be an advantage to us. I don’t
know what you’ve heard about the werewolves, but you should know that sabotage is still going on, as well as liquidations of Germans who cooperate with the Allies. All I’m asking you to do is to keep an eye open for us and report back to us.”

By virtue of his presence, Leopold Kessler becomes involved in the conflicts between the American occupation and lingering hostile elements of the German population. Colonel Harris is explicit that he wants to use Kessler as a potential spy to ferret out Nazi werewolves who might oppose the occupation. The werewolves are equally eager to use him. Shortly after he meets the Hartmann family, the owners of his company, Kessler is asked to look after two boys travelling to Cologne. They are handed off to him, with their tickets, by a man who claims the Hartmann family is amenable to Kessler doing this small favor. Unfortunately, the two young boys are later revealed to be assassins, sent to murder a passenger on the train. The target was a man appointed to be the mayor of Frankfurt by the American occupational authorities. The werewolves wanted to eliminate a collaborator, and this highlights in von Trier’s film a theme common to most films depicting American bases and occupations across the world. Such occupations could not survive as well as they do without collaborators in host nations who are ready and willing to support and take positions of authority with the occupying power and to serve it.

Kessler fulfills his agreement with Harris by reporting what he knows of the assassination on the train. Harris replies by informing him that the U.S. Army has already found a new mayor of Frankfurt to take the dead man’s place. This reinforces the

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necessity of collaborators, and indicates that there is a significant enough number of Germans willing to cooperate with the U.S. That is significant, but the film also takes time to explore a more complicated issue of collaboration with the Americans. This is the case of Max Hartmann, the owner of Zentropa, the railway where Kessler is employed. The film is slightly anachronistic regarding the timeline of Allied attempts to revive Germany as an economic and later military power. By the early years of the Cold War, the Americans would seek to cultivate the post-occupation West German state into an ally, an important bulwark against the Soviets in Central Europe. Toward that end, German reconstruction would be heavily encouraged. In 1955, West Germany would finally be permitted to join NATO, the explicitly military Western alliance.

The occupying Americans are severe in rooting out the Nazi werewolf partisans in their zone of occupation. After the boy on the train successfully kills the would-be collaborationist mayor, he is confronted by American MPs on the train, points a gun at them, and is promptly shot down. However, as the case of Max Hartmann illustrates, if the Americans became too particular about whom they agreed to work with, based solely on their Nazi ties, they would lack collaborators. Much is made in the film about the American questionnaire Hartmann was required to fill out, documenting his links, if any, to the Nazi party and Nazi government. That paperwork would then be checked and verified by a victim of Nazi persecution. As Harris explains to Leopold after a man—identified only as ‘a Jew’—verifies Hartmann’s papers, even going so far as to praise Hartmann for allegedly saving him from the Nazis during the war, it had been found necessary to falsify wartime records of those Germans whom the Americans deemed vital for aiding the reconstruction of the country.
We handed out fifteen million questionnaires, and found that eighty percent of the Germans in our zone have Nazi sympathies. Max Hartmann is important for the reconstruction of the transportation system. I admit I made a little private arrangement with that Jew. He broke into an American food depot, and he’s quite thankful that I got him out of trouble.¹⁰⁸

This is a shameless admission of a great double standard of the occupation as depicted in von Trier’s film. The Americans are adamant in dealing decisively with bands of Nazi partisans holding out after the surrender, while being amenable to working with much more significant Nazi collaborators in the name of German reconstruction. Von Trier’s depiction of this postwar environment evokes Holmes’s arguments about radical leftist groups who attacked U.S. installations in West Germany in the 1970s. “According to their analysis, fascist traditions had only been briefly interrupted during the short period of denazification but then resurfaced as Germany became integrated into the Western alliance.”¹⁰⁹ Von Trier’s portrayal of the cynical relationship between Colonel Harris and Max Hartmann, and the manipulation leading to Hartmann being absolved of culpability for Nazi ties, echoes this argument. Von Trier gives no indication in the film that this previous left-wing analysis impacted his directorial choices, but the ideological continuity in regard to the American presence is significant, because the U.S. presence remains constant. The Soviets, during their occupation of Germany, doubtless relied on former Nazis as collaborators as well, making them as hypocritical as the Americans depicted onscreen. However, by the time von Trier shot Europa, it was clear that with the end of the Cold War, Soviet forces in Germany would withdraw, while it was less certain

¹⁰⁸ Europa, directed by Lars von Trier, 46:45-47:12.
¹⁰⁹ Holmes, Social Unrest and American Military Bases, 103.
that the U.S. troops would leave their bases. They did not, and remain in Germany presently.

While the contexts of postwar Germany and Japan are quite different, it is worthwhile to note that in both Europa, as well as Japanese films such as Pigs and Battleships, the American presence is, in many ways, responsible for sustaining undesirable elements of the host society. The Japanese yakuza in Pigs and Battleships are reliant on the scraps from the American base in order to feed their pigs, as well as on the American sailors in order to maximize profits at their brothels. In Europa, the American occupation, which means the extirpation of any remnants of the Nazi resistance, also means nurturing former Nazis who might be useful to American purposes in the emergent Garrison Era. Such attitudes were grounded in the reality of the time. German businessmen, such as Alfried Krupp, were able to retain their holdings despite their Nazi ties. German scientists, such as Werner von Braun, were able avoid punishment for working on Nazi weapons programs, finding work in the American rocket and space programs. A preoccupation with crime as one of the byproducts of a base presence is one of the key criteria for pragmatic antibase protest as Calder defines it. Such crime can take multiple different forms.

The American occupation, while sustaining certain undesirable elements in the German society depicted in Europa, simultaneously brings hardship into the lives of ordinary Germans. The American troops depicted in von Trier’s film are not the bloodthirsty savages found in other films, yet the occupation, as shown, seems no less onerous. Aside from the obvious contradiction displayed between eradicating Nazi partisans and cooperating with Nazi-connected businessmen, the occupation is an
oppressive presence in the lives of average people. This is successively demonstrated throughout the film with three specific actions taken by the American occupying troops against the interests of ordinary Germans. These include the destruction of cargo loading cranes, the confiscation of heaters from the Zentropa sleeping car where Leopold Kessler works, and the forcible dispersion of Max Hartmann’s funeral.

While the Americans are amenable to sanitizing Max Hartmann’s past in the interest of revitalizing the German transportation system, such magnanimity is not extended uniformly to all German industries, as a scene in which several cargo loading cranes are destroyed illustrates. “The Allies are blowing up cranes in Westhafen. They’re dismantling…To prevent another German military power from rising up. They’re destroying everything that could be used for military ends.” The crane destruction scene reflects actual occurrences in the immediate aftermath of the war when the Americans demolished German industrial infrastructure not already destroyed by wartime strategic bombing. While cargo loading cranes could, of course, be used for military purposes, they might also have been used for perfectly legitimate peaceful purposes. As Katherina Hartmann, secret Nazi partisan, is quick to note, “The food supply situation will become even worse.” The clear implication is that those cranes could, and likely were, in use for unloading food shipments, and that their destruction will hinder this distribution. The devastation of postwar Germany had been made clear visually by the film, allowing the audience to grasp the seriousness of any disruption of the food supplies.

110 Europa, 27:45-28:00.
111 Europa, 28:05-28:07.
While the destruction of the last of Germany’s infrastructure is hinted to likely cause suffering and hardship, the actions of American troops to remove the heaters from Kessler’s Zentropa sleeping car are an example of directly causing hardship. Leopold Kessler is in the middle of his shift, overseeing the two boys who will soon murder the collaborationist mayor, when German workers, guarded by American MPs, board his train. “We have dismantling orders for all the heaters on this train… War debts, for Scandinavia.”¹¹² Kessler’s uncle, a more senior railway employee, is restrained from stopping this removal by the American MPs, who have by now become a ubiquitous presence in foreign films involving American military occupations. In a small bit of irony, the removal of the heaters causes Kessler to break out the supply of blankets to better keep the passengers warm, and he conscripts the two young assassins to assist him. The boys deliver blankets to the collaborationist mayor, and Kessler leaves them in the compartment with him, going on to pass out blankets to others. This handily facilitates the subsequent murder, which occurs while the railroad workers and MPs on the train are otherwise distracted.

The destruction and confiscation of infrastructure are shown to be inconveniences to the recovering German population, but it is the curfews and the prohibitions on public gatherings which are shown to be the most onerous parts of the occupation for ordinary Germans. It is when they are enforcing curfews or disrupting group gatherings that the Americans are depicted in the most negative light. This is epitomized by the American response, in the film, to Max Hartmann’s funeral. As part of the occupation ordinances, public gatherings of Germans are forbidden. As a result, the funeral for Max Hartmann,

¹¹² *Europa*, 37:05-37:15.
who killed himself after the charade allowing him to keep control of his company, must
be held clandestinely. Hartmann’s son asks for Kessler’s help to stop the train, allowing
the funeral party, led by a priest, to remove the casket from the train and transport it to a
railway marshalling yard, where the funeral will be held. “We will proceed with our
ceremony in secret, like the Christians in the catacombs.”

The American regulations against public gatherings lead to the violent breakup of
Max Hartmann’s funeral by American soldiers. The priest leads the service beside
Hartmann’s two children. The Americans arrive suddenly, giving orders to the crowd in
English and German. “This is the American occupation force. Law 1067 of the military
government forbids gatherings and processions. Please disperse and go home or you will
be arrested.” This message is delivered, and when the crowd does not immediately
break up, the American troops begin firing their weapons in the air, frightening the
Germans to disperse and flee the scene. The Americans demand that Hartmann’s coffin
be turned over to them, as a group of Germans rush to remove it from the scene. Despite
the logic of laws restricting gatherings in the immediate postwar environment, the impact
of the scene is not diminished. As several people ferry Hartmann’s coffin away, the
audience witness it being literally ripped away from Hartmann’s children, as well as a
priest who was Hartmann’s friend in life. The Americans pursue the coffin, and continue
firing their guns to frighten the crowd. Portrayed in this context, the actions of the
American occupational forces appear cruel and unfeeling.

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113 *Europa*, 1:00:50-1:00:58.
114 *Europa*, 1:02:22-1:02:41.
The remainder of the film largely centers on the werewolf partisans threatening Kessler into aiding them in a plot to blow up a bridge when the Zentropa train will be crossing it. This, however, has little to do with the depiction of American occupational forces in Germany. While the U.S. occupation of defeated Germany is never the primary focus of the film, von Trier effectively uses that time as a framing device for the plot. In a 2005 interview with Danish journalist Bo Green Jensen, von Trier elaborates on his fixation on the time period. “I don’t know if it was important, but it attracted me.”

“There’s no doubt that Germany was a scoundrel state. We’ve heard that loads of times. And I’m sure it’s true, but many other countries were as well. But the whole thing was so one-sided. Later on, we’ve begun to see things from different angles.” While von Trier does not mention the Americans specifically, it is easy to conjecture that his problematizing of one-sided narratives regarding the period around 1945 could apply to the U.S. This is possible due to the generally negative portrayal of the U.S. occupation in Europa. This issue retains salience due to the continued presence of American troops in Germany contemporary to the film’s release.

While von Trier never made the Americans the focus of Europa, his attitude about the use of the German environment as a setting echoes what Buruma argued about postwar, Garrison Era Japanese films about U.S. occupation. Just as Buruma insisted that Japanese filmmakers had an almost “pornographic fixation” on American bases in Japan and the sex and crime that went with them, von Trier speculates similar attitudes.

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influenced his work on *Europa*. “Whether the material was important, because there’s so much fetish, surrounding the whole German thing, the design and everything—It all attracted me.”\(^{117}\) This fetishization of the postwar environment of destruction, the wreckage itself, is evident when von Trier lingers on the ruin of Germany in the aftermath of the war, the result of attacks by the Allies. Similar to how Tokyo is presented as a ruin in *Gate of Flesh*, many shots in *Europa* emphasize shattered buildings and rubble. Germany is shown as a wasteland. Just as Imamura and Suzuki also focus on the corruption bred by the American presence, von Trier, intentionally or otherwise, depicted similar themes of destruction, destitution, and corruption. This concern with the practical consequences of an occupation or continuing military presence is a trait shared by *Pigs and Battleships*, *Gate of Flesh* and *Europa*, making them examples of pragmatic antibase protest.

Valley of the Wolves: Iraq (Turkey, 2006): Well into the Second Expeditionary Era, a NATO Ally Produces a Pinnacle of Anti-American Film

According to Kaplan’s periodization of American overseas military basing, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 inaugurated the Second Expeditionary Era. This would be an era unlike the Cold War, in which the target of American basing was the immovable Soviet Union. “The Second Expeditionary Era featured an emphasis on rapid mobility worldwide to deal with peacekeeping interventions, anti-terrorist strikes, and the containment of Iran and Iraq. The post-September 11 global footprint was to put further emphasis on mobility and the dispersion of forces, to deal with the twin threats of radical Islam and the rising power of China.”118 In the early years of the twenty-first century, U.S. forces began to be garrisoned in places where they had never before gone. This included post-Cold War expansion into formerly Soviet-controlled states in Eastern Europe, with several former members of the Warsaw Pact joining NATO. New nations hosting U.S. troops means that the list of countries which are capable of producing base films has only grown in recent decades.

While the Second Expeditionary Era certainly expanded the number of nations playing host to a U.S. military presence, those nations which had accommodated U.S. garrisons for the duration of the Cold War saw little change. The U.S. did not abandon its bases in Germany, Japan (particularly Okinawa), Turkey, or South Korea, even as it expanded into new nations, such as Romania. The advent of the Second Expeditionary

118 Robert Kaplan, Imperial Grunts, 13.
Era, and the Iraq War in particular, generated one of the more virulently anti-American films to be produced by a host nation. This was the Turkish film *Valley of the Wolves: Iraq* (2006). This film, alongside the South Korean film *The Host*, also released in 2006, are noteworthy for taking as their inspiration and point of departure real events from their nations’ interactions with the United States and dramatizing them. From the perspective of Calder’s rubric, *Valley of the Wolves* is an extremely nationalistic film, reflecting virulently anti-American attitudes. As the film is not set principally in Turkey, it does not address pragmatic basing concerns. Since Turkey is a longstanding ally, as well as a NATO member, however, the film is worth examining principally as a gauge of Turkish attitudes toward the U.S.

Turkey had been a Cold War ally and host nation of U.S. forces since near the conflict’s inception. “Throughout World War II, Moscow had pressured Ankara to establish Soviet bases in the Bosporus and Dardanelles, a request that Ankara refused for the last time in 1946.” 119 The Truman Doctrine, promulgated in 1947, was a direct response to U.S. fears of Soviet pressure on Turkey, as well as Greece. Turkish troops later served alongside U.S. troops as part of the United Nations force during the Korean War. This generated a popular song about that alliance after the 1953 ceasefire. “The lyrics said that Turkey would stand by the United States until eternity in fighting for freedom, and that the two peoples had become blood brothers fighting together in Korea.” 120 The U.S. continued to provide military and economic aid to Turkey, and U.S. forces would be stationed at several bases around the country. This led to a greater

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120 Criss, “Turkish Perceptions of the United States,” 51.
dissemination and acceptance of American culture, with Criss arguing “Americans were a vivid and powerful force in the cultural and political life of Turkey.” A history of interaction and degree of affection for the United States makes *Valley of the Wolves* a jarring viewing experience, given how negatively the American characters are portrayed. By the beginning of Kaplan’s Second Expeditionary Era, it was possible to see changes in how the United States was viewed in Turkey.

Even before the end of the Cold War, Nur Criss and Alexander Cooley are cognizant of events which soured the U.S.-Turkish relationship, beginning with U.S. arms embargoes against Turkey in the 1970s in response to the Greco-Turkish war on Cyprus. Twice during the 1960s, the U.S. had successfully pressured the Turks into not intervening in their own interest on Cyprus. Popular sentiment in 1974 after the installment of a pro-Greek leader on the island led to a military incursion, which the U.S. opposed. In response to the Turkish intervention, “the U.S. Congress—urged by a powerful pro-Greek faction—imposed an arms embargo…in October 1974.” “Turkey retaliated by closing down U.S. bases and listening installations at a time when Washington needed those assets to monitor Soviet compliance with arms reduction agreements. The punitive aspect of the sanction fed Turkish anti-Americanism, and instilled feelings of suspicion towards the United States on the part of Turkish decision-makers that still reverberate today.” Prior to the embargoes, the U.S. had been providing arms to Turkey since the early Cold War, and it is entirely possible that the

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121 Criss, “Turkish Perceptions,” 53.
123 Cooley, 117.
124 Criss, 54.
Turks felt betrayed. The notion of Turkey being ‘betrayed’ by the United States is a theme which emerges early in *Valley of the Wolves*.

Even more damaging to U.S.-Turkish relations than the Cypriot war-era arms embargo was the much larger issue of the 2003 Iraq War. It is well-known that the U.S. decision to invade Iraq, toppling dictator Saddam Hussein and waging a yearslong struggle against an insurgent resistance, was massively unpopular from the start. The reaction in Turkey was no different. As Criss asserts, “when the United States decided to attack Iraq, based on slim evidence and without the explicit approval of the UN Security Council, both the government and the people of Turkey were astonished.”\(^{125}\) Criss is unable to quantify what exactly made the Turks feel this way, only that it shattered preconceived notions that many had of the U.S. “People believed that the United States, by acting without strong international support and solidarity…had broken faith with the world and was acting, instead, like a bully.”\(^{126}\) The recurring demonstration of Americans acting like bullies—vicious, sadistic bullies—is the most consistent aspect of *Valley of the Wolves*.

Despite widespread Turkish misgivings regarding the desirability or morality of the Iraq War, the Americans expected Turkey to play a significant role in the actual prosecution of the war. While coalition troops would also enter Iraq from the south, original U.S. war plans called for use of Turkish territory by the U.S. military, “which had planned on encircling the Iraqi army by establishing a northern front of about 60,000 troops.”\(^{127}\) When the use of Turkish territory and bases for the impending invasion was

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\(^{125}\) Criss, 57.  
\(^{126}\) Criss, 57.  
\(^{127}\) Cooley, 130.
put before a vote in the Turkish parliament in spring 2003, however, the legislators rejected the issue. This was not enough to stop the invasion from taking place, with U.S. troops toppling the regime of Saddam Hussein within weeks, though plans for a northern front of the war had to be dropped. “Although contingency plans had been drawn up, the decision came as a surprise to most military planners, and disgruntled political analysts accused Turkey of abandoning its superpower ally in a time of need.” Cooley goes on to note that the decision was not a simple matter of anti-American sentiment in Turkey, which had existed at least from the arms embargoes over the Cyprus war in the 1970s. Rather, he attributes the vote to the political climate in Turkey at the time, including doubts about the justness of the proposed war.

The United States was eager to gain access to Turkish installations for the Iraq invasion, and made generous financial promises in an attempt to secure that access. “In exchange for base access, Turkey would be offered $2 billion in grant aid and $24 billion in loan guarantees and debt write-off, on top of the upgrades to its bases, ports, and military installations. The package itself led many critics to assert that the country’s compliance was being bought.” This attitude was coupled with preexisting public sentiment against merits of the war, as well as its potential implications for Turkish interests. The authorization for use of Turkish bases nearly passed in the Turkish parliament, but due to abstentions, it failed by a margin of three votes. While the Turkish government, particularly Tayyip Erdogan, leader of the newly empowered Justice and Development Party, hoped for another vote, previous opposition by the

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128 Cooley, 130.
129 Cooley, 132.
130 Cooley, 133.
Turkish public had not abated, and was supportive of the rejection vote. No second vote was held on U.S. base usage.

The more immediate inspiration for Valley of the Wolves was the “Hood Incident.” Turkish troops did not participate in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. However, in 2005, Turkey did offer to send 10,000 troops to Iraq to aid in postwar stabilization.\textsuperscript{131} Iraqi Kurds, and the coalition, rejected such a move, and the Turkish army remained within its borders. However, a number of Turkish Special Forces soldiers were present in Iraq by July 2003, when they ran afoul of the occupying U.S. forces. On July 4, several Turkish officers were arrested in northern Iraq, “with the detainees seen on TV in Abu Ghraib-style hoods.”\textsuperscript{132} An angry public reaction to such an event is understandable. While there were certainly U.S.-Turkish tensions at the time regarding the Iraq War, and past resentments the Turks might have had against the U.S., this was still an incident in which Turkish soldiers were taken prisoner and humiliated by forces of a NATO ally. “Barely a news blip in the United States, the “hood event,” as it’s known in Turkey, became such a sore point that, three years later, the country packed cinemas to cheer as a group of fictional Turkish supermen infiltrated Iraq and murdered the commander responsible for the errant raid.”\textsuperscript{133} That is essentially the plot of the film, and the circumstances of its inspiration make it one of the single best examples of an allied host nation mounting a cinematic nationalist critique of the U.S. base presence, or of the United States military generally.

\textsuperscript{131} Cooley, 134.
\textsuperscript{132} Michael Idov, “America the Brutiful,” Foreign Policy no. 188 (Sept/Oct 2011): 109, \url{https://www.jstor.org/stable/41353207}.
\textsuperscript{133} Idov, “America the Brutiful,” 109.
*Valley of the Wolves* opens with a cinematic recreation of the “hood event,” seen through Turkish eyes. It is framed as one of the Turkish officers present writing a letter about that day to his friend, and presumably former comrade, Polat Alemdar, the protagonist. His narration brackets what the audience is shown of the event. The Turkish soldiers, in a house in Suleymaniye, Iraq, are surrounded by dozens of American soldiers, most in battle dress, others, bizarrely, in tank tops with ponytails. The raid is commanded by an American known only as Sam Marshall, played by Billy Zane. This American walks into the office of the Turkish commander and orders the Turks to surrender and submit to a search of the premises, as well as arrest and questioning at another location. The Turkish commander relents, and the Turkish soldiers are led out of the house, zip-tied with the infamous hoods over their heads, and loaded onto a truck. The music throughout the entire scene conveys a sense of foreboding and dread. The tension between the Americans and the Turks in the building during the raid is palpable.

This recreation of the “hood event” on film is significant for two reasons. The first is that it refers to an actual event perpetrated by American soldiers on the personnel of an ally and host nation. Previous antibase films referred to what was known to occur at the time—the rapes of the Japanese women in *Pigs and Battleships* and *Gate of Flesh*, for example—but never a concrete, real event at a specific time in a specific place. The second reason is that the film then allows the audience to understand the significance which the *Turks* imbue into that event. The dialogue of the Turkish commander in Suleymaniye as the Americans surround his headquarters give some indication of the profound feeling of anger and betrayal that he and his men, and presumably the Turks by proxy felt at this seemingly unthinkable action by their ally.
We are 11 people. We have a machine gun on the roof. We have the firepower to hit half the 100 Americans and 60 local soldiers. They aren’t intended to make a search, sir. The guys we served tea are pointing guns at us. It is not against us, but against the Turkish nation. With my 10 soldiers, I’m waiting for your orders to die, sir!134

The anger is palpable, and the nationalism is plainly evident. There is no small amount of nationalistic bravado when the Turkish commander asserts that his ten men could possibly inflict fifty percent casualties on a force of almost 160. There is also a degree of hurt. The Americans are the ‘guys we served tea,’ supposed allies whom the Turks believe they have treated with respect, only to be met with no respect in return. Finally, the Turkish commander states that this action taken by the Americans, the arrest and humiliation of eleven Turkish soldiers, is an insult and threat to the entire Turkish nation.

After recounting the hood event in detail in his letter, the narrator, Suleyman, seals the letter for Alemdar and commits suicide in shame, asking his friend to avenge the wrong done to the Turks by the Americans that day. This establishes the plot for the rest of the movie; Polat Alemdar, former member of the Turkish special forces, along with three accomplices, attempts to take revenge on the American Sam Marshall for the crime of the hood event. It is a plot which is not dissimilar to many Hollywood films. This revenge fantasy would not look out of place being released in the U.S. starring the likes of Steven Seagal or Chuck Norris. The principal difference is that in this particular case, the Americans, rather than the heroes, are shown to be horrible villains. Interviews of the cast show that the American actor playing the primary antagonist, Billy Zane, was aware of this “role-reversal.” An American viewer of the film may experience whiplash at

134 Valley of the Wolves: Iraq, directed by Serdar Akar (Pana Film, 2006), 2:00-2:45, DVD.
seeing familiar action movie cliches with this one startling difference. It is in this environment that the Turkish filmmakers fully explore their grievances against the Americans.

*Valley of the Wolves* is the single most anti-American film examined here. Akar’s film is not subtle, and the anti-American sentiment is expressed by the actions of American characters throughout. Dante, the primary U.S. soldier shown onscreen, is a psychopath. He murders Iraqi civilians he has taken prisoner, killing a fellow American soldier who threatened to report him, and suffers no consequences. The Americans raid an Iraqi wedding party, ostensibly having no reason to do so, but when guests begin firing rifles in the air as an act of celebration, the soldiers, waiting outside, eagerly announce: “Now they’re terrorists.” U.S. soldiers then massacre several wedding guests, including children. The most blatant (and fabricated) display of U.S. evil is the film’s representation of Abu Ghraib, where there is “an Army doctor—played by Gary Busey as a conniving Jewish stereotype—who steals prisoners’ livers for wealthy clients in New York and Tel Aviv.” Billy Zane’s Sam Marshall is also implied to be some type of Christian religious fanatic. This reveals a depth of anger towards Americans likely building prior to the hood event. The most important scene of the film, however, is not a gun battle or massacre, but a conversation between protagonist and antagonist. *Valley of the Wolves* is unique among the films discussed here, as it is not set in the nation which produced it. It nevertheless still reveals Turkish attitudes about their relationship with the U.S. For that reason, it deserves to be examined, and the

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135 *Valley of the Wolves: Iraq*, 16:00.
The most important scene in *Valley of the Wolves* for gauging Turkish attitudes towards the U.S. at the time of release is a conversation between Polat Alemdar and Sam Marshall in an Erbil hotel dining room. In an attempt to lure Marshall to meet with them, Alemdar and his accomplices placed explosives on the main support columns of the Grand Harilton hotel in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan. They force the hotel manager, an associate of Marshall, to call him, asking him to come. He does, and sits with Alemdar to discuss the motivations behind the prospective bombing. Alemdar initially wants to visit upon the American the same form of humiliation meted out to the Turkish soldiers in Suleymaniye. Alemdar orders Marshall to put a hood over his own head, and the heads of the soldiers accompanying him. The Americans would then be obliged to walk out of the hotel in this state, allowing the journalists outside to photograph them. It would be simple, relatively harmless punishment, with Alemdar making the promise that he would then drop the matter. Marshall refuses to submit to this humiliation, and begins an angry tirade against Alemdar, and against the Turks in general. Billy Zane’s character effectively becomes an American-looking mouthpiece for how the Turks likely think the U.S. views them.

Alright look. Turk. I’ve been in this region for fifteen years. Now, I know Turks very well. They like to boast. They got their own rules, they got their own red lines. They got their stable Iraqi politics. You think, uh, if we don’t want something to happen, there’s nothing anyone can do to make it happen. Let me tell you something. We stepped all over your red lines. We screwed your Iraqi politics. Now am I to understand, that you are not offended by this, but by these hoods? I’ll tell you why you’re offended. Because the United States has been paying for you for the last 50 years. We send you the elastic for your goddamn panties. Why
can’t you produce anything? You say you want money, we send it to you. But you steal and cheat each other for it, then ask for more? You say you want guns, we send it to you. You wanna do battle, but you wanna bargain with us before sending in your troops. And then, you ask for more money.

How can you forget how you begged us to save you from the communists. No wonder you’re offended. We don’t need you anymore.\textsuperscript{137}

Marshall’s monologue, provided to him by the Turkish director and screenwriters, is an insight into how the filmmakers perceive American arrogance and hostility in the aftermath of the U.S. condemnation of Turkey for refusing to participate directly in the Iraq War in 2003 and the bitterness of the hood event. Marshall references the U.S.-Turkish relationship as far back as the Truman Doctrine, when Turkey “begged” the U.S. to save them from the “communists”—the Soviets. After that, U.S. bases were established in Turkey, U.S. servicemen were stationed there, and U.S. aid and supplies were sent. Criss discusses her own history of receiving powdered milk and cheese from U.S. food shipments as a child.\textsuperscript{138} American aid to Turkey over the years was real, both military and otherwise. Marshall’s dialogue, however, implies that this was a one-sided relationship. Marshall, in a very arrogant voice, perfectly delivered by Billy Zane, implies that the Turks never reciprocated in kind for the largesse which the U.S. bestowed upon them. It is ignored by Marshall that Turkey repaid the U.S. by not siding with the Soviets in the Cold War, by joining NATO, and allowing U.S. bases, as well as the famous missiles (a partial catalyst for the Cuban Missile Crisis) to be stationed in their country.

The dismissal by Marshall, that the United States does not need Turkey any longer, is the largest reference to how the U.S. responded to Turkish refusal to join the

\textsuperscript{137} Valley of the Wolves: Iraq, 36:00-37:00.

\textsuperscript{138} Criss, “Turkish Perceptions,” 52.
Iraq War in 2003. The United States had needed Turkey in the past. It needed airbases in Turkey for U-2 reconnaissance flights over the Soviet Union, as a base for nuclear missiles in the Soviet Union, and to prevent Soviet control over the Straits. “Even before 9/11, American geopolitical strategists were overly enthusiastic about Turkey’s utility in strengthening America[n] power in the region…Turkey’s leaders and educated public were—and are—well aware that when the United States government looks at Turkey, it sees a forward base for its military adventures.”\(^{139}\) When the U.S. invaded Iraq, the Turks, viewing this move as lacking in international legitimacy, declined to participate, angering the U.S. “In a broadcasted interview on CNN-Turk, U.S. deputy defense secretary Paul Wolfowitz blamed the Turkish military for not having taken a strong leadership role.”\(^{140}\) He presumably meant to imply that the military should have urged the Turkish state to willingly join the American war effort against Saddam. This attitude ignored the twentieth-century Turkish history of military coups, in 1961, 1973, and 1980, which would likely make the Turks wary of overt military intervention in a foreign policy question.

Alemdar and his accomplices sit quietly at the table and listen through Marshall’s entire monologue. Being the only member of his group who speaks English, Alemdar is the one to reply to the American. His response to Marshall’s oblique references to the previous fifty years of U.S.-Turkish relations is to ignore them. The reply of Alemdar, as written by the screenwriters, is devoid of anything but simple nationalist sentiment and anger at the Americans.

\(^{139}\) Criss, “Turkish Perceptions,” 62.
\(^{140}\) Criss, “Turkish Perceptions,” 63-64.
“I am not a leader of a political party. Nor a diplomat, neither a soldier. I am a Turk, as you pointed out very well. I wreak havoc upon those who put hoods over a Turk’s head! Now, shut up and put this on!”

Alemdar’s much shorter response to Marshall demonstrates the overall attitude of the film. The actual motivation of the Americans in *Valley of the Wolves* is meaningless, from their motivation for being in Iraq to motivation for the smaller, casually sadistic crimes the various American characters commit throughout. Alemdar is making clear the fact that he is uninterested in why the hood event may have happened. It matters that it happened, and that his fellow Turks were grievously insulted by the U.S. troops that day in Suleymaniye. It is for this reason that Akar’s film is one of the clearest examples of a *nationalistic* base film according to Calder’s criteria. While not set in Turkey or at U.S. bases in Turkey, it still reflects attitudes of outrage over the perceived American violation of Turkish sovereignty via the arrest of those soldiers.

Criss explicitly references *Valley of the Wolves* in her essay on the changes in Turkish perceptions of the U.S. Like most commentators on issues of American bases, she gives cultural depictions of those installations and of reactions to American occupations comparatively little attention. She does note, significantly, that the film was generally popular upon its release in 2006. “In just a few months, four million people in Turkey paid to see this movie.” She gives no indication what the critical consensus was among moviegoers, but this is a sizeable number of people. As Michael Idov notes, the film was also a commercial success; he refers to *Valley of the Wolves* as Turkey’s most

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141 *Valley of the Wolves: Iraq*, 37:00-37:20.
142 Criss, “Turkish Perceptions,” 67.
successful action film at the box office, making $28 million. Cultural critic Vecdi Sayar, intriguingly, has argued that The Valley of the Wolves will not, as some people have feared, fuel anti-Americanism in Turkey. He argues that, like the Hollywood films it imitates, it will just allow people in Turkey to let off some steam by harmlessly venting their frustrations over American actions in their region. This is an interesting viewpoint, as Americans depicted in the film are generally unredeemable. Even slightly less terrible American characters are killed by more monstrous American main characters. As Criss notes, “the movie’s success also reveals that a lot of people in Turkey are quite comfortable watching Americans portrayed as monsters—and this perspective is not something that would have been credible to people in Turkey even in the 1990s, let alone during the height of the Cold War.” The popular reception to Valley of the Wolves: Iraq is therefore an excellent cultural barometer to gauge the sharp plummet of U.S.-Turkish relations in the aftermath of the Iraq invasion and especially the hood incident.

Aside from the significance of the Turkish reaction to the film, Valley of the Wolves is also notable for the genuine American presence in its cast. One issue antibase films have faced is finding suitable actors to portray the Americans. This was less of an issue in earlier films, such as Pigs and Battleships and Gate of Flesh, where the American presence was much more of a background element. The three U.S. sailors who rape protagonist Haruko in Imamura’s Pigs and Battleships, for example, when shown singing “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad,” clearly have Slavic accents. By the time of

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144 Criss, 67.
145 Criss, 67.
the Second Expeditionary Era, however, a change occurred in who actually played American roles, which was “the increasing participation of Americans in America-bashing.” Idov is intrigued by this, noting that previously, “the evil Yanks of Valley would have been played, in bad English, by bottle-blond Turks and perhaps a German or two. Now, there’s Zane and Busey.” These two actors perfectly encapsulate the early twenty-first century trend of American villains in foreign films, including the antibase films considered here, being portrayed by American actors. Idov posits that this development is a “byproduct of the globalized film economy. With Turkish studios now more able to compete with Zane’s salary…everyone can get their foreign villains directly from the source.”

147 Idov, 109.
148 Idov, 109.
**The Host** (South Korea, 2006): Environmental Carelessness of U.S. Bases Creates a Literal Monster, Abetted by a Willing “Host”

Similar to Turkey, South Korea hosted a large U.S. base presence during the Cold War, which remained after the end of the conflict. As elsewhere, this presence produced a cinematic reaction. A crucial example is Bong Joon-ho’s 2006 picture *The Host*. His film appears to be a generic monster movie, with a grotesque, computer-animated mutant creature terrorizing the population of Seoul. Similar to the violent revenge fantasy of *Valley of the Wolves*, Hollywood makes such creature pictures regularly in the U.S. However, in this South Korean produced film, behind the monster rampages and screaming citizens lies a complex story of the effect that the American military presence has had on South Korea. In particular, *The Host* demonstrates, better than any other film analyzed here, how American base presences worldwide rely heavily on the acquiescence of local authorities in various host nations to maintain themselves. Americans do not play significant roles in this film, but the U.S. presence is felt in the actions of those South Korean authorities and individuals who spend much of the film working against the interests of the South Korean protagonists.

*The Host* is a product of the mid-2000s, well within Kaplan’s Second Expeditionary Era, although the roots of the U.S. presence in South Korea date to the earliest days of the Garrison Era. The American military arrived in the southern half of the Korean Peninsula at the end of the Second World War, liberating it from Japanese colonial rule, just as the Soviet army arrived in the northern half of the peninsula, defeating the Japanese there. The peninsula remained divided into north and south, with
the Americans and Soviets both placing their own handpicked leaders in power over two new Korean states. In the north, Kim Il-Sung led a Soviet-oriented regime, while Syngman Rhee led an American-oriented regime in the south. Throughout *The Host*, a recurring theme is the notion that the situation in the plot is beyond the control of the South Korean protagonists. They are routinely at the mercy of their native authorities, which, the movie implies, are receiving direction from the American overlords. This theme of imposition reflects a reality present, in Cooley’s estimation, from the founding of South Korea. John Hodge, the American general who arrived in southern Korea to control the region after the war, “allowed a group of landlords and wealthy elites, most of whom had collaborated with occupying Japanese forces, to administer the U.S. occupation.”149 In addition, rather than rely on indigenous leaders to serve in the new government in the south, “Hodge repatriated a small group of Korean conservatives living in exile, the most important of whom was the seventy-year-old, long-term U.S. resident Syngman Rhee. Rhee assumed the first presidency of the South when it was granted its independence in August 1948.”150

In June 1950, North Korea, encouraged by the Soviet Union, invaded South Korea, and U.S. troops rushed back to repel the attack. These troops formed part of a United Nations force, which successfully defended the south against the North Koreans and later the Chinese, until the Korean War ended with a negotiated ceasefire in 1953. After the war, U.S. troops never fully left South Korea, and Seoul signed a defense treaty with Washington in 1953. “Article IV of the agreement granted the U.S. military “the

150 Cooley, 97.
right to dispose land, air, and sea forces in and about the territory of the Republic of Korea,” a clause that amounted to granting full and unrestricted use rights.”151 The U.S. military took full advantage of the basing rights under this pact, with Cooley giving the figure of 60,000 as the number of U.S. troops who remained in Korea after the end of the war. These troops were concentrated in the demilitarized zone (DMZ) north of Seoul, “to deter a North Korean offensive.”152 Aside from these installations, many of which still exist, Cooley references various air bases, missile bases, supply depots and other facilities that the U.S. established throughout South Korea.

The legacy of the Korean War for U.S.-ROK relations went beyond the issue of military bases. The defense agreements between Washington and Seoul also extended to the operation of the South Korean military overall. “Emphasizing the hierarchical nature of the arrangement, the ROK agreed to keep its forces under the UN command of the United States, a command that had been established initially in 1950 for operational purposes.”153 The issue of subordination to the United States in important matters is prevalent throughout Bong’s film, and this subordination was grounded in the structure of the defense relationship between South Korea and the United States. For the next three decades, South Korean leaders, mostly a succession of dictators, exploited the American military presence for their political benefit. They occasionally managed to accomplish this in spite of the subordinate position of the ROK. An example of both success and failure in this regard was the downfall of Syngman Rhee. “Rhee fraudulently won a national election in March 1960, and the victory ignited student protests throughout the

151 Cooley, 99.
152 Cooley, 99.
153 Cooley, 99.
country. Rhee asked for, and received, permission from the U.S. commander to dispatch Korean marines to trouble spots within South Korea, and he declared martial law.”¹⁵⁴ In this case, it is possible to see the culpability of the U.S. military command in Korea, a remnant of the Korean War, in assisting domestic Korean political repression. However, Rhee’s initial crackdown failed to quell the popular unrest, and protests, including in Seoul, only increased. As a result, in April 1960 “the U.S. ambassador and commanding general visited Rhee to demand his resignation, and on April 29 the leader left for exile in Hawaii.”¹⁵⁵ Rhee had used the American presence to his own benefit, but when he was unable to maintain political control, that same presence had a voice in unseating him from power, reinforcing the dominant position of the United States.

The Korean War legacy of U.S. operational command and the massive military presence, coupled with support for undemocratic military regimes in South Korea both contributed to one of the most contentious events in the U.S.-ROK relationship, the Kwangju Massacre. This large massacre, perpetrated on May 27, 1980, was prompted by protests against a coup by Chun Doo Hwan, a general who had replaced the slain former dictator, Park Chung Hee. Despite imposition of martial law, demonstrations continued in the city of Kwangju, prompting a crackdown on May 27, when “Korean Special Forces and Twentieth Division troops swiftly and brutally brought an end to the insurrection, killing 170 by official estimates, a figure that was later revised to 240.”¹⁵⁶ The slaughter reflects the complex way U.S. operational control is perceived, and use of the American presence by South Korean political leaders to justify their actions. “The United States

¹⁵⁴ Cooley, 106.
¹⁵⁵ Cooley, 106.
¹⁵⁶ Cooley, 112.
may not have explicitly authorized the massacre, but it did not take steps to actively block it. ROK commanders notified the United States that they were removing elements of the Twentieth Division from CFC operational command on May 16, and Americans approved their subsequent use in Kwangju.\(^{157}\) This administrative procedure is not proof of U.S. advocacy of or desire for a massacre, yet Chun was quick to draw on the American connection to gain legitimacy. “Radio broadcasts by official ROK media during the crisis stated for propagandistic purposes that the United States had approved the use of ROK Special Forces [in Kwangju], even though U.S. officials vehemently denied granting such permission.”\(^{158}\) Just as Rhee had relied on American allowance to take troops off the line in 1960, Chun relied on the perception that the Americans were in overall control as a veneer of legitimacy. Unlike Rhee, his crackdown brought the situation under his control, leading the U.S. to recognize the coup which brought him to power.

While the Kwangju Massacre itself does not factor into the plot of *The Host* in the way that the real-life Hood Incident is recreated in *Valley of the Wolves*, its contribution to the strain on the U.S.-ROK relationship cannot be ignored. Cooley asserts that during “the democratization era of the 1990s and 2000s, Kwangju became an important narrative and a powerful symbol for mobilizing antibasing activists and anti-American protests.”\(^{159}\) This period, after the overthrow of the last of the military dictators, encompasses the decade when *The Host* was made. Imagery and other visual and aural cues in the film give the consistent impression that the actions of the South Korean authorities are being

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\(^{157}\) Cooley, 112.

\(^{158}\) Cooley, 112.

\(^{159}\) Cooley, 111.
influenced and dictated by offscreen American authorities. This is unsurprising given a history of military dictators explicitly tying the survival of their regimes to the U.S. troop presence. “The presence of U.S. forces in Korea was essential not only for deterring the North but for serving as an internal reminder that the South constantly “needed security” and hence military rule.” By the time *The Host* was released, nearly three decades after Kwangju, the military dictatorships were gone, but the impression remained onscreen that Korean authorities were still attempting to protect the American base presence.

The host nation relationship between the U.S. and South Korea was born out of war, and fostered by the environment of the Cold War, with South Korea in a clearly subordinate position. The U.S.-led UN force did prevent the demise of South Korea at the hands of the North Korean and Chinese communists, yet their continued presence after 1953 provided an invaluable, if often unwitting, crutch for non-communist authoritarian governments in South Korea. This continued until nearly the end of the Cold War. Perceptions of this support, as well as negative perceptions of the UN forces command structure generated by events such as the Kwangju Massacre, provide a basis for nationalist opposition to the American presence under Calder’s rubric. Eventually, South Korea did become less authoritarian. In the early 2000s, Chalmers Johnson described South Korea as “probably closer to a genuine parliamentary democracy than any country in East Asia, but no thanks to the American State Department, the Pentagon, or the CIA. It was the Korean people themselves, particularly the students of the country’s leading universities, who through demonstrations and street confrontations in 1987 finally

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160 Cooley, 108.
brought a measure of democracy to their country.” It was after this post-dictatorship liberalization in the 1990s that The Host was made.

Despite democratization in South Korea after the Cold War, anxieties of subordination to a large, outside power remained, as evidenced by The Host. Nationalist resentments against the American influence over South Korea pervade the film, lending it partial character as nationalist antibase protest. However, it is more blatantly a pragmatic protest against American bases in the country, reflecting specific concerns about impact such facilities have on the environment. The mutant fish monster which is a major antagonist in The Host was created by American pollution in South Korea, loosely based on an actual event in 2000. That event remains only one example of environmental degradation wrought by U.S. bases. In effect, The Host is a reflection of political anxieties regarding subordination to the United States masquerading as a monster movie with a clear environmentalist message. Environmental issues are the surface level conflict, while the plot gradually reveals the deeper anxieties.

Aside from real and imagined support for decades of undemocratic regimes, U.S. military bases in South Korea have a history of causing environmental damage. David Vine, writing in 2015, catalogues an extensive litany of problems generated by toxic materials used and discarded on these bases. “In 2011, underground water at Camp Kim in Seoul had almost a thousand times the allowable level of petroleum hydrocarbon, which includes gasoline and other oil by-products. What’s more, three veterans say they followed orders in the late 1970s to bury hundreds of leaky barrels of Agent Orange at

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161 Chalmers Johnson, Blowback, 25.
the base.” Agent Orange, Vine notes, is documented as being extremely toxic, causing several types of cancer, and is infamous for its use as a defoliant during the Vietnam War. The legacy of burying barrels of the dangerous mixture at Camp Kim is evidenced by the fact that cancer “rates near the base have exceeded the national average by as much as 18.3 percent.” Such American behaviors in South Korea include the specific incident which inspired The Host.

In another case (dramatized in the 2006 film The Host), a soldier at an Army base in the middle of Seoul dumped twenty gallons of formaldehyde—a chemical that causes cancer in some animals and may cause cancer in humans—into the capital’s Han River. After the incident sparked national outrage, the U.S. ambassador in Seoul took five months to express personal regret about the contamination. The Army announced it would spend $100 million to replace fuel tanks at bases throughout South Korea to avoid leaks and improve its environmental reputation.

The dumping of formaldehyde into the Han River in Seoul, while negative in itself, is, as established, only one of many examples of the environmental damage wrought by the U.S. presence in South Korea. This incident’s inspiration of The Host, however, is one of the few times that a film reacting to a base presence is directly referenced in base historiography. Vine references it, as does Calder in Embattled Garrisons. However, neither author treats the film as a significant aspect of opposition to the bases. Calder is especially dismissive of The Host, as well as of the event behind it. The Host, “has a tiny, albeit badly distorted and sensationalized, basis in fact. The director…Bong Joon-ho, claims to have based it on an incident in 2000 in which a mortician with the U.S. military was arrested over a discharge of formaldehyde into the

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162 David Vine, Base Nation, 142-143.
163 Vine, Base Nation, 143.
164 Vine, 143.
Han.”\textsuperscript{165} The lack of total accuracy leads Calder to imply that the movie, and the sentiment behind it, lack serious merit. “Although the incident was unfortunate, there was no lasting pollution—not to mention monsters. Yet the distortions, and the popularity of the film, are a sign of the times.”\textsuperscript{166} This attitude fails to account for the longer history of environmental ‘incidents’ in South Korea caused by American actions, as well as the broader history of Korean subordination in the post-Korean War defense alliance between the two nations. The film itself manages to capture these diverse anxieties simultaneously.

\textit{The Host} opens with a recreation of the dumping of formaldehyde into the Han River in Seoul in 2000. An American mortuary worker at Yongsan Camp orders his Korean subordinate to dump several dozen dusty bottles of formaldehyde down the drain. The subordinate objects to this assignment, warning his American superior that formaldehyde is a toxic chemical, and that there are regulations about dumping such substances. The American is unmoved by his attempts to object, and his concerns that the chemicals will eventually drain into the Han River. When he is told the formaldehyde would drain into the Han, his response highlights this lack of concern. “That’s right. Let’s just dump them in the Han River…The Han River is very broad, Mr. Kim. Let’s try to be broad-minded about this. Mm? Anyway, that’s an order.”\textsuperscript{167} The subordinate, having been given his order, carries it out, pouring dozens of bottles of formaldehyde down the sink. The viewer can clearly see the vapors rising from it. The entire time he is pouring,
the Korean worker is in full medical scrubs, with a breathing mask to block the fumes. Ordering the formaldehyde disposal into the Han River is the most significant action taken by a specific American character in the film. While Americans as individuals are largely relegated to the background for the remainder, they are the inciting incident.

After the dumping of the formaldehyde on American orders in 2000, the film conducts two time skips, meant to demonstrate the long-term impact of this act of pollution. The first jump is to 2002, when two fishermen in the Han notice an odd-looking fish swimming past. It is small enough for one of them to capture in a cup, and they easily identify it as being mutated somehow. The fishermen are startled when the fish bites at one of their fingers, dropping it back into the river. The film then jumps to 2006, the film’s actual release year, and remains there for the remainder. A South Korean businessman, about to commit suicide by jumping off a bridge over the Han, notices something dark moving in the water before letting go of the railing. A short time later, the audience is finally shown the full consequences of the river pollution: a mutated fish monster, with multiple fish tails, legs, and an enormous mouth with rows of sharp teeth. It is able to survive outside the water for extended periods, mainly to hunt. While never explicitly stated, the clear implication from the editing and time skips is that the formaldehyde dumped into the river on American orders led to the mutation of a fish into a terrifying, man-eating monster.

The film’s protagonist, Park Gang-du, who operates a snack stand along the shore of the Han River with his father, is one of the South Korean civilians caught in the initial rampage of the fish monster. Alongside an off-duty American sergeant, he is one of the only people who attempt to fight the monster, winding up splattered with its blood in the
process. His daughter, Park Hyun-seo, is taken alive by the monster to its nest in a sewer drain. The remainder of the film focuses on the efforts of Gang-du, alongside his siblings Nam-joo and Nam-il, and their father, to rescue Hyun-seo. In their efforts to save Hyun-seo, the Park family must work almost entirely on their own. A key aspect of the plot of *The Host* is that for the Parks, the entirety of South Korean society—their society—at various points seems to be working against them. Multiple base commentators note the importance of local authorities in preserving a U.S. base presence in a country. *The Host* depicts a South Korea fully subservient to American wishes. Beyond a cinematic representation of environmental damage, Bong’s film is rather a representation of South Korean subordination to the U.S. more generally. This is shown in how the South Korean authorities treat the Park family, and how the American authorities in the film spread falsehoods about the monster and the threat it represents.

During the initial rampage, Park Gang-du briefly attempted to fight the monster, and he was splattered with the creature’s blood as a result. Because of this, due to fears of contagion from the fluids of the monster, he and his family are separated from the other displaced victims, and quarantined in a hospital. At the hospital Gang-du receives a phone call from Hyun-seo in the monster’s lair, alerting him that she is still alive. When the family attempts to report her survival to the police, they are dismissive. Hyun-seo was listed among the victims, and Gang-du fails to explain the phone call adequately or coherently, or how she might plausibly have survived. With their own local police force unable or unwilling to aid them in retrieving Hyun-seo, the Park family escapes from quarantine to find and rescue her themselves. As a result, they become the targets of a manhunt.
During the time the Park family is under quarantine, as well as after their escape and search for Hyun-seo, the extent of South Korean subordination to the United States, in this instance regarding the handling of the monster situation, becomes obvious. The family patriarch is obliged to give up the bulk of his assets, including his credit cards, to criminals who furnish the family with a truck and several shotguns for use against the monster. Throughout the film, the family watch several segments of South Korean television news. This is the medium through which Bong keeps the audience informed of American actions, particularly U.S. misinformation campaigns and pressure on South Korea to take certain actions in response to the monster crisis. The most significant example is a news report of a virus borne from the creature. “After a thorough examination, U.S. Army medical staff have identified an unknown virus, primarily in body parts that came into contact with the creature.”168 This is the reason why the authorities are intent on keeping Gang-du under quarantine, though he does not exhibit any symptoms of a virus. When a U.S. Army medical official is asked about the virus by the South Korean news, he responds, “I can’t give, uh, any of that information, without the approval of the United States.”169 From the outset of the crisis, the movie firmly establishes an accepted, American-originated narrative regarding the monster, and local media acceptance of it, as well as of American secrecy regarding the matter. In the handling of the crisis, South Korea, as in its defense relationship with the U.S., takes the subordinate role.

169 The Host, 28:48-28:53.
With the Park family on the run, fears that they are possibly carrying a virus lead to an urgency for their recapture. Gang-du is recaptured by the South Korean authorities, immediately after his father is killed by the creature. In order to reinforce the subordination of South Korea more thoroughly, the film cuts from the death of the Park father to a news report regarding the death of the U.S. sergeant who aided Gang-du in fighting the creature, which is treated as a great tragedy. In the same news report, the audience is informed of continuing heavy-handed control of the situation by the U.S. “Meanwhile the U.S. and WHO [World Health Organization], citing the failure of the Korean government to secure the remaining two infected family members, or to capture the creature in question, have announced a policy of direct intervention.”170 Only in light of the history of inequality in the U.S.-South Korea relationship does this news report appear logical. The government of South Korea ‘failed’ to adequately control its own population, in this case the Park family, and now the U.S. will intervene to halt a crisis, which, as the opening of the film indicates, is their own doing to begin with.

While Korean authorities fail to capture Gang-du’s siblings, Nam-il and Nam-joo, the U.S. moves forward with their own plan to eliminate the monster. It is announced on South Korean media that the Americans intend to use a substance called “Agent Yellow” in Seoul to hopefully kill the monster. The name is a clear reference to the more infamous Agent Orange, which was used as a chemical defoliant by the Americans in Vietnam. In addition, Vine noted the incident of U.S. soldiers burying barrels of Agent Orange in South Korea in the 1970s. The commentary on the environmental impacts of the U.S.

presence is very clear. South Korean news reporters describe Agent Yellow in detail, giving the audience insight into how it might work.

Agent Yellow, which has been chosen for use here in Korea, is a state-of-the-art chemical and deployment system recently developed by the U.S. to fight virus outbreaks or biological terror. This extremely powerful and effective system, once activated, completely annihilates all biological agents within a radius of dozens of kilometers.\textsuperscript{171}

The American deployment of Agent Yellow against the creature, while initially presented as uncontroversial, was not met with universal acceptance. The media does report opposition by citizens to the plan.\textsuperscript{172} Despite this, the Americans move forward with dispersing Agent Yellow. This incites massive protests on the banks of the Han where the chemical deployment machine is being readied. The protestors create a barrier between the Han and the device. The advance of the chemical deployment machine to the river is protected by black-clad South Korean riot police. With their black uniforms, boots, and face-obscuring helmets, they resemble SS troops, a visual representation that these authorities are antagonistic. In addition, the word “POLICE” on their uniforms and riots shields is clearly written in English, as well as Korean. This visual cue indicates what these policemen are truly protecting. They are serving as a barrier between the American presence in their nation and their nation’s citizens. The Americans are attempting to fight a monster that they created by releasing even more potentially toxic chemicals. A U.S. base relies on local allies for defense, and the riot police at the climax of \textit{The Host} are the most blatant example of this on film. Significantly, heavily armed riot police with U.S.-supplied equipment holding local protesters back from a U.S.

\textsuperscript{171} \textit{The Host}, 1:07:31-1:07:54.
\textsuperscript{172} \textit{The Host}, 1:07:59.
installation has real-world parallels. David Vine writes of being present at a protest in 2011 at Soto Cano in Honduras, marking the anniversary of the U.S.-condoned 2009 coup. Defending the American presence “a line of police and soldiers was blocking the gate [at Soto Cano], some with equipment marked “U.S.A.” and shields saying police in English.”⁷³ Art imitates life, and while films depicting U.S. bases worldwide may not hew completely to the truth, they are meaningful barometers of sentiment toward U.S. garrisons.

Despite some opposition to American use of further chemical agents, The Host makes a clear statement that not only the institutions of the state, but South Korean society in general, has been bent to serve the dictates of the American occupier. This is conveyed through the subplot of Nam-il, Gang-du’s brother. After Gang-du is recaptured by the authorities, Nam-il and Nam-joo continue to search for Hyun-seo. Nam-il, while avoiding the police, enlists the aid of a friend, a former comrade in the pro-democratization protests of the 1990s, who works as a salaryman for a telecommunications company. Nam-il hopes that his friend can use the company computers to track Hyun-seo’s cell phone in the sewers. Nam-il is able to successfully discern where Hyun-seo’s phone call originated from, and hence where she approximately is. However, his comrade betrays him. He alerted the authorities that Nam-il would come to that building, and attempts to trap him, so that he might collect the reward money for his capture.⁷⁴ This illustrates the depth of penetration of South Korean society by the mandate to safeguard the U.S. presence in the country. While Nam-il and

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⁷³ Vine, Base Nation, 98.
⁷⁴ The Host, 1:13:18.
his friend used to be comrades in the work of democratization, now this is abandoned, as
his friend pursues financial gain by delivering Nam-il to the South Korean authorities,
and by extension the Americans, who had been pressing for the family’s capture.

While the U.S. had, throughout *The Host*, pressed the South Korean state to bend
to its wishes, toward the end of the film it is revealed to the audience that the Americans
have been lying about the nature of the threat. From the earliest news reports on the
creature shown to the audience, to the rationale given for the deployment of Agent
Yellow, the Americans insisted that the creature from the Han River was the carrier of a
deadly new virus. Gang-du and his family were targets for capture due to concerns that
Gang-du’s contact with the monster’s blood had exposed them to the virus. This was
revealed as falsehood in the aftermath of Gang-du’s capture. He is brought to a surgical
operating room, where South Korean doctors examine him and collect tissue samples. All
the time, he insists on telling them that his daughter is alive. An American doctor comes
to inspect Gang-du, and proclaims confidently to his Korean colleague that the virus must
be inside Gang-du’s brain. However, after this pronouncement, the American takes his
colleague aside to tell him the truth.

Now this is strictly confidential. Even among our team, very few know what I’m
about to tell you…The late Sergeant Donald, first one classified as a victim of the
virus, was given an extensive autopsy, and no virus was found. He died of shock
during the operation. Also, no traces of the virus were found in any of the patients
quarantined. Simply put, so far, there is no virus whatsoever.  

Despite the admission by an American that there was no virus, Gang-du is
nevertheless subjected to an invasive medical procedure against his will, presumably to

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find the virus in his brain. After this ordeal, Gang-du makes another escape from his medical captors, going off again in search of his daughter. Significantly, the issue of a virus is never mentioned in the film again, indicating that fears of a virus were either exaggerated rumors or deliberate misinformation. The film implies that the heavy emphasis on the issue of a virus was misinformation. The ending focuses on Gang-du eating dinner with Se-joo, a child who had been trapped with his daughter in the sewer, who survived while she did not. With Hyun-seo dead, the implication is that Gang-du adopted the boy, and is raising him. They are watching the news on television while eating dinner, and the story is a report on the ‘virus incident,’ in which investigative committee of the U.S. Senate determined that “ultimately, the virus was not discovered, and we conclude the cause of the crisis can, and should be wholly attributed to misinformation.”

The film introduces the storyline of the virus, only to conclude that it was a U.S. lie, a fabrication which only served to justify further potentially harmful American action in South Korea. Specifically, the Americans used fear of the virus to press for the necessity of releasing Agent Yellow, despite objections by the South Korean citizenry. Concurrently, no discussion is shown ever being raised in the South Korean media, or even among the characters in the film, regarding the possible origins of the creature. The U.S. was not forthcoming with information on the issue, and the South Korean media never questioned the issue of where the giant man-eating monster in the middle of the South Korean capital might have come from. The audience is privy to the fact that it was American action which led to the creation of the creature, while the characters do not

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176 *The Host*, 1:54:15-1:54:27.
even contemplate this possibility. Much like earlier films critical of U.S. bases worldwide, there is virtually no positive development achieved by the conclusion.

The actions taken by the American and South Korean characters in *The Host* align well with the plotlines of previous films which react to the issues stemming from an American base presence. As previously mentioned, Bong’s film is one of the most compelling depictions of host nation servility to the dictates of the American occupier. The extent of this is remarkable. The film depicts the environmentally irresponsible actions of a representative of the U.S. military in South Korea leading to the creation of a mutated, man-eating fish monster. The monster created in this manner goes on to terrorize the South Korean public, specifically in Seoul. In response, the U.S. and South Korean authorities, preoccupied with the possibility of a virus, place a burden of suffering on ordinary South Koreans. In the film, the suffering of the fictional Park family in the face of uncaring local authorities is the emotional center of the film. Their story is used to indict the complicity of South Korean authorities in abetting and supporting the U.S. presence. This awareness of local complicity places the film in a broader tradition of base film and base scholarship.

American military bases abroad rely on meaningful local support from the governments of host nations. This is well understood by commentators on the issue of basing, as well as by the filmmakers behind several films incorporating the American presences in various countries. The American base at Yokosuka in *Pigs and Battleships* generated a thriving sex business to cater to the urges of the large number of American sailors stationed there. The Americans disapprove of these activities, and therefore Shore Patrol officers are sent to arrest sailors frequenting brothels in the city. The SP men take
the sailors back to base, but they do not act alone. Crucially, squads of Japanese policemen accompany the SP, arresting the Japanese women engaged in prostitution, even though for some their only goal is financial survival. In *Valley of the Wolves*, Alemdar and his accomplices seek retribution against the Americans for the insult of the Hood Incident, the shame of which drove Alemdar’s friend to suicide. The protagonists in Akar’s film must operate alone, as they receive no help from Turkey, or any other nation. Individuals and bureaucracies working in service to American presences over the concerns and objections of their own nation’s citizens is theme again seen in the Romanian film *California Dreamin’* (2007).

In South Korea, relations between the state and the U.S. military presence were clearly mutually beneficial. Dictators like Rhee and Chun were able to wield their connection to the American presence in order cement their rule when challenged by popular discontent. That much is revealed by the history of U.S.-ROK relations in the aftermath of the Korean War. *The Host* provides the other side of the story, how the South Korean state can marshal itself against its own citizens to serve American designs. The U.S. could criticize South Korea’s failure to capture the Park family, and press for the use of Agent Yellow against a nonexistent virus, and the Koreans would bend to this pressure. This blunt messaging is possible due to the simplistic nature of the plot and the general lack of moral ambiguity. Romania’s *California Dreamin’* conveys a similar message regarding the corruption of a host nation to serve U.S. interests, but does this in a much subtler fashion, with a much less sympathetic protagonist.
California Dreamin’ (Romania, 2007): A Subtle Warning on the Consequences of Bases on the Cusp of a New Relationship

The final and most recent film under examination is the 2007 Romanian film California Dreamin’, directed by Cristian Nemescu. Of all the host nations whose films are catalogued here, Romania has the shortest-term relationship with the U.S. Japan, Germany, Turkey, and South Korea all became hosts to American military bases in the mid-twentieth century, in the context of the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War, at the beginning of the Garrison Era. Romania did not host U.S. troops until the 2000s, long after the end of the Cold War and well into the post-9/11 Second Expeditionary Era. It was in this context that Nemescu made California Dreamin’. Significantly, his film draws on likely Romanian perceptions of the U.S., and the “lost opportunity” of greater U.S.-Romanian cooperation at the end of the Second World War. The film was released while the U.S. presence in Romania was very new. It warns, however, of the potential dangers of allowing even a small force of Americans in for a short time, and how such a troop presence has the potential to exacerbate preexisting divisions within Romanian society.

Nemescu’s film is similar to Valley of the Wolves and The Host, while presenting a much subtler argument. Like Valley of the Wolves, it is based on a real event. Like The Host, the film considers the bending of a nation’s bureaucracies, from the national to local level, to the service of a foreign army. The film does not take its real-life inspiration to build a wild revenge fantasy, as Akar did. It does not depict the blatant pressure on a host government of the sort depicted in The Host. Additionally, compared to the other
films considered, Nemescu gives one of the most positive portrayals of American soldiers as individuals. They are not the enthusiastic rapists of *Pigs and Battleships*, nor the psychotic killers of *Valley of the Wolves*. Instead, they are average men, generally easygoing and amiable. That does not diminish the damage wrought by their stay in Romania. The subtle pressure placed upon the Romanian state to accede to American demands in the film, and sparse opposition to interpersonal contact between the American soldiers and the Romanian locals gives the film character as a nationalist antibase protest. The fear it raises over a U.S. troop potentially presence exacerbating preexisting economic and political tensions in the host nation gives the film an extremely interesting nationalist-pragmatist lens of antibase protest.

The beginning of the relationship between Romania and the United States in the postwar period, historically and cinematically, begins with the abandonment of the former by the latter. While not the intention historically, it is perceived as such in Nemescu’s film. Romania was an Axis partner of Germany during World War II, and Romanian troops fought alongside their German, Hungarian, and Bulgarian allies in the Soviet Union. As a result, Romania was targeted by Anglo-American air raids and later directly in the path of the Red Army as they drove Axis forces out of the USSR. In the film, flashbacks inform the audience that the family of Doiaru, the main Romanian protagonist, feared the arrival of the Red Army, expressing hope that Americans would arrive to save them from the Russians. This was *after* the family nearly died at the hands of a U.S. air raid. The expected salvation did not come, historically or cinematically. Prior to the end of the war Churchill and Stalin came to an informal arrangement on postwar division of influence, thereby deciding Romania’s fate. Under this agreement,
“Russia would exercise predominant authority in southeastern Europe, Great Britain would do so in Greece, and the Allies would share responsibility in Yugoslavia.”

Williams asserts that while the U.S. was not party to the initial Anglo-Soviet deal, “Roosevelt went along with Churchill on the need to control affairs in Greece… *Both in fact and in the eyes of the Russians, that committed Roosevelt on the eve of the Yalta Conference to the agreement worked out between Churchill and Stalin.*” In exchange for abandoning Greek communists then engaged in a struggle with Greek monarchists, Stalin was given a freer hand in dealing with southeastern Europe after the war, which included Romania. The United States did not come marching to the aid of Romania, now firmly under Russian control, though not out of malice or a lack of concern.

William Williams is adamant that the U.S. never intended to abandon Romania to Soviet domination after 1945. However, the realities of war forced its hand. While Williams argues that “Roosevelt had *not* abandoned, at the time of his death, the intention of reasserting American power and influence in eastern Europe,” practical considerations overrode this, particularly the need to support the Russians. “It was suggested to him that the United States should file a vigorous protest over the Soviet action early in 1945 of reconstituting the Rumanian Government along pro-Soviet lines. Roosevelt did *not* reply that the basic issue should be forgotten, His position was quite different. *He said merely that the Rumanian episode, because it involved supplies for the Red Army that was still fighting Germany, did not offer the best kind of ground upon*
Roosevelt was not unsympathetic to the plight of Romanians who, while freed from fascist dictatorship, now confronted the communist variety. Nevertheless, to ensure total defeat of the Axis, the Red Army needed to continue fighting against remaining German forces. This reality, coupled with the tacit U.S. acceptance of the Anglo-Soviet power division agreement, and the fact of the presence of the Red Army in Romania at the end of the war, produced a scenario in which American intervention to keep the Soviets out, as imagined by Doiaru’s family, became a pure fantasy.

There were Americans in Romania prior to the end of the war, mainly a small number of intelligence officers, who were wary of the Soviets, but unable to effectively counter them. They included Frank Wisner, who was made the Bucharest station chief of the OSS in September 1944. The Red Army and a small American military mission had seized control in the capital, and Wisner’s orders were to keep an eye on the Russians…he proudly reported to headquarters that he had made a successful liaison with the Soviet intelligence service.” However, the situation quickly turned against the Americans. The Soviets “already had well-placed agents within the OSS, and they quickly infiltrated Wisner’s inner circle of Romanian allies and agents. By midwinter, they took control of the capital, herded tens of thousands of Romanians who had German bloodlines into railroad cars, and shipped them eastward to enslavement or death.”

With that, and the reconstituting of the government to a pro-Soviet orientation, four

\[180\] Williams, Tragedy, 223.
\[182\] Tim Weiner, Legacy of Ashes, 11.
\[183\] Weiner, Legacy of Ashes, 11-12.
decades of communist rule in Romania began. American intentions and intelligence officers were unable to change this state of affairs in 1945 or afterward. Despite these realities, an understanding of *California Dreamin’*, particularly of protagonist Doiaru, is impossible without recognition of this narrative of betrayal and abandonment. Doiaru’s own family was, narratively, imprisoned by the communists because their factory had produced materiel for the Axis war effort.

For the purposes of Nemescu’s film, the Americans dropped out of Romanian affairs altogether after 1945 until the 1990s, when the movie is set. By that time communism had fallen. Nicolae Ceausescu was overthrown in 1989, along with the other communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe, at the end of the Cold War. *California Dreamin’* is explicitly set ten years after this, in May 1999. Similar to *Valley of the Wolves* and *The Host*, the inspiration for Nemescu’s film is grounded in an actual event, specifically a Romanian railway stationmaster delaying the passage of railcars carrying U.S.-NATO equipment for the war in Kosovo. The train was passing through Pielesti on June 3, 1999, when the stationmaster, Florin Patrachioiu, “saw that he did not have all the documents in order, [and] he decided, as head of the station, to keep the transport in place for four hours.”

For Patrachioiu, the issue was adherence to regulation. “The NATO train did not leave Pielesti station until all the documents were in order. I saw clearly that military transport was not cleared through customs…I did my duty and obeyed the law.” The train eventually did pass, but when it passed through his station on the return

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185 Mitrache, “The Oltean stationmaster who stopped the NATO train twice,” Adevarul.
trip after the war in Kosovo had ended, it was delayed again for lack of proper paperwork. Doiaru, the stationmaster character in the film, is clearly based on Patrachioiu. Both halt a train carrying NATO equipment to Kosovo. While both speak of the necessity of following Romanian rail regulations, Nemescu imbues his character, and his obstruction of the American train, with much more symbolic weight.

*California Dreamin’*, while narrowly based on real events, takes many creative licenses with its plot which serve to enhance both the nationalist character of the film, and to highlight the practical realities of an American troop presence entering an already complicated local political scene. Nemescu’s film, more than any other examined here, probes the ways in which local town and country political and economic dynamics can be affected by an American troop presence. In *Pigs and Battleships*, audiences are given a glimpse of this, when Japanese gangsters negotiate with American businessmen on the base for food scraps and expired rations, but the complicated dynamics of the situation are not fully explored, particularly on the American side. In *California Dreamin’*, an understanding of the film, and impact of the Americans, requires some grasp of the local factions in the town of Capalnita where the film is set. At the center of this is Doiaru, who survived American bombing of Romania as a child and is, by 1999, the stationmaster for the rail station in the town. He is a widower, and lives at the station with his daughter Monica. Doiaru makes for an interesting contrast with the Park family in *The Host*, who are genuine innocent victims thrust into a tragedy of largely American origin. Doiaru and the other primary Romanian political characters are much less naïve or innocent.
Within the town of Capalnita at the opening of the film, Nemescu creates three distinct factions, all of whom seek advantage from the arrival of the American train. The first faction is Doiaru, living at the station with his daughter. He is officially the railway stationmaster, while also, it is implied, engaging in black marketeering. Using his position, he steals various items, such as cigarettes, off of freight cars for resale. Additionally, according to workers at the town’s cement factory, Doiaru steals cement from the outgoing factory trains, negatively impacting the factory’s productivity, hastening its financial collapse. He does this out of a desire to drive it to bankruptcy and then purchase it for himself at a cheaper price. The second faction are the unionized workers at the cement factory. Unsurprisingly, they have very low opinions of Doiaru due to his actions against the factory. The third faction consists of the mayor of Capalnita. His position vis-à-vis the other two factions is difficult to ascertain. He is opposed to the workers of the cement factory going on strike on the railroad tracks of the town. They are his constituents as mayor, but it is implied that he deals with Doiaru for the commodities stolen from the trains, including the cement. Nevertheless, Doiaru makes it clear that he holds the mayor in low regard. Between the three factions, there is mistrust and suspicion. When Doiaru’s shift leader at the rail station is told via telephone of the arrival of the Americans, and that they are to be granted free passage, he informs both the union leader and the mayor before informing Doiaru, demonstrating a lack of clear allegiance to a single faction.

The three factions of Doiaru, the factory union, and the mayor all immediately seek to turn the arrival of the Americans to their own ends. When informed of the impending arrival of the Americans, the workers at the factory decide to go on strike on
The railroad tracks. This will block the passage of the Americans, and according to the union leader, increase public exposure of their plight at the hands of Doiaru. The mayor, who was also informed by Doiaru’s shift leader of the Americans’ arrival, opposes this strike, viewing such a hinderance to the Americans as an embarrassment. Meanwhile, Doiaru, who wants the cement factory for himself, wants to avoid exposure of the factory workers’ grievances. He therefore stops the NATO train at his rail station, before it can continue on further down to where the strikers are. Once it becomes clear that Doiaru’s obstinacy regarding proper customs papers for the train, which mask his ulterior motives, will delay the Americans, the mayor seeks advantage from this. Specifically, the mayor is shown to believe the long-term presence of Americans will be beneficial for putting Capalnita “on the map,” leading to potential outside financial investments and similar opportunities.

The factional jockeying for advantage is the dramatic complexity that Nemescu layers on top of the originally simple story of a duty-bound stationmaster conscientiously halting a NATO train for lacking all necessary clearance papers. It gives Doiaru a complexity that the Park family in The Host and the massacred Iraqi bridal party in Valley of the Wolves lacked. It also conveys, better than most of the other films examined, the fact that American base presences never exist in a vacuum. The Japan depicted in Gate of Flesh and the Germany depicted in Europa come close, as they were set in the aftermath of World War II, when the German and Japanese societies were nearly destroyed. The Capalnita of Nemescu’s film, however, is a living town with a status quo of rivalries and interest groups. It is this reality which the American soldiers enter. They are their own interest group, personified by their commanding officer,
Captain Jones, played by American actor Armand Assante. His sole mission is to deliver the NATO equipment on the train, and this forces him to interact with the local interest groups of Capalnita to achieve this.

While the town factional rivalries give the film some of its dramatic tension, nationalist elements are still present, and Doiaru has established reasons for harboring resentment against the U.S. Flashback sequences reveal his childhood survival of a U.S. bombing raid, as well as misplaced family hopes that the U.S. would come rescue them from the Soviets. Doiaru cloaks both his resentment against the Americans and his interest in halting the train from going further behind an appearance of concern with proper paperwork. He is immediately assertive on this point when confronted by Captain Jones. “So, according to the Romanian transportation laws, you need to have custom papers.” Doiaru explicitly ties compliance with the stated Romanian transportation laws with respect for Romanian sovereignty. “This is the legislation. I don’t make legislation. I respect legislation. You come to Romania, you have to respect legislation, too.” At this point that Doiaru notices his daughter being removed from the train. She had attempted to stow away onboard the train and leave home. Given his past, when the Americans “abandoned” his family to the Soviets, seeing his own child abandon him for the Americans no doubt incenses him further, and he loses interest in Captain Jones. His parting words to the U.S. commander at the end of their first encounter simultaneously encapsulates both the nationalist sentiment of the real-life Patrachioiu, as well as the dramatized resentment against the Americans: “Fuck USA! Fuck NATO! Fuck Bill

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186 *California Dreamin’ (Endless)*, directed by Cristian Nemescu (Media PRO Studios, 2007), 29:36-29:43, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cTWCrLz-Bk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cTWCrLz-Bk).
Clinton and those pricks in Bucharest. This is my station. Check point. You need custom papers. You ain’t got them, you ain’t passing through.”

At this point, Doiaru has the train moved off the main track to a small holding track in front of the station, preventing the Americans from going any further. They do not encounter the striking workers on the tracks. This establishes the status quo of the film—the Americans are trapped in Capalnita.

Doiaru’s actions strand a unit of American soldiers in a Romanian town for five days. Nemescu made his film at a time when a larger force of Americans was invited into Romania. Romania joined NATO in 2004, along with several former members of the defunct Warsaw Pact. Introduction of American forces soon followed. “With the New Europe of Poland, Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria, among others—markedly more supportive of Bush administration strategic purposes than the “Old Europe” further west—and with the costs of “New Europe” also being highly competitive, the United States after 9/11 seriously considered a deeper partnership with the new, involving the establishment of new forward-operation locations (FOLs) and training locations in the East.” This was concurrent with the 2003 U.S.-launched Iraq War, which some Western European nations objected to. Those Western European powers had also hosted U.S. forces for decades, with those forces often utilized for extra-European operations.

Eastern European governments did not voice equivalent objections to the Iraq War, and were comparatively more open to an increased American presence. “Both Bulgaria and Romania, in particular, cut deals in 2005-2006 to host American military forces on their

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189 Calder, Embattled Garrisons, 55.
territory, and have been eager to expand the presence of U.S. forces. Bulgaria agreed in March 2006 to host 2,500 American troops at a time…Romania will host 1,500 troops.”\(^{190}\) Nemescu’s film takes place in 1999, prior to these events, but they are relevant. *California Dreamin’* ponders the impact of a dozen American soldiers in a Romanian town for five days. It considers this question as Romania prepared to accept the long-term presence of over a thousand American troops. One avenue through which this issue is explored is the relationship which develops between one of the U.S. soldiers and Doiaru’s daughter, Monica.

While Doiaru is the primary Romanian protagonist, and Jones the principal American, a relevant subplot of the film is the fleeting romantic relationship between an American sergeant, David McLaren, and Monica, Doiaru’s daughter. This relationship is able to develop because the Americans are stuck in Capalnita. It is the most fully developed—and consensual—relationship between an American soldier and a host nation national in any of the films examined here. While there is a comparative lack of rape in the film, to classify this romance as a love story, or view it as the focus of the film, is a clear mistake. Michael Idov takes this view, severely limiting his analysis of the film as a whole. He narrowly focuses on the character of McLaren, who he describes as “one unabashedly adoring, sunshine-and-Coca-Cola American character I have seen in non-Anglophone cinema of the 2000s.”\(^{191}\) While this is true in comparison to Billy Zane or Gary Busey’s characters from *Valley of the Wolves*, or the American medical technicians


\(^{191}\) Michael Idov, “America the Brutiful,” 108.
from *The Host*, it ignores McLaren’s faults in the context of Nemescu’s film, and the problems of interpersonal relationships in a U.S. military presence-host nation context.

While not as violent as other encounters between American soldiers and local women, both onscreen and off, David and Monica’s relationship is fraught from the beginning. The first issue is the language barrier. David does not speak Romanian, and Monica does not speak English. Initially, they must rely on one of Monica’s high school classmates to translate their conversations for them. This particular classmate is himself infatuated with Monica, leading him to intentionally mistranslate between her and David. This is insufficient to prevent David and Monica from copulating during the course of a house party thrown by several of Monica’s more popular classmates. It is an explicit sex scene, more than any other film examined, including topless nudity and the implication of a mutual orgasm on the part of the two participants. Their intimacy is tied to the second, and much more important complication of their relationship—David’s infidelity. The opening scene of the entire film is David attempting to call his American girlfriend from the port of Constanta, where he just arrived in Romania. He makes a subsequent attempt to call this paramour later in the film. So, while David is not a rapist, like many other American servicemen depicted in these films, he is a philanderer. He engages in sexual acts with Monica, who will remain in Romania long after he has left for his mission, and returned to the U.S. Far from being a love story, David and Monica’s relationship represents the worst possible aspects of intimate interpersonal relationships between American soldiers in far-flung stations and locals. Americans may eventually leave, leaving heartbreak and abandonment in their wake.
There is also a potential underlying nationalist message embedded in David and Monica’s relationship. The historical context in the world of the film is predicated on the abandonment of Romania, specifically Doiaru’s family, by the Americans in 1945. Even after suffering through American bombing in 1944, Doiaru’s family did not abandon hope that the U.S. would rescue them from the Soviets. This hope was later proven to be unfounded. It is unclear what Monica expected from her liaison with David other than physical intimacy, but one possible viewing of the film is that her relationship with a philanderer, who will doubtless leave the village, leaving behind a bitter legacy, is a warning of history repeating itself, with a new generation of Romanians putting ill-placed faith in the Americans. This interpretation is strengthened by a small, but significant narrative choice on the part of Nemescu. At the same time that David and Monica are engaged in sex, there is an explosion at the office of the Romanian Foreign Minister. The audience is later informed that it was an unexploded bomb from the Second World War. With how the film is edited, the explosion appeared to take place at the moment when David and Monica achieved mutual climax in their intercourse. The Americans had returned to Romania, yet the remnants of an unpleasant legacy remained.

Doiaru certainly has a negative reaction to David and Monica’s relationship, which has very blatant nationalist undertones. Similar to how he noticed Monica being taken off the train during his first meeting with Jones, Doiaru happens to notice her embracing David when he is meeting with the Romanian Foreign Minister. The Foreign Minister is attempting to persuade Doiaru to allow the American train to pass, even in the absence of the correct customs papers. In itself, this is another clear example of nationalist protest. While less blatant than U.S. pressure on the South Korean government
in *The Host*, the Foreign Minister’s visit is an indicator of how the Romanian state is invested in ensuring that the needs of an American military force are met. Doiaru storms out of the meeting to confront David, expressing his frustrations at the Americans as he does. “You go woo women in your own fucking country! No one’s getting out of here! Not you, not the Americans, no one! You’re all staying here with me!”192 The concern with customs papers in almost entirely absent, and Doiaru appears to be primarily influenced by his personal grudge against the Americans for their actions—more precisely inaction—at the end of the war. He could not rely on the Americans in 1945, and does not want his daughter with one in 1999.

The nationalist-pragmatist message that the U.S. is potentially untrustworthy is much more pronounced in the relationship between Jones, the American commander, and the mayor of Capalnita. Doiaru represents one interest group in the village, while the unionized workers at the cement factory represent another. The mayor by himself essentially formed a third interest group. He, like Doiaru and the factory workers, is very interested in how he can exploit the arrival of the Americans in Capalnita to his advantage. After Doiaru detains the NATO train, and word begins spreading around the village that American soldiers are at the rail station, the mayor responds by calling a town meeting. He urges the villagers to be as welcoming as possible to the American soldiers, and hints at many potential benefits that this unexpected visit might produce. “As far as village affairs go, the arrival of the Americans can only bring us all good tidings. Because if we make it into the news, we will draw new investors to our village…Not to mention that our guests are also potential investors. We will welcome them into our pubs and our

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hotels. And we will benefit from all of this.” The mayor, of course, can claim a large share of the credit should his predictions come to pass, which can potentially benefit him financially, electorally, or both.

The mayor attempts wooing the Americans, trying to impress them with his village, as soon as it is clear that Doiaru fully intends to hold them in Capalnita indefinitely. He begins by hosting a large party celebrating the 100th anniversary of Capalnita’s founding. The village by this point had already celebrated its anniversary, but the mayor hosts another, grander party, all as part of an attempt to impress the Americans. It seemingly begins to work, and many of the American soldiers express a desire to attend the event. Jones allows them to go, even attending the party himself on the advice of David. While it celebrates the anniversary of the village, the party definitely has an American aesthetic. The welcome banners are written out in English, the stage is decorated with paintings of the American presidents, from Washington to Clinton. The mayor even hired a Romanian Elvis impersonator to sing “Blue Suede Shoes.” The party does serve as a pleasant atmosphere to introduce the Americans to the village at large, but it is unclear how it increases interest in Capalnita, or serves to bring in meaningful outside investment. Jones attends the party out of courtesy, but it is clear that he is only interested in delivering the NATO equipment on the train in accordance with his deadline. The factory workers stage a protest at the party to raise awareness of their failing business, which they blame on Doiaru. The mayor defuses the situation, inviting them to join the public meal, and assuring the Americans that there is nothing amiss.

The anniversary party fails to either increase positive notoriety for Capalnita or woo the Americans as potential business investors. The Americans are soldiers who are simply fulfilling a mission, yet the mayor treats them as a business opportunity. Even after the village anniversary party, he attempts to court favor with them, with his next major attempt being much more direct. The mayor takes Jones and several of his soldiers by van to a hotel, where he treats them to dinner and a stage show. The stage show and the greeting both involve numerous scantily-clad women, who blatantly flirt with the Americans during dinner. The mayor is likely emphasizing the positive amenities that his village has to offer, with the main attraction used to get the attention of the Americans being women. This is unsurprising, as almost every film reviewed here shows that American soldiers in an overseas posting will seek out the company of the local women. Despite this blatant attempt at manipulation, Jones remains unmoved. Armand Assante’s performance brilliantly captured how irritated and restless the captain is throughout the dinner, as he is uninterested in festivities, being fixated on his mission. This fixation leads Jones to become an interest group unto himself, engaging in the local political dynamics just to get what he wants.

Jones is completely uninterested in the complex relationships which exist in Capalnita between Doiaru, the factory workers, and the mayor. For him, they are obstacles to be overcome in his mission to deliver his train’s cargo on schedule, to support the NATO war in Kosovo. Much like with the real-life Patrachioiu, the Romanian state, despite American entreaties, is unable to force Doiaru to allow the American train through his station. For a time there is even confusion in Bucharest, as the Foreign, Defense, and Transportation Ministries are all uncertain who has the
bureaucratic authority to insist that Doiaru allow the train to pass. Eventually, the Foreign Minister is sent personally by the Romanian Prime Minister to meet with Doiaru, telling him to let the train through. Doiaru flatly refuses, as the minister has brought a commission from the prime minister, but not the necessary customs papers.

“Commissions don’t mean a thing to me. You know as well as I do that the law’s the law.” The minister leaves, without even seeing Jones, with nothing but vague commitments that he will return. In order to get the train out of the Capalnita station, Jones can only rely on himself, manipulating the mayor to achieve this.

Jones, from the beginning of his enforced presence in Capalnita, attempted to convince Doiaru to let the train pass without the proper documents. He tries offering Doiaru a cash bribe in U.S. dollars to convince the stationmaster to let the train through. This fails, as Doiaru refuses to take the bribe, seeming to take offense that the American officer thought he could easily be bought. After the mayor has thrown the village-wide party for the Americans, Jones visits Doiaru in his apartment above the station office. Once again, Jones tries coaxing the stationmaster to allow for his departure. Despite some forced pleasantries and the gifting of a cigar, Doiaru is unmoved. Concurrently, Jones is failing to fulfill his mission, his purpose for being in Romania. He is left to sit on the train, or to participate in the mayor’s schemes to impress him and the soldiers he commands. While the mayor’s endeavors do not impress Jones, he appears intrigued by the mayor when he confides to him, via translator, that he, and much of the rest of the village, view Doiaru unfavorably. This is a wedge that Jones successfully manipulates to

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align himself with the mayor, pit him and his supporters against Doiaru, and create the opening he needs to extricate himself from Capalnita and continue his mission.

Jones exploits the opportunity to create division in Capalnita when the mayor resignedly confides to the American commander that Doiaru is unpopular, but powerful to confront. While the mayor had concealed the extent of his bitterness toward Doiaru up to this point, he begins to loudly complain about the stationmaster, as the translator attempts to convey this to Jones. “The state this village is in, it’s all his fault…But we’re scared. That’s it…Who’s got the guts to pick a fight with him?…Others tried, too, and they got their faces pounded in…The police are on his side.” Having the police allied with him is likely what allows Doiaru to carry out thefts from the trains and his black marketeering, which, if the workers in the film can be believed, is driving the cement factory to financial ruin. The mayor and his supporters are insufficient to counter this. That is, until a force of American soldiers arrive in Capalnita by train. The mayor of a Romanian town is depicted as attempting to recruit American troops to further the cause of defeating a local Romanian bureaucrat and businessman. He believes that he can convince this foreign military presence to serve his own domestic ends. Rather than reject this plan, Jones cynically views it as an opportunity.

The American commander publicly goes along with the mayor’s plans to enlist American help in moving against Doiaru. Jones has a final talk with Doiaru over dinner, though it does not result in passage for the Americans. Afterwards, Jones agrees to meet with the mayor, later going with him to address a town meeting. The mayor and the

factory union leader both occupy the stage, and the mayor openly denounces Doiaru in front of the assembled villagers. He proceeds to bring Jones, and his translator, up to address the crowd. Jones is not shown to be adept at public speaking, but he clearly joins the mayor in denouncing Doiaru. It is unclear what exactly he tries to tell the Romanian villagers, except for the vague belief that Doiaru’s actions constitute a form of ‘disrespect.’ This is something he exhorts the townspeople to fight against.

What if all of us, what if all of us here, right now, could stand up right now and be united as one? Just united as one. I’ll tell you what. We could defeat the repression, okay. We could defeat the tyranny. We could defeat the Doiarus of this world. Right. Defeat the disrespect! The disrespect! And be united, as God intended us to be! As God intended us to be! United as one! United!196

The mayor, the union leader, and the union members lead the larger crowd of townspeople into a chant of “United,” and general applause at Jones’s words. Assante’s performance perfectly conveys awkwardness with public speaking and passionate emotion. Jones embraces the mayor onstage, and the crowd continues to chant about unity.

The mayor’s plans for using the Americans went beyond impassioned rhetoric. Since the police chief in Capalnita was in league with Doiaru, the mayor wanted the American soldiers to actually join a fight between the Capalnita police and a combination of the factory union workers and any other supporters of the mayor. Jones is adamant that the Americans cannot instigate any sort of firefight with the Doiaru-aligned police. However, he assures the mayor that “if his police fire as much as one round, one round,

we’re your first line of defense.” Jones thereby commits his troops to aiding the union-mayor combination against Doiaru. They mayor and his allies put their faith in the Americans to assist them, just as the Doiaru family put their faith in the U.S. to save them from the Russians in 1945. In the event, their faith was just as misplaced as that of the Doiarus.

At the same time that Jones is plotting against Doiaru with the mayor, the Foreign Minister and a representative of the Romanian national railway arrive to give the correct customs papers to the stationmaster. They also inform Doiaru that he will be removed from his position after the passage of the American train is concluded. When the Americans are informed, they make ready to leave immediately. However, the mayor’s plan is already in motion. Doiaru’s subordinate, who has been a mole for the union for the duration of the film, informs Doiaru that the villagers captured a group of “gypsies” who have allegedly been stealing from the trains. This motivates Doiaru to call his allied cops and assorted other muscle to exact vigilante justice on them. When the mayor-union forces meet Doiaru’s forces in the streets, the situation devolves into a fight. Men begin clubbing each other with sticks, the police arrive with at least one automatic rifle, and a police vehicle is set on fire with a Molotov cocktail. The mayor ordered one of his subordinates to call up the Americans to assist. The Americans, of course, did not come, and the mayor himself was reduced to cowering behind a barricade. The fight ends in the early hours of the morning, as the American train rolls away from Capalnita. Doiaru is stabbed, dying in the street in front of his daughter.

197 California Dreamin’, 2:16:00-2:16:07.
Despite promises made to give aid to one side of a small village dispute, the Americans, led by Jones, abandon the town and people of Capalnita as soon as they are able to continue with their mission, delivering NATO radar equipment to Kosovo. A text card at the end of the film informs the audience that the equipment on the delayed train was set up after NATO negotiated a ceasefire with the Serbians in Kosovo, ending the war, thereby rendering the equipment, and the mission to deliver it, redundant. Therefore, in hindsight, the entire plot of the movie, and efforts by Jones to expedite his departure, were meaningless. The epilogue of the film is set in 2004, with Monica attending college in Bucharest. Little dialogue is exchanged, and the film ends abruptly. Much like the other films examined here, the resolution cannot be considered ‘happy’ for parties involved. Just as Haruko lost Kinta at the end of Pigs and Battleships, Mume had to leave behind her classmates at the end of MacArthur’s Children, and Leopold lost his own life at the conclusion of Europa, Monica loses her father in a street brawl. The American occupations, or military missions in these respective films carry on, uninterrupted, unaffected by the human tragedies occurring in their shadows.

*California Dreamin’* demonstrates, better than any of the other films examined, the sheer complexity of problems which arise from an American military presence in a foreign nation. It is a very subtle example of pragmatic antibase protest put to film. The Americans as individuals are relevant to the plot, much more than in Pigs and Battleships or Gate of Flesh, where they nearly fade into the background. However, the more important aspect of the film is how the arrival of a foreign military presence immediately alters its surrounding environment, in this case the village of Capalnita. The Americans, by their presence and the actions of their commander, inflamed the preexisting animosity.
between the stationmaster Doiaru and his rivals, the cement factory union and the mayor. This escalated to violence, which the Americans avoided entirely, boarding their train to continue their mission. Explosions resulting from the fight accidentally set off fireworks, and the Americans thought this was a friendly send-off, rather than the town’s descent to anarchy and violence. The Americans also left behind several disappointed young women who hoped the soldiers would take them to the U.S. David leaves as well, likely never seeing Monica again.

In a specifically Romanian context, Nemescu’s film is a consideration of the risks which accompany allowing American soldiers into the country. The flashbacks which tell the story of Doiaru, how the U.S. did not come to save his family in 1945, are a parable that the U.S. cannot be relied upon to provide salvation from a problem. This experience leaves Doiaru bitter against the Americans, and explains his hostility towards them in the film. However, the other factions in the village have not imparted this lesson. The union and the mayor both look to how the American presence in Capalnita can benefit them. The union wants greater media exposure for their grievances, which they believe the Americans can provide. The mayor wants to attract the Americans as potential business investors, or as a draw for other investors. Seeing Doiaru as an obstacle to their goals, the union and the mayor believe they can recruit the Americans to remove Doiaru for them by force. However, as soon as the train is cleared for passage, there is nothing to keep the Americans in Capalnita; they have a mission to accomplish. They therefore abandon the Romanian factions who had counted on their support to a fight against their neighbors. Just as Romania was abandoned to the communists in 1945, so Capalnita was abandoned to anarchy by a small group of Americans in a fictional 1999.
As in the case of *Valley of the Wolves* and *The Host*, the real-life incident which inspired *California Dreamin’* is exaggerated for the sake of dramatizing the plot. Florin Patrachioiu, when asked why he stopped the real-life NATO train in 1999, responded that it was out of sense of duty to follow Romanian railway regulations. Nemescu gives much more complex motives to his characters. Doiaru is a complicated, flawed character. He is undoubtedly corrupt, seemingly unlike his real-life counterpart, and his obsession with rail regulation is mask for the bitterness he holds toward the Americans and his own selfish interests. Nevertheless, he was a widower and a father who was killed in a street fight against his own countrymen over an economic and village political squabble. His character was imperfect, yet ultimately emblematic of the central thesis of the film, that the Americans were unreliable, and that it was misguided to trust them.

The director of *California Dreamin’*, Cristian Nemescu, died in an automobile accident as the film was being edited. This makes his views of the film, and of the response to it, difficult to ascertain. Suzuki gave interviews on *Gate of Flesh* decades after its release; that is impossible with Nemescu. Despite this, it is easy to infer the influence of the impending U.S. troop presence at the time of the film’s production. Romania had agreed to host 1,500 U.S. soldiers for an indefinite duration; Nemescu depicts the chaos incited by one American captain after five days in Romania. Romania also supported the U.S. in other ways during the Second Expeditionary Era, sending over 700 soldiers to fight in the American-instigated Iraq War.198 Such support did not diminish after the release of *California Dreamin’*; rather it increased. In 2009, while the Iraq War was nearing its end, Romania increased its commitment to the American-led

198 Idov, “America the Brutiful,” 108.
NATO war in Afghanistan. “They agreed to boost their Afghanistan contingent from 962 to more than 1,500—even as Romania’s economy is suffering and defense spending is being cut.” At the same time, “Washington agreed to place missile-defense technology in the country [Romania], enhancing the Romanians’ sense of security.”

“To the Romanians, participation in the Afghan mission is a good way to demonstrate their bona fides as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and as an ally of the United States, two relationships they believe will deter any aggressive moves by their old East Bloc overlord, Russia.” Romania’s historical experience of Soviet invasion and imposed communist dictatorship give it valid reasons for distrusting Russia and desiring security guarantees from the West. Despite the firm support given to the U.S., Nemescu implies through his film that such loyalty is not reciprocated on the American side.


200 Perry, “Romania shows its support.”

201 Perry, “Romania shows its support.”
Conclusion: A Base Blight on the Big Screen

The study of foreign films depicting U.S. military installations is a valuable window into attitudes about these bases. The seven films reviewed here should not be considered a complete catalogue of non-U.S. films depicting the American military. Nevertheless, they are drawn from multiple sources, from multiple decades, providing a reasonable sample of attitudes toward the specific phenomenon of military basing, or an American troop presence, upon which conclusions can be drawn. The stories told via these films, and attitudes expressed, are endless. However, in spite of the vastly different settings and time periods of these films, there are clear continuities. This reflects common, shared anxieties about a U.S. base presence and the potential for problems arising from these installations. This is unsurprising given the breadth and endurance of the U.S. bases worldwide. Bases give disparate nations a common historical experience. Based on Calder’s criteria as defined in Embattled Garrisons, these films generally represent nationalist or pragmatic protest against U.S. bases. Between those two, pragmatic concerns are predominant. The films generally depict the practical ways in which American military bases can disrupt the lives of those living near them. This is true of both Garrison and Second Expeditionary Era films.

These films are not literal chronicles of what takes place outside the gates of U.S. bases around the world, but they do allow for an examination of how these installations are perceived, for good or ill. Commentators such as Calder and Idov dismiss the more critical films discussed here, criticizing the dramatizations that filmmakers such as Akar or Bong use. This interpretation defeats the utility of examining the films as primary
sources. A film such as *Valley of the Wolves* or *The Host* exaggerates the actual events of U.S. soldiers arresting Turkish troops, or American morticians polluting the Han River in Seoul, to make a much larger point about loss of national sovereignty or dignity vis-à-vis an American military presence. Once these films are situated in their appropriate historical context, it is possible to approach them critically, and appreciate that they are a comparatively harmless space for critiquing matters of profound importance to various host nations. These critiques focus on the realities, as they are perceived, of the effects of the U.S. military presence, without criticizing the United States itself, or Americans more generally.

While the trend of these films is to be harshly critical of bases, they are not necessarily anti-American. Most criticize the specific issues spawned by a base or military presence, without demonizing all American characters, or even having American characters. *Valley of the Wolves* is unequivocally anti-American, with American characters uniformly shown as killers, torturers, and thugs. It was produced, however, by a nation which had recently objected to its NATO ally’s war in neighboring Iraq, and which had suffered the indignity of having its soldiers arrested on camera by an allied military. *Gate of Flesh* is harshly critical of the American presence in Japan, but it does not depict all Americans as brutes and rapists. Americans are relegated to the background in both *Pigs and Battleships* and *MacArthur’s Children*, with the exception of the rape scene in the former. In contrast, *California Dreamin’* depicts Americans as amiable individuals with no real malice. Jones manipulates the villagers of Capalnita, not due to ill intent, rather as a means to complete his mission. In *The Host*, an American sergeant aids Gang-du in fighting the fish monster—created from American action—later dying of
his injuries. The films criticize specific American actions, or consequences resulting from U.S. bases generally. To consider them anti-American would be an oversimplification. The targets of their ire are much more specific, and often much more local.

American bases and American troop presences are not the only subjects criticized in the films considered here. The lowly officials and authority structures of the host nations themselves, as well as everyday citizens of those nations, are also regarded unfavorably in these films. Local forces and local actors are seen, not without reason, as abettors of the occupation of a given host nation by a foreign army. These attitudes are evident in both eras of U.S. basing post-1945, thus highlighting how these U.S. occupations could not succeed without continuous support of native allies keeping the local populace in check. This is demonstrated when American Shore Patrol officers and Japanese police jointly raid a brothel at the opening of *Pigs and Battleships*. The Americans arrest their sailors, dragging them back to base, while the police arrest the Japanese prostitutes and take them to jail. In a more extreme example, the South Korean government spends a majority of *The Host* hunting a family of their citizens so U.S. doctors can examine them for a virus which does not exist. Riot police are dispatched to protect the machines which will release toxic chemicals to combat a fish monster created by an American release of toxic chemicals. This is done because Americans deemed it to be necessary, and the cinematic South Korean state allowed it to happen.

Given the continuing reality of U.S. military bases worldwide, examining responses to such installations remains relevant. Once a nation agrees to host American military forces, it is rare that they are permanently forced out. A notable exception was the eviction of American bases from Libya after Qaddafi came to power. The Philippines
ejected the U.S. from Clark Air Base and the Subic Bay naval base in 1992, but they soon returned. A new Visiting Forces Agreement, signed in 1998, allowed U.S. troops back into the Philippines. After 9/11 and the opening of Kaplan’s Second Expeditionary Era, the Philippines became a more willing defense partner. “Philippine president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo immediately offered overflight rights and the use of Subic Bay and Clark to international coalition partners for the Afghanistan campaign.” U.S. forces left Saudi Arabia in 2003, after the U.S. acquired additional bases in the Middle East. American bases are resilient, and protest movements, either genuine, or instigated by parties outside a host nation, have failed to dislodge them in a majority of cases. The films analyzed here represent an invaluable glimpse into how bases are perceived, especially in host nations with longstanding defense relationships with the United States and a sizable U.S. presence. It is possible for them to remain relevant long after their release.

The films analyzed here cannot be taken literally, and they certainly do not predict the future. These films do not depict actual events, at least without gross exaggerations. However, the concerns chronicled in them remain extremely valid. When three U.S. servicemen gang-raped a twelve-year-old Okinawan girl in 1995, it prompted an enormous backlash and mass popular outrage on the island, with many denouncing the U.S. base presence and the pragmatic consequences thereof. The 1995 rape occurred over thirty years after Imamura released Pigs and Battleships and Suzuki released Gate of Flesh. Both depict the gang-rape of a Japanese woman at the hands of American

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202 Cooley, Base Politics, 86.
203 Cooley, 87.
servicemen. That is not directly related to the 1995 incident, and the films do not claim to
be based on actual events. Nevertheless, they reflect the concern that the large American
presence in Japan may lead to violence against Japanese women. Such violence had
occurred prior to the release of both movies. The numerous real-life incidents after those
films were released demonstrate that those concerns were well-founded, and remain
unaddressed. The Host depicts a South Korea which is servile to the wishes of the U.S.
military. The fictitious nature of the mutant fish monster aside, this reflects the
historically-rooted hierarchical defense relationship between the two nations. The films
cannot be considered chronicles of interactions between American soldiers and local
citizens of host nations. However, can be considered outlets for host nation fears,
grounded in the realities of having masses of foreign soldiers in their cities and towns,
inextricably woven into their everyday lives.
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