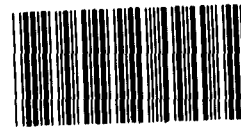


January 1993

# FORCE STRUCTURE

## Issues Involving the Base Force



148396

---

---



United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

---

**National Security and  
International Affairs Division**

B-251846

January 28, 1993

The Honorable Sam Nunn  
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate

The Honorable Ronald V. Dellums  
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services  
House of Representatives

This report discusses the key defense policy choices underlying the Department of Defense's proposed Base Force. It also cites five key policy issues that decisionmakers must consider in deciding on the size and composition of U.S. military forces. These issues provide a framework for debating force structure issues in the coming months and years. We are providing this information because we believe that it will be useful to the Congress and the new administration in assessing future defense requirements, but we are making no recommendations.

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Defense and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. We will also make copies available to others upon request.

This report was prepared under the direction of Paul F. Math, Director, Research, Development, Acquisition, and Procurement Issues, who can be reached on (202) 275-4587 if you or your staff have any questions. Other major contributors are listed in appendix I.

Frank C. Conahan  
Assistant Comptroller General

---

# Executive Summary

---

## Purpose

The dissolution of the Soviet Union has touched off a national dialogue on the appropriate level of future defense spending. In a January 31, 1992, testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, the Secretary of Defense described the Base Force as the Department of Defense's (DOD) response to the end of the Cold War and as the force necessary to protect U.S. interests in an uncertain world. A number of congressional leaders and the incoming administration have proposed reductions in defense spending that could entail a smaller military than the Base Force.

GAO undertook this assignment to assist the Congress in assessing future defense requirements. GAO's objective was to examine the key defense policy choices underlying DOD's proposed Base Force.

---

## Background

Beginning in the late 1940s, the goal of containing the former Soviet Union was the key factor determining U.S. military strategy, the kinds of forces the United States programmed and deployed, and the missions the United States assigned and trained its forces to carry out. No global threat exists today that could similarly serve as the basis for U.S. military strategy and force planning. Instead, DOD believes that threats to U.S. interests are now essentially regional, requiring a new strategy and a range of different types of forces.

The "Base Force" is DOD's term for the force structure it has proposed for the post-Cold War era. Planning for it began in late 1989 in recognition of the decline of Soviet power and reduced defense budgets. A lower defense budget associated with the Base Force was incorporated in the Budget Enforcement Act of November 1990. Compared to force structure levels in 1990, by fiscal year 1995, the Base Force plan would reduce the Army from 28 to 20 divisions and the Air Force from 36 fighter wing equivalents to 26.5. By fiscal year 1997, the Base Force plan would reduce the Navy from 547 ships to 435, including a reduction of 3 carriers, and the Marine Corps from an end strength of 197,000 to 159,000. The Base Force is organized into four force packages—strategic, Atlantic, Pacific, and contingency forces.

---

## Results in Brief

The Base Force, in DOD's view, is the force necessary to shape the international security environment so that threats to U.S. national interests do not emerge and if they do, to deter potential aggressors and respond decisively in the event of major conflict. Although conventional force levels in the current Base Force were originally formulated prior to the

---

dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Secretary of Defense has stated that they fully reflect the current international security environment.

DOD's force structure decisions stem from assumptions regarding national interests, threats, contingency requirements, military doctrine, and risk. The Base Force is predicated on the capability to deter and defend against uncertain threats in regions critical to U.S. interests, including Europe, Southwest Asia, and the Pacific, the need to be able to respond to more than one contingency at a time, wars in which armor is emphasized, and a desire to minimize the potential for military reversals.

In the relative absence of immediate military threats to U.S. interests, it is not clear how the United States should compare itself militarily to other major countries. GAO cites five key policy issues that decisionmakers must consider in determining the size and composition of U.S. military forces. These issues provide a framework for debating force structure issues in the coming months and years.

---

## Principal Findings

### The World Has Changed Since the Base Force Was Formulated

Senior DOD officials state that, while the dissolution of the Soviet Union has resulted in a further reduction of the Base Force's nuclear forces and the formulation of a new defense acquisition strategy, conventional force levels should not be reduced below the Base Force levels because they were based on assumptions that fully anticipated changes in the international security environment. For example, during the Secretary of Defense's January 31, 1992, appearance before the Senate Armed Services Committee, he stated that the Base Force was predicated on four assumptions about the future: (1) the United States would see continued arms reductions and democratic progress in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; (2) security ties among democratic states would continue; (3) regional tensions, heightened by weapons proliferation, would continue in areas of great concern to the United States; and (4) the United States would not have to undertake any significant commitment of forward-deployed forces.

The Secretary said that during 1990 and 1991, two of the four assumptions were placed in doubt by the coup in the former Soviet Union and by the war with Iraq. He said that these events could have forced DOD to halt the

glide path that it was following toward achieving the force structure levels of the Base Force. However, because developments eventually turned positive, the assumptions DOD originally used to derive the Base Force are being realized. In response to questions during the same testimony, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said that, while DOD did not specifically plan forces in anticipation of the “breakup” of the Soviet Union, it did recognize that the country could evolve into a federation or a commonwealth.

In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD noted that the 1992 National Military Strategy characterizes the Base Force as dynamic, and as potentially “reshapeable” in response to further changes in the strategic environment. Nonetheless, the 1992 Joint Military Net Assessment, as well as testimonies by senior DOD officials in 1991 and 1992, describes the Base Force as the minimum force capable of meeting enduring U.S. defense needs.

---

### The Base Force Revolves Around Five Critical Policy Choices

GAO’s interviews with DOD officials, defense experts in the academic community, and former senior DOD officials indicate that a broad analytical framework exists that can be used to assess U.S. military requirements. Although budgetary and political considerations play a large role in driving DOD force structure proposals, this framework is evident in DOD’s planning processes—the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System and the Joint Strategic Planning System. It constitutes five critical policy issues regarding U.S. defense, including

- the nation’s interests;
- potential threats to those interests;
- the strategy for countering these threats, including the size, nature, and number of contingencies that the United States should be prepared to engage in at any one time;
- the ways that military doctrine will be defined in the future; and
- the level of risk the nation is prepared to take in not being able to protect its vital interests.

The specific assumptions that DOD is currently making on each of these issues underlie its Base Force proposal. As a result, such assumptions can be used to examine the Base Force and to compare it to alternative perspectives on U.S. defense policy.

The President's 1991 National Security Strategy Report and DOD's 1992 National Military Strategy defined U.S. national interests as the survival of the United States as a free and independent nation, a healthy U.S. economy, a secure world, and cooperative relations with allies and friendly nations. These documents express continued U.S. commitment to the security of allied and/or friendly nations in Europe, the Pacific, the Middle East (including Southwest Asia), and Latin America. They define U.S. national objectives to include, among others, defeating aggression against the United States and its allies, ensuring U.S. access to markets, and promoting regional balances of power.

Although threats to U.S. national interests are currently low as a result of the end of the Cold War and the defeat of Iraq, DOD believes that the United States still faces a dangerous albeit unpredictable future and thus needs to retain a robust, though much reduced, military. In DOD's view, only a strong military can deter and defend against potential adversaries, as well as promote stability, so that future threats to U.S. interests are prevented from emerging in the first place. DOD describes the Base Force as being consistent with its new regional defense strategy, which centers on strategic deterrence and defense, forward presence, crisis response, and reconstitution, and as possessing the capability now needed to counter potential threats.

According to the 1992 National Military Strategy, DOD derived force structure requirements by assessing the military capabilities of known adversaries, as well as those of countries not currently hostile but located in regions critical to U.S. national interests. DOD further noted in its 1992 Joint Military Net Assessment that in planning future military forces the United States must look to regions where potential aggressors have the motive and capability to employ military coercion or actual force against their neighbors. That assessment noted that, while determining motive remains an elusive goal, some measures, including whether nations are heavily militarized, give indications of capabilities. In this regard, data on the capability of other countries indicates that the military power of the former Soviet Union is breaking apart and shrinking, while the substantial military superiority the United States possesses relative to regional powers in the Third World should not appreciably change, even with the planned drawdown to the Base Force (unless these countries undertake massive military buildups).

The size and structure of the Base Force are also influenced by the numbers and types of contingencies to which the United States wishes to

be prepared. According to the 1992 National Military Strategy, the Base Force is sized such that if the U.S. military employs decisive force in a major regional contingency in one part of the world, it will have sufficient forces so as not to be left vulnerable to a second regional contingency elsewhere. However, DOD is unclear as to the nature of the two regional contingencies for which it wishes to prepare. In assessing the capabilities of U.S. Armed Forces in specific crisis scenarios, the 1992 Joint Military Net Assessment examined the forces' capability to respond to other crises that might occur before redeployment from the first crisis has been completed. The assessment stated that these other crises are not specified in location or detail but stated that they might range in scope from a second major regional crisis through lesser contingencies. The scope of the second regional crisis would affect whether the military would be able to respond with an offensive or defensive operation.

The size and structure of the Base Force are also shaped by the manner in which future military doctrine is being defined. In this regard, one important issue raised by the revolutionary use of air power in the Persian Gulf conflict is whether during future conflicts air power can be similarly used to defeat armored forces on the ground. DOD believes that the Persian Gulf conflict showed that air power can have an enormous effect on the battlefield, and so it has strengthened the air power portion of future force packages. However, the Army's ongoing review of its military doctrine, "Airland Battle," has thus far not indicated that in the future air power will be emphasized over heavy ground forces.

Finally, DOD sized the Base Force with the assumption that the United States should seek decisive outcomes in regional conflicts, and should seek to minimize casualties. According to DOD, the Base Force seeks to manage risk at prudent, acceptable levels, reflecting strategic considerations and fiscal realities. Nonetheless, an official at the Joint Staff indicated that risk is a generalized concern in that it pervades military decision-making but cannot be readily quantified. This is particularly the case today because of the uncertainty of the current international security environment. Such uncertainty regarding future threats, and the corresponding difficulty of objectively assessing military requirements, makes force planning today highly dependent on tolerance for risk.



---

## Recommendation

GAO is providing information that it believes will be useful to the Congress and the new administration in assessing future defense requirements, but is making no recommendations.

---

## Agency Comments and GAO'S Evaluation

In official oral comments on a draft of GAO's report, DOD emphasized that the Base Force is dynamic and changeable, depending on circumstances, rather than the minimum force capable of defending U.S. interests. GAO has revised its report to reflect DOD's view. However, GAO believes that DOD's depiction of the Base Force has been inconsistent—as a minimum force structure on the one hand and as a force-sizing concept that is adaptable to circumstances on the other.

DOD did not believe that the GAO report accurately summarized (1) the assumptions regarding potential changes in the former Soviet Union that DOD used when formulating the Base Force, (2) the development of the Base Force, and (3) the manner in which DOD assesses the risk implied by the Base Force. GAO has revised the report to more fully reflect these and other matters.

---

# Contents

---

<b>Executive Summary</b>		2
<b>Chapter 1</b>		10
<b>Introduction</b>	The End of the Cold War Eliminates the Rationale for Much of the Prior U.S. Defense Posture	11
	Designing the Nation's Military Posture Today Requires a New Basis for U.S. Military Strategy	12
	Objective, Scope, and Methodology	13
<b>Chapter 2</b>		15
<b>The Base Force and Its Origins</b>	The Primary Development Effort of the Base Force Began in Late 1989 and Was Completed Prior to the Signing of the Budget Enforcement Act	15
	The Base Force Is Organized Into Four Force Packages	16
	The World Has Changed Since the Base Force Was Formulated	18
<b>Chapter 3</b>		20
<b>The Base Force Revolves Around Five Critical Policy Choices</b>	U.S. National Interests Remain Global	20
	The Base Force Is Predicated on a View of a Dangerous World Requiring a Strong, Flexible Military	21
	The Base Force Is Influenced by DOD's Goal of Being Able to Respond to More Than One Contingency	27
	Military Doctrine Assumes That Future Wars Will Significantly Involve Heavy Ground Forces	29
	The Base Force Seeks to Manage Risk	30
	Conclusions	30
	Agency Comments and Our Evaluation	31
<b>Appendix</b>	Appendix I: Major Contributors to This Report	32
<b>Tables</b>	Table 2.1: DOD's Proposed Base Force	17
	Table 3.1: Military Assets of the United States	24
	Table 3.2: Military Assets of Selected Third World Countries	26

---

**Abbreviations**

DOD	Department of Defense
GAO	General Accounting Office
ICBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSC	National Security Council
SLBM	Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile

# Introduction

---

The collapse of communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union have touched off a national debate on defense spending. In his 1992 State of the Union address, the President announced that spending for strategic nuclear forces and weapons modernization can be reduced \$43.8 billion for fiscal years 1993 through 1997, compared to what the administration originally proposed last year. However, neither the President's February 1992 proposed defense budget nor the fiscal year 1993 defense authorization and appropriation acts (except for the level of reserve forces) affect the plans the Department of Defense (DOD) announced in February 1991 for a 25-percent reduction in force structure and personnel by fiscal year 1997. This 25-percent reduction would give the United States what the Secretary of Defense has labeled the "Base Force." More recently, the incoming administration has proposed further reductions in defense spending and a smaller military than the Base Force.

According to the Base Force plan, by fiscal year 1997, active military personnel will be reduced to 1,626,000, about 25 percent below the fiscal year 1987 post-Vietnam peak, while the reserves will be cut to 920,000, about 20 percent below their fiscal year 1987 level. Active Army personnel will be reduced the most, going from 750,600 in 1990 to 536,000 in 1995. By fiscal year 1997, the Air Force will be reduced from 539,300 in 1990 to 430,000, the Navy from 582,900 to 501,000, and the Marine Corps from 196,700 to 159,000. Compared to force structure levels in 1990, these cuts will bring the Army from 28 to 20 divisions, the Air Force from 36 fighter wing equivalents to 26.5, and the Navy from 547 battle force ships to 435, including a reduction of 3 carriers. Though reduced in end strength, the Marine Corps will retain its structure of three active and one reserve Marine Expeditionary Forces (MEF).

By 1997, DOD's budget authority would total \$274.6 billion. This represents a 37-percent cumulative real decline in budget authority, compared to that of fiscal year 1985, the peak year of defense spending during the Reagan administration, and a 2.8-percent decline compared to that of fiscal year 1980. Defense budget outlays will be about 3.4 percent of the gross national product by fiscal year 1997, compared to 7.2 percent in fiscal year 1985 and 5.3 percent in fiscal year 1980.

However, several congressional leaders, as well as some defense analysts outside the executive branch, contend that, because the Base Force was formulated before the August 1991 failed communist coup in the former Soviet Union, it does not fully reflect recent changes in the world. These analysts argue that the Base Force plan is now outdated, that it

consequently lacks strategic rationale, and that it does not go far enough in offering the nation a peace dividend.

## The End of the Cold War Eliminates the Rationale for Much of the Prior U.S. Defense Posture

Since the late 1940s, fears of Soviet expansion in Western Europe and in the Third World have been the principal determinant of the military, political, and economic components of our foreign policy. For our defense posture, the goal of containing the former Soviet Union was the key factor determining our military strategy, the kinds of forces we programmed and deployed, and the missions we assigned and trained our forces to carry out.

Containment of the Soviet Union led the United States to focus its military strategy on deterrence and collective security, which were intended to pressure the Soviet Union and its allies into reassessing their aggressive foreign policies due to the knowledge that any military aggression would be met by significant force. Consequently, for the first time, the United States chose to maintain a large standing military. Also unprecedented, since the late 1940s the United States signed numerous security treaties that today involve nearly 40 countries.

The effect of this strategy on the size of our forces and their roles and missions has been pervasive. The U.S. nuclear arsenal has been shaped by the past policy of using nuclear forces to deter a nuclear attack on the United States by the Soviet Union and to help deter a conventional attack through Central Europe by the former Warsaw Pact.

Most of our conventional forces have been similarly tied to the Soviet threat. For most of the Cold War, because the Soviet Union was a continental power with large numbers of armored forces stationed on the borders of our North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies, the United States placed a premium on the forward deployment of heavy ground and tactical air forces. The size of the Soviet threat and its assumed short warning time meant that forces deployed in Europe were backed by large numbers of active and reserve reinforcement forces at home, as well as large stockpiles of munitions and logistical supplies stored in the United States and prepositioned abroad. All the services also currently station forces in South Korea and/or Japan, both to deter North Korean aggression and to promote regional stability. These goals were originally viewed by the United States as part of the global strategy of containment, though they are now justified in the President's 1991 National Security Strategy

---

Report in the context of long-standing commitments to key allies and by national interests in the region.

One of the principal characteristics of U.S. military planning during the Cold War was the use of forces originally designed for a conflict with the Soviets in confrontations that involved other countries. Military planners considered non-Soviet contingencies as being lesser cases that would be covered by planning for war with the Soviet Union. For example, the Army originally developed rapid response forces (light infantry and air mobile divisions), such as those used in Panama in 1989, because the United States feared Soviet aggression in the Persian Gulf region following the Soviet assault into Afghanistan. The recent war in the Persian Gulf is another example in that the forces deployed were originally designed for global war involving the Soviet Union.

---

## Designing the Nation's Military Posture Today Requires a New Basis for U.S. Military Strategy

Because fear of Soviet expansion has guided our defense policy for so long, the demise of that threat requires a new basis for U.S. military strategy and force planning. No overarching global threat exists today that could substitute as the sole basis for U.S. military planning. Instead, as the President has articulated in his 1991 National Security Strategy Report, threats to U.S. national interests are regional and could develop at various degrees of intensity. This means that in contrast to our defense policy during the Cold War, the United States may require multiple regional strategies, each associated with different types of forces.

Further complicating U.S. policy is the uncertainty inherent in international affairs today. While senior DOD officials acknowledge that threats to U.S. national interests are currently low, they nonetheless contend that the security environment has not become benign. According to DOD, the nature of international politics is such that the intentions of leaders can change, potentially posing military challenges to the United States that are unforeseeable and that occur with short warning. For DOD, the fact that only North Korea, a weakened Iraq, a hostile Iran, and perhaps other countries pose clearly identifiable threats to U.S. interests does not mean that the United States should plan its military for these threats alone; on the contrary, DOD believes that the world's unpredictability means that military capabilities should be geared to a potentially more threatening future.

For this reason, DOD has chosen to stop evaluating force requirements solely in terms of immediate threats. Instead, DOD used what it terms a

“capabilities-based approach” to force planning when formulating the Base Force. According to the 1992 National Military Strategy, DOD derived force structure by making broad comparisons of U.S. capabilities with those of other countries—no matter what their current intentions were—and by ensuring that our own force can undertake military tasks ranging from the full spectrum of combat missions to those not specifically related to countering an actual conflict (such as maintaining forward presence and conducting counternarcotics, counterterrorism, or humanitarian assistance operations). The Base Force, in DOD’s view, is the force now necessary to shape the international security environment so that threats do not emerge and if they do, to deter potential aggressors and respond decisively in the event of major conflict.

## Objective, Scope, and Methodology

The objective of this report was to examine the key policy assumptions underlying the Base Force. The report does not advocate any specific defense policy or force structure. Rather, by exploring the implications of the post-Soviet world, it seeks to contribute to congressional consideration of future defense budgets.

To determine the assumptions underlying the Base Force, we examined DOD’s development of the Base Force, which is presented in chapter 2. We interviewed the author of a study on the Base Force done for the Los Alamos National Laboratory<sup>1</sup> and gathered corroborating information through interviews at the Joint Staff, at the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, and with former DOD officials.

We derived the underlying assumptions in the Base Force that are presented in chapter 3 by identifying the most critical policy issues that DOD addresses when assessing military requirements. We consulted selected procedural documentation of DOD’s Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System and Joint Strategic Planning System, interviewed DOD officials, and examined the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s annual Joint Military Net Assessment and National Military Strategy. Using the analytical framework derived from this investigation, we examined recent testimony of senior DOD officials, as well as key DOD documents such as the 1991 and 1992 Joint Military Net Assessment and the 1992 National Military Strategy, to determine how the Base Force addresses the key issues in force planning. We also interviewed officials with planning

<sup>1</sup>Sharon K. Weiner, National Security in the Post-Cold War Era: A Description of the New U.S. Defense Strategy and the Base Force Concept (Center for National Security Studies, Los Alamos National Laboratory, July 19, 1991).

responsibilities at the services and at selected combined military commands.

To analyze DOD's policy assumptions, we examined alternative views on threat and on U.S. military objectives. We received threat briefings from DOD officials; interviewed academic specialists, including officials at the RAND Corporation, the Naval War College, and the National Defense University; used the results of our conference on "Worldwide Threats";<sup>2</sup> and reviewed numerous academic and military articles. We also compiled data on the militaries of most major countries in the world, using an authoritative secondary source, The Military Balance, published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, and made comparisons with U.S. military capabilities. When discussing the security environment with defense analysts, we examined the implications of different perspectives on threat for force structure and force deployments.

This report addresses policy choices in planning only general purpose forces; discussing the U.S. strategic nuclear arsenal is outside the report's scope because the strategic nuclear arsenal involves a separate category of forces, strategy, and doctrine.

We conducted our review from September 1991 to September 1992 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

---

<sup>2</sup>National Security: Perspectives on the Worldwide Threats and Implications for U.S. Forces (GAO/NSIAD-92-104, Apr. 16, 1992).



# The Base Force and Its Origins

Beginning in 1985, defense resources began to decline because of the growing budget deficit and the perception that the Soviet Union, under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, was becoming less threatening. By the late 1980s, the prospects of even more accelerated declines in defense resources meant that cuts in force structure would be unavoidable. In anticipating downward pressures on the defense budget, the Secretary of Defense offered the Base Force as DOD's reaction to the profound changes in the international security environment. This proposal has shaped the debate over the nature of reductions in defense spending. It also reflects DOD and other administration officials' reassessment of U.S. national defense strategy, specifically, the relationship between threats, strategy, and defense resources.

## The Primary Development Effort of the Base Force Began in Late 1989 and Was Completed Prior to the Signing of the Budget Enforcement Act

During the late 1980s, General Colin Powell, when he was National Security Adviser to President Reagan, began to consider the implications of developments in the former Soviet Union for the United States. According to officials on the Joint Staff, as well as a former member of the National Security Council (NSC) staff, General Powell believed that the Soviet Union was in irreversible decline and that in the absence of clear military threats to U.S. national interests, U.S. force structure would have to be based on what it would take for the United States to be perceived as a superpower. General Powell also reportedly believed that substantial reductions in defense resources were inevitable and that DOD needed to manage these reductions to minimize their impact on military capabilities and interservice rivalries. At this time, General Powell made no attempt to match his strategic thinking with actual force structure requirements. However, concurrent with, but separate from, General Powell's efforts, officers at the Joint Staff under the direction of Admiral Crowe did conduct their own study of future military requirements.

Upon becoming Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in October 1989, General Powell set the Joint Staff to work on producing a plan that would realign U.S. military strategy and force structure within substantially reduced resources. In May 1990, General Powell presented the resulting Base Force proposal to the Defense Planning and Resources Board, which oversees DOD's planning, programming, and budgeting process and is comprised of DOD's senior management. In June 1990, the Secretary of Defense proposed possible reductions in U.S. military forces that reflected the Base Force proposal.

The reduction in defense spending that accompanied such cuts in forces became part of the Budget Enforcement Act, which was signed into law in November 1990. During the next 2 months, the services revised their program and budget submissions to meet the lower defense spending levels for fiscal year 1991. Finally, in February 1991, DOD presented its long-term proposals for force structure reductions to what it labeled the "Base Force" to the Congress as part of the 1992-97 Future Years Defense Program. Except for changes to nuclear forces, the Base Force has not been revised since it was originally submitted to the Congress.

## The Base Force Is Organized Into Four Force Packages

The Base Force is grouped into four force packages: strategic, Atlantic, Pacific, and contingency forces.<sup>1</sup> According to the 1992 National Military Strategy, the four force packages do not constitute a blueprint for a new command structure but are useful tools for sizing U.S. force requirements and demonstrating their functional and geographic orientation. The 1992 National Military Strategy also notes all U.S. forces are available for worldwide employment.

The strategic package contains the three legs of our nuclear triad, which are currently being restructured as a result of the June 17, 1992, Joint Understanding that the President signed with Russia.<sup>2</sup> As previously mentioned, discussion of these forces is outside the scope of this report. The other three force packages constitute conventional forces. Table 2.1 provides greater detail on the forces associated with the Base Force's conventional force packages.

<sup>1</sup>In addition to the four force packages, the Base Force includes four supporting capabilities, including transportation, space, reconstitution, and research and development.

<sup>2</sup>Under the agreement, which incorporated and then went beyond START I (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), the United States would have 500 Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM) with 1 warhead each, 432 Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBM) with a total of 1,728 warheads, and 99 bombers with a total of 1,268 warheads. The Minuteman II and MX missiles would be eliminated, as would the Poseidon C-4, B-52 bombers would not carry nuclear warheads, and procurement of the B-2 would stop at 20. On January 3, 1993, the President and President Boris Yeltsin signed the Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Further Reductions and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms. The treaty, often called START II, codified the June 17, 1992, Joint Understanding.

**Chapter 2**  
**The Base Force and Its Origins**

**Table 2.1: DOD's Proposed Base Force**

<b>Package</b>	<b>Army divisions<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Air Force wings<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>MEF<sup>c</sup></b>	<b>Carriers<sup>d</sup></b>
Atlantic				
Europe	2	3.42	0	2
United States				
Active	3	1.33	1	4
Reserve	6	11.25	1	0
Cadre	2	0	0	0
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16.00</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>
Pacific				
Japan	0	1.25	1	1
South Korea	1	1.25	0	0
United States <sup>e</sup>	1	1.00	0	5
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>
Contingency				
United States	5	7.00	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>26.50</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>

Note: All forces are active unless otherwise indicated. Additionally, only major reserve combat units from the Army National Guard, the Air Force National Guard and Reserve, and the Marine Corps Reserve are listed, whereas the ships in the Navy Reserves are not. This is consistent with DOD's presentation of the Base Force.

<sup>a</sup>By 1995, the Army also plans to have one reserve and two active armored cavalry regiments, one light cavalry regiment, and three active and five reserve brigades. One of the armored cavalry regiments will be located in Europe, while one of the brigades will be in Alaska.

<sup>b</sup>These are approximations based on information given to us by the Air Force staff and Joint Staff.

<sup>c</sup>The Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), is made up of a Marine division and an air wing. The reserve MEF is listed here in the Atlantic package only for illustrative purposes, since DOD has not specified in which force package it belongs.

<sup>d</sup>The total number of Navy battle force ships will decline from 547 in 1990 to 435 by 1997, including approximately 24 strategic submarines, 79 attack submarines, and 143 surface combatants. Also, in addition to forward-deployed carrier battle groups, the Atlantic and Pacific packages will each contain one amphibious ready group with an afloat Marine Expeditionary Unit.

<sup>e</sup>This package includes forces in Hawaii, Alaska, and the continental United States.

**The Atlantic package is committed to defending U.S. interests in the Atlantic region, including Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Africa, and Southwest Asia. The Atlantic package contains forward-stationed forces from all the services, as well as U.S.-based armored, air, and naval forces. Forward-stationed forces in Europe would**

number 150,000, about half the 1990 level, and would include 2-1/3 Army divisions, 3.4 Air Force fighter wings, 2 carrier battle groups, and 1 amphibious ready group with an afloat Marine Expeditionary Unit.<sup>3</sup> One of the Army divisions is part of NATO's U.S.-led multinational corps, while the second is part of the German-led corps. Additionally, elements of forward-deployed Army units are part of the Allied Command, Europe, Rapid Reaction Forces. In the event of a conflict in the Atlantic, forward-stationed forces could be reinforced by active Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine units, in addition to some or all of the planned Army National Guard divisions and Air Force reserve wings. U.S. forces in the Pacific package are planned to be smaller than those in the Atlantic and primarily maritime. This package is smaller because the forces of potential adversaries in the Pacific are different from those in the Atlantic and because of the geographic characteristics of the region. Forward-stationed forces, which are scheduled to total 120,000 by the end of 1992—down 15,000 from the 1990 level—could be even further reduced. DOD announced these reductions in response to the provisions of the Nunn-Warner Amendment to the fiscal year 1990 National Defense Authorization Act, which required the President to report to the Congress by April 1990 on the force structure in East Asia and on ways to increase cost sharing by U.S. allies. Forward-deployed forces are backed by Army, Navy, and Air Force units in Hawaii, Alaska, and the continental United States.

Unlike the Atlantic and Pacific packages, the contingency package lacks a geographic designation; instead, it constitutes a rapidly deployable crisis response force. In the event of a conflict in the Atlantic region like Operation Desert Storm, forces from the contingency package could be the first to deploy and would be supported by active and reserve Army and Air Force units contained in the Atlantic package.

---

## The World Has Changed Since the Base Force Was Formulated

As mentioned in chapter 1, several congressional leaders and defense analysts contend that, because the Base Force was formulated well before the failed August 1991 coup in the former Soviet Union, it does not fully reflect the more benign international security environment that has since taken shape. In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD officials stated that the dissolution of the Soviet Union has resulted in a reduction of nuclear forces and the formulation of a new defense acquisition strategy, but that conventional force levels in the Base Force should not be reduced because they were based on assumptions that fully anticipated changes in

---

<sup>3</sup>The fiscal year 1993 Defense Authorization Act requires that total U.S. military forces in Europe be further reduced to 100,000 by fiscal year 1996.

the international security environment. During testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on January 31, 1992, and in subsequent testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee and House Foreign Affairs Committee in late February and in early March 1992, senior DOD officials stated that the Base Force was predicated on four assumptions about the future: (1) the United States would see continued arms reductions and democratic progress in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; (2) security ties among democratic states would continue; (3) regional tensions, heightened by weapons proliferation, would continue in areas of great concern to the United States; and (4) the United States would not have to undertake any significant commitment of forward-deployed forces.

During his appearance before the Senate Armed Services Committee on January 31, 1992, the Secretary of Defense said that for a time during 1990 and 1991, two of the four assumptions were placed into question by the hardliner coup in the former Soviet Union and by the war in the Persian Gulf. He stated that if events had gone differently, the glide path the military was following toward achieving the Base Force's conventional force levels would have been stopped. However, because developments eventually turned positive, the assumptions originally used to derive such forces are now being realized. In response to questions during the same testimony, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that, although DOD did not specifically anticipate the "breakup" of the Soviet Union, it did envision the country potentially evolving into some sort of federation or commonwealth. The Chairman said that the Base Force is right for the foreseeable future, both because it matches the current security environment and because increasing the rate of drawdown could destroy the force. He said that when the U.S. military gets to the Base Force in 1995, the country should then debate whether it is the right force level.

In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD described how the Base Force is characterized in the 1992 National Military Strategy, which is that it is "dynamic, able to be reshaped (either upward or downward) if strategic developments warrant it." This characterization of the Base Force contrasts with that contained in the 1992 Joint Military Net Assessment; the Secretary's January 31, 1992, testimony; and earlier testimonies on the Base Force by senior DOD officials in February and March 1991—namely, that the Base Force is the minimum force structure needed to execute the National Military Strategy and meet enduring U.S. defense needs.

# The Base Force Revolves Around Five Critical Policy Choices

Interviews with DOD officials, defense experts in the academic community, and former senior DOD officials indicate that a broad analytical framework exists that can be used to assess U.S. military requirements. Although political and budgetary considerations play a large role in driving DOD's force structure proposals, this framework is evident in DOD's planning processes—the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System and the Joint Strategic Planning System.<sup>1</sup> It constitutes five critical policy issues regarding U.S. defense: (1) the nation's interests, that is, those that it should be able and prepared to use force to protect; (2) potential threats to those interests; (3) the military strategy for meeting these threats, including the size, nature, and number of contingencies that the United States should be prepared to engage in at any one time; (4) the ways in which military doctrine will be defined in the future; and (5) the level of risk the nation is prepared to take in not being able to protect its interests.

The specific choices or assumptions that DOD has made on each of these issues underlie its proposals for force structure. Such policy assumptions are evident in DOD's presentation of the Base Force; consequently, they can be used as a means of examining the Base Force, as well as of comparing it to alternative perspectives on U.S. defense policy.

In presenting the Base Force, administration and DOD officials define U.S. national interests and objectives as they have in the past—as freedom, independence, and national prosperity. Although the United States no longer faces a global military threat from the Soviet Union, DOD believes that the world remains dangerous and uncertain. In this regard, the Base Force is predicated on the need to deter and defend against uncertain threats in Europe, Southwest Asia, the Pacific, and elsewhere; the need to be able to respond to more than one contingency at a time; wars in which armor is emphasized; and a desire to minimize the potential for military reversals.

## U.S. National Interests Remain Global

The President's 1991 National Security Strategy Report characterizes U.S. national interests and objectives as the survival of the United States as a free and independent nation, a healthy and growing U.S. economy, a stable and secure world, and healthy and cooperative relations with allies and friendly nations. The President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have stated that for economic, geopolitical, and cultural reasons the United States remains deeply

<sup>1</sup>Two documents issued annually by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—the National Military Strategy and the Joint Military Net Assessment—are the result of the Joint Strategic Planning System.

committed to the security and stability of allied and/or friendly nations in Europe, the Pacific, the Middle East (including Southwest Asia), and Latin America. To secure these interests, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's 1992 National Military Strategy states some of the U.S. national objectives as the deterrence and defeat of aggression against the United States and its allies; the continuation of U.S. access to foreign markets, natural resources, the oceans, and space; the promotion of regional balances of power by demonstrating U.S. capabilities and commitment; the impedance of the illegal drug trade; the curbing of weapons proliferation; and the combating of terrorism.

---

## The Base Force Is Predicated on a View of a Dangerous World Requiring a Strong, Flexible Military

Speaking on the day Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, the President stated in an August 2, 1990, speech in Aspen, Colorado, that the principal threats to U.S. interests in the future would be crises in unexpected quarters potentially leading to regional contingencies. Although the uncertainty that characterizes the international security environment makes future regional conflicts difficult to predict, according to DOD, the possible sources of such conflicts include instability in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, as well as rivalries between military powers in the Third World. According to the Secretary of Defense, instability in the former Soviet Union could lead not only to regional wars, but to a remilitarization of Russian foreign policy. DOD believes that other threats to U.S. interests include the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and low-intensity violence such as terrorism against U.S. property and citizens.

The central military strategy concepts for meeting potential threats to U.S. national interests were outlined during testimonies before the Congress and in key DOD and administration documents beginning in late fall 1990 and continuing through August 1992.<sup>2</sup> These concepts include strategic

---

<sup>2</sup>The Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other DOD officials gave testimony on the Base Force numerous times between January and March 1991 and January and March 1992, in conjunction with the President's budget submissions. U.S. national security strategy and proposed changes in force structure are also outlined in the 1991 and 1992 issues of the Annual Report to Congress by the Secretary of Defense, the 1991 and 1992 issues of the Joint Military Net Assessment, the President's 1991 National Security Strategy, and the Chairman's 1992 National Military Strategy.

---

deterrence and defense, forward presence, crisis response, and reconstitution.<sup>3</sup>

The underlying purpose of the national military strategy is to achieve nuclear and conventional deterrence. In this regard, DOD argues that for the United States to retain a credible military deterrent, it must possess a substantial military force at high levels of readiness. In a January 31, 1992, testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, the Secretary stated that the currently low level of threat to the survival of the United States or to U.S. national interests was only transient and that, consequently, U.S. military capabilities must remain sufficiently robust in order to "shape the global security environment." This means the United States must retain a military leadership role to deter potential adversaries and generally promote stability so that threats to U.S. interests are prevented from emerging in the first place. DOD believes that if the United States draws down its military too far, vacuums of power could develop in regions where the United States was once influential, potentially inducing some hostile countries to militarize to seek regional domination.

DOD describes the Base Force as matching the United States' new military strategy and as possessing the capability now needed to deter and defend against potential threats. The methodology that DOD used to derive the Base Force and its four force packages has been described in general terms in the 1991 and 1992 issues of the Joint Military Net Assessment; the 1992 National Military Strategy; and the Chairman's January 31, 1992, testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee. According to the 1992 National Military Strategy, DOD derived force structure requirements by assessing the military capabilities of known adversaries, as well as those of countries not currently hostile but located in regions critical to U.S. national interests. DOD further noted in its 1992 Joint Military Net Assessment that in planning future military forces the United States must look to regions where potential aggressors have the motive and capability to employ military coercion or actual force against their neighbors. That assessment noted that, while determining motive remains an elusive goal, some measures give indications of capabilities. The assessment identified

---

<sup>3</sup>To support the four strategy concepts, the 1992 National Military Strategy outlines a number of additional strategic principles, including (1) readiness, the belief that U.S. forces must never be understaffed or undertrained; (2) collective security, the strengthening of deterrence through participation in formal alliances; (3) arms control, the commitment to arms reductions as a means of controlling uncertainty; (4) maritime and aerospace superiority, the ability to control air, sea, and space in order to efficiently employ combat power and guarantee the unimpeded flow of supplies; (5) technological superiority, the means by which the United States offsets quantitative advantages that other countries possess in ground forces; (6) strategic agility, the ability to quickly move forces to wherever they are needed; and (7) decisive force, the ability to rapidly assemble the forces needed to overwhelm adversaries and thereby terminate conflicts swiftly with minimal loss of life.



as one such measure heavy militarization, which is indicated by the proportion of gross national product spent on armed forces, large standing armed forces, or the development of weapons of mass destruction.

In determining force size, DOD assumed that certain capabilities must be retained to carry out the national military strategy. For example, although an improved security environment means that half of U.S. forces in Europe will come home or be deactivated, DOD believes that a significant U.S. presence must remain there. According to the 1992 National Military Strategy, remaining forces in Europe are the smallest units capable not only of credible theater war-fighting, but of facilitating the arrival of reinforcement units. Forces remaining in Europe are designed to provide the United States an influential role in the Atlantic Alliance and in future security arrangements on the European continent. Forward-deployed forces in the Pacific are similarly meant to demonstrate U.S. commitment, particularly to the defense of South Korea and Japan, as well as to promote regional stability.

### Numerical Advantages in U.S. Military Assets Will Remain Even After Reductions Planned for 1997

Because of the relative absence of clear and immediate threats to U.S. national interests, the international security environment provides no clear indicator as to how the United States should compare itself militarily to other countries. Data on the capability of other countries indicates that the United States today possesses substantial numerical military superiority against almost any potentially hostile regional power. Moreover, such superiority would remain even if additional reductions were made in U.S. force structure beyond those proposed in the Base Force plan.

The United States currently spends between seven and nine times as much on defense as do key U.S. allies—the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, and France. Except in the unlikely event of a major military buildup in one of these countries, this spending differential should not appreciably change even after DOD's proposed drawdown.

The U.S. investment in military resources is proportionally even greater, when compared to the investments of countries DOD believes are the most likely future threats: regional powers in the Third World. Table 3.1 provides data on specific U.S. military assets for 1991 compared to what is planned for 1997, while table 3.2 provides data on the militaries of selected Third World countries as of June 1, 1991. The tables show the extent to which the U.S. military in 1991 exceeded those of the most powerful Third World states, China, India, and North Korea. The tables also indicate that,

**Chapter 3**  
**The Base Force Revolves Around Five**  
**Critical Policy Choices**

unless these countries undertake massive military buildups, the U.S. military will retain a substantial numerical advantage, even after the drawdown to the Base Force.

For example, the United States spent between 30 and 50 times as much on defense in 1991 as did China, India, and North Korea. Assuming defense spending in these countries remains stable over the next 5 years, this overwhelming spending advantage should not appreciably change by 1997. Moreover, even though the number of active and selected reserve U.S. military personnel will shrink by about 600,000 by 1997, the United States will still possess a force larger than that of any other country except China and will retain its considerable advantages in armored forces, air and naval combat capabilities, and nuclear weapons.<sup>4</sup> Compared to the military capabilities of China, India, and North Korea, those of Third World countries that are most hostile to the United States—Iraq, Libya, Cuba, and Iran—are even smaller, less well armed, and less mobile.

**Table 3.1: Military Assets of the United States**

Dollars in billions

Fiscal year	Total force <sup>a</sup>	Defense spending	Battle tanks <sup>b</sup>	Combat aircraft <sup>c</sup>	Naval vessels	Nuclear forces
1991	3,140,200	\$287.5	16,301	3,645	121 submarines 207 surface combatants	640 SLBMs 1,000 ICBMs 277 bombers
1997	2,546,000	274.6	8,000	2,964	103 submarines 156 surface combatants	432 SLBMs 500 ICBMs 99 bombers

(Table notes on next page)

<sup>4</sup>The apparent numerical advantage that China possesses in aircraft is deceptive because the numbers do not include nuclear bombers, tactical fighters and bombers kept in storage or used for training, or numerous types of tactical support aircraft such as early warning, electronic warfare, forward air control, tankers, and transport. If all these were included, the U.S. military would show a numerical advantage in terms of aircraft over China by several thousand. With respect to tanks, even if the number of tanks in the U.S. arsenal reaches DOD's low-end approximation of 8,000 by 1997, the numerical parity with China would be offset by the fact that Chinese tanks are older.

---

**Chapter 3**  
**The Base Force Revolves Around Five**  
**Critical Policy Choices**

---

<sup>a</sup>These totals include active forces and the Selected Reserve.

<sup>b</sup>These figures include tanks from both the Army and the Marines. The figure for fiscal year 1997 is the low-end of approximations ranging from 14,300 to 8,000. The high approximation is based on a statement by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs before the Senate Appropriations Committee on March 3, 1992. The low approximation is based on service staff inputs. The actual figure will depend on future foreign military sales, inventory disposal rates, and possible changes in U.S. inventory objectives.

<sup>c</sup>Combat aircraft include conventional bombers, fighters, multirole aircraft (capable of delivering ordnance in air-to-air or air-to-ground combat), and reconnaissance aircraft. Others, such as nuclear bombers and airborne warning, electronic warfare, forward air control, and transport aircraft, are not included. Combat aircraft are totaled here from the Air Force, the Navy, and the Marines and include active and reserve aircraft.

**Chapter 3**  
**The Base Force Revolves Around Five**  
**Critical Policy Choices**

**Table 3.2: Military Assets of Selected Third World Countries** (as of June 1, 1991)

U.S. Dollars in billions

Country	Total forces	Defense spending <sup>a</sup>	Battle tanks	Combat aircraft <sup>b</sup>	Naval vessels	Nuclear forces
China	4,230,000	\$7.6	8,000	5,640	94 submarines 56 surface combatants	80 ballistic missiles
India	1,565,000	9.0	3,100	618	17 submarines 28 surface combatants	Developing capability
North Korea	1,651,000	5.2	3,500	686	22 submarines 3 frigates	Developing capability
Vietnam	1,541,000	2.3	1,300	185	7 frigates	None
Brazil	1,411,700	1.0	0	119	5 submarines 1 carrier 11 frigates	None
Pakistan	1,078,000	3.2	1,980	331	6 submarines 13 surface combatants	Developing capability
Indonesia	1,078,000	1.6	0	54	2 submarines 17 frigates	None
Iraq	1,032,500	8.6	2,300 <sup>c</sup>	261 <sup>c</sup>	5 frigates 6 coastal combatants	Developing capability
Egypt	1,024,000	1.7	3,190	431	4 submarines 5 surface combatants	None
Iran	878,000	3.8	700	208	8 surface combatants	Developing capability
Syria	804,000	1.6	4,350	490	3 submarines 2 frigates	None
Cuba	315,500	1.8	1,700	148	3 submarines 3 frigates	None
Libya	125,000	1.5	2,150	374	6 submarines 3 frigates	None

<sup>a</sup>Defense spending is for 1991 and is presented in 1991 U.S. dollars in billions, with the exception of figures for Iraq, Syria, and North Korea, which list defense spending for 1990 (in 1990 U.S. dollars in billions), and Libya, Vietnam, and Cuba, which list spending for 1989 (in 1989 U.S. dollars in billions).

<sup>b</sup>As in table 3.1, combat aircraft include heavy and medium-weight conventional bombers, fighters, multirole aircraft (capable of delivering ordnance in air-to-air or air-to-ground combat), and reconnaissance aircraft. Others, such as nuclear-capable bombers and airborne warning, electronic warfare, forward air control, and transport aircraft, are not included.

<sup>c</sup>These figures are rough estimates due to the uncertainty surrounding the Iraqi military following the Gulf War.

Source: The Military Balance, 1991-1992, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1991.

It appears that the former Soviet Union's military forces are currently being parceled out among the former republics and that, ultimately, the individual military power of Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan (the largest of the newly independent states in that region) will be substantially less than what was held by their Soviet predecessor. For example, in January 1992 testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency stated that active duty staffing levels in the former Soviet military will fall to between 2 million and 2.5 million by the end of the year from a current level of approximately 3 million. Although Ukraine initially announced that it would build an active military force of 400,000 personnel, the Defense Intelligence Agency noted that Ukraine had more recently reduced this number to 100,000. In addition, the fact that all of the former republics are downsizing their force structures will affect the numbers of Army, Air Force, and Navy combat units retained in the former Soviet Union. Finally, the division of the Black Sea fleet between Russia and Ukraine points to the possibility that neither country will have a Navy as large as that of the former Soviet Union. DOD's 1992 Joint Military Net Assessment further states that the goal of the Russian Defense Ministry is to reduce the size of the Russian armed forces to 1.2 million to 1.5 million active duty personnel by the end of the decade.

## The Base Force Is Influenced by DOD's Goal of Being Able to Respond to More Than One Contingency

DOD's determination of the size and structure of the Base Force was also influenced by its assumptions about the number and type of contingencies to which the United States wishes to be prepared to respond. According to the 1992 National Military Strategy, the Base Force is sized such that if the U.S. military employs decisive force in a major regional contingency in one part of the world, it will have sufficient forces so as not to be left vulnerable to a second regional contingency elsewhere.

DOD does not clearly define the nature of the two regional contingencies. The 1991 Joint Military Net Assessment tested the Base Force in the event of two concurrent regional contingencies without further elaboration as to whether both contingencies would involve offensive operations, concluding that aggregate combat forces would be adequate for defeating adversaries.<sup>5</sup> In comparison, in May 1992, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy stated that the Base Force should be capable of conducting one offensive deployment in a major regional contingency and a defensive action in a second contingency. In August 1992, the 1992 Joint Military Net Assessment evaluated the Base Force against illustrative crises in Korea in

<sup>5</sup>The 1991 Joint Military Net Assessment also tested the Base Force in the event of major conflict in Europe leading to war between NATO and the Soviet Union. It concluded that planned forces would be adequate. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, DOD tests forces only for regional contingencies.

1993 and Southwest Asia in 1999. DOD analyzed the Base Force's ability to respond to each postulated crisis, to continue to maintain forward presence while engaged in the postulated crisis, and to respond to a second crisis that occurred before redeployment from the first crisis had been completed. The assessment stated that these other crises are not specified in location or detail, but might range in scope from a second major regional crisis through lesser contingencies. The scope of the second regional crisis would affect whether the U.S. military would be able to respond with an offensive or defensive operation.

### **Future Contingency Requirements Are Uncertain**

The extent to which future international conflicts will threaten U.S. national interests is largely unpredictable, thus making it difficult to evaluate DOD's assessment regarding the size and number of contingencies the U.S. military should be prepared for. Although the end of the Cold War will not change (and could even increase) the propensity of some nations to go to war, it is not certain that such wars will involve the United States.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reports that there were 30 armed conflicts in the world in 1991, only 1 of which involved the United States: the Gulf War. Currently, the United States has military forces deployed in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia. The armed conflict currently taking place in the latter region, between Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, is an example of the kind of regional conflict that U.S. military strategy is now focused on. Even so, U.S. military forces deployed there have thus far not directly engaged in combat operations. There are many other countries in the world where there is potential for violent conflict in the future; however, these conflicts may not engage the United States militarily because they may not be perceived as sufficiently threatening to U.S. vital interests.

With the end of the Cold War, U.S. policymakers will no longer evaluate regional conflicts in terms of their impact on the superpowers' balance of power. The conditions in which potential conflicts will be seen as threatening to U.S. vital interests have consequently become less clear. For example, other than for direct military threats to the U.S. homeland, key allies, or the security of Persian Gulf oil, DOD officials have not specified which potential conflicts would elicit a U.S. response. Officials at the U.S. Pacific Command identify the disagreement between China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and the Philippines over control of the Spratly Islands as having the potential to lead to regional conflict. However, the United States has not specified that vital national interests

would be at stake if conflict over the islands were to take place. Similarly, DOD officials have not publicly articulated how the United States and its allies would respond in the event of regional wars in the former Soviet Union or in Eastern Europe (excluding Yugoslavia) or between India and Pakistan, all of which DOD considers potential future conflicts. While DOD believes this lack of specificity regarding when the United States would use its military is prudent, this ambiguity makes it difficult to evaluate the number and identity of regional contingencies U.S. military requirements should be based on.

Other threats to U.S. interests with unpredictable repercussions for the U.S. military could involve the illegal drug trade, terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. DOD points out that the end of the Cold War has not stemmed the flow of drugs into the United States or the number of incidents of terrorism and that the problem of weapons proliferation has actually worsened. However, these threats have not historically involved intensive uses of military personnel. Instead, they have involved limited air strikes, such as that against Libya in 1986, and the use of limited numbers of specialized personnel and equipment. Often, in attempting to counter these threats, the United States has emphasized means besides military force, such as economic and security assistance, diplomatic overtures, and arms control.

---

## Military Doctrine Assumes That Future Wars Will Significantly Involve Heavy Ground Forces

One additional factor that influenced DOD's determination of the size and structure of the Base Force is its current definition of future military doctrine. DOD predicates the Base Force on the assumption implied in the Army's review of its war-fighting doctrine, "Airland Battle": that future wars will involve significant clashes of armor against armor.

DOD officials are currently studying the doctrinal implications of technological breakthroughs demonstrated in the Gulf War, specifically the use of air assets that significantly offset the need for armored forces to counter opposing armor. According to an official involved in the planning of the air campaign during the Gulf War, as well as officials at the U.S. Army's Training and Doctrine Command, if DOD concludes that military technology can be used in similar ways in the future, then the composition of U.S. forces could favor air power and shift away somewhat from heavy ground forces, particularly tanks. In this regard, DOD's 1992 Joint Military Net Assessment states that the Persian Gulf conflict showed that air power can have an enormous effect on the battlefield. DOD has, therefore, strengthened the air power portion of future force packages. This issue,

however, is far from being settled. At present, the Army's ongoing review of Airland Battle does not indicate that strategic or tactical air power will be emphasized in the future over heavy ground maneuver forces or that heavy divisions will rely to any lesser extent on tanks.

---

## The Base Force Seeks to Manage Risk

In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD described the Base Force as a force that reflects the management of risk at a prudent, acceptable level and that reflects both strategic considerations and fiscal realities. DOD believes that, although the Base Force does not minimize risk entirely, it does reflect DOD's position that the United States should seek decisive outcomes in regional conflicts while minimizing casualties.

DOD's intention is to contain risks to U.S. national security at a level lower than it has been in half a century because of the end of the Cold War and because of the absence of any credible global or regional challengers. This is why more than two Army divisions and why three Air Force wings will remain in Europe and at least some response to two concurrent regional contingencies is being planned for. This is also why the readiness of active units is being retained at previous levels and relatively high levels of funding will continue for weapons research.

An official at the Joint Staff told us that risk is a generalized concern in that it pervades military decision-making but cannot be readily quantified. This is particularly the case today because of the uncertainty of the security environment (and the relative absence of clear and immediate military threats to U.S. vital interests). DOD believes that a drawdown to a force structure smaller than the Base Force, and to a correspondingly smaller defense budget, would necessarily entail acceptance of greater risk in U.S. national security policy. Tolerance for risk is, thus, one of the key variables in determining force structure requirements in today's uncertain security environment.

---

## Conclusions

We believe that there are five key policy issues that decisionmakers must consider in deciding on the size and composition of U.S. military forces: (1) the nation's interests, (2) potential threats to those interests, (3) the number of contingencies that the United States should be prepared to engage in at any one time, (4) the ways in which military doctrine will be defined in the future, and (5) the level of risk the nation is prepared to take in not being able to protect its vital interests. These issues can be used by



---

the Congress and the new administration to examine the Base Force as well as compare it to alternative perspectives on U.S. defense policy.

---

## **Agency Comments and Our Evaluation**

In official oral comments on a draft of this report, DOD emphasized that the Base Force is dynamic and changeable, depending on circumstances, rather than the minimum force capable of defending U.S. interests. We have revised the report to reflect DOD's view. However, we believe that DOD's depiction of the Base Force has been inconsistent—as a minimum force structure on the one hand and as a force-sizing concept that is adaptable to circumstances on the other.

DOD also did not believe that the report accurately summarized (1) the assumptions regarding potential changes in the former Soviet Union that DOD used when formulating the Base Force, (2) the development of the Base Force, and (3) the manner in which DOD assesses the risk implied by the Base Force. We have revised the report to more fully reflect these and other matters.

---

# Major Contributors to This Report

---

**National Security and  
International Affairs  
Division, Washington,  
D.C.**

Steven Sternlieb, Assistant Director  
James Wiggins, Assistant Director  
Todd Appel, Evaluator-in-Charge  
Shawn Bates, Evaluator

---

**Far East Office**

Peter Konjevich, Assignment Manager  
David Trimble, Site Senior  
Joyce Akins, Evaluator

---

### **Ordering Information**

**The first copy of each GAO report and testimony is free. Additional copies are \$2 each. Orders should be sent to the following address, accompanied by a check or money order made out to the Superintendent of Documents, when necessary. Orders for 100 or more copies to be mailed to a single address are discounted 25 percent.**

**Orders by mail:**

**U.S. General Accounting Office  
P.O. Box 6015  
Gaithersburg, MD 20884-6015**

**or visit:**

**Room 1000  
700 4th St. NW (corner of 4th and G Sts. NW)  
U.S. General Accounting Office  
Washington, DC**

**Orders may also be placed by calling (202) 512-6000  
or by using fax number (301) 258-4066.**

---

**United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548**

**Official Business  
Penalty for Private Use \$300**

**First-Class Mail  
Postage & Fees Paid  
GAO  
Permit No. G100**

---