Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

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U.S. national security strategy declares that the United States must be able to win two major military conflicts nearly simultaneously. One of these conflicts, which forms the basis of U.S. conventional defense planning, is defense of the Persian Gulf against the threat of large-scale conventional attack. For the U.S. military and the U.S. Air Force in particular, this mission requires the ability to project significant forces to the region promptly and to sustain these forces for prolonged operations in high-intensity combat. At the same time, U.S. national security strategy postulates that in any major military operation conducted abroad, U.S. combat forces will be part of a coalition of like-minded countries. For America’s European allies—who, like the United States, import large quantities of Persian Gulf oil—this mission requires robust power projection capabilities as well as political will on the part of European governments to overcome popular opposition to the use of military force outside Europe.

This book examines potential European military contributions to the security of the Persian Gulf and other energy-producing regions around Europe’s periphery. It does so within the context of current U.S. military strategy and the ongoing debate within NATO over the Alliance’s purpose and missions in the new millennium as well as the transatlantic dialogue on burden sharing. This focus on the military dimensions of Persian Gulf security does not, however, imply that military means are the only option available for responding to a prolonged disruption in Persian Gulf energy supplies. To the contrary, “energy security”—a term that is commonly used but rarely
defined with any degree of conceptual rigor—is more than just a military issue. A number of nonmilitary measures are available to prepare Western economies to withstand energy supply disruptions, including “hedging” strategies to diversify sources of energy supplies and to accumulate oil inventories. In the event of a major energy crisis in the Persian Gulf, moreover, several different responses would be at policymakers’ disposal to deal with the disruptive effects of oil price increases. These include drawing down on strategic petroleum reserves, allowing market responses to stimulate emergency energy production elsewhere, and implementing government policies to reduce oil prices.\(^1\) Although analysis of these alternatives lies beyond the scope of this study, suffice it to say that a comprehensive assessment of energy security policy should include consideration of the cost-effectiveness of military and nonmilitary alternatives in preventing or responding to disruptions of oil supplies, given the likelihood of consequent increases in oil prices.

The United States has declared the Persian Gulf an area of vital interest and has established a security umbrella over the major oil-producing states of the Arabian Peninsula. While most of these countries are friendly toward the West, most face conventional military threats from larger hostile countries. The most serious of these threats is possible military coercion by Iraq, and the most demanding scenario would be an Iraqi invasion—or threat of invasion—against Kuwait and Saudi Arabia that would occur with little warning and could be blunted only by the rapid deployment of air power. Planning and preparing for such a contingency offers the most effective means of deterring such a threat and will therefore remain a core mission for the U.S. military in the coming years.

There are several reasons that the security of the Persian Gulf is likely to figure more prominently in U.S.-European relations in the years to come. First, Europe will continue to import large quantities of Gulf oil, and thus a prolonged disruption of Gulf oil exports could invite calls for Western military action. Second, Gulf oil supplies will for the next decade remain vulnerable to an array of threats—including

\(^1\)Bill White, “Taking the Upper Hand on Oil Prices,” *Washington Post*, March 30, 2000. White, former deputy secretary of energy, recommends the use of modern financial instruments to use the reserve to moderate wild swings in the price of oil resulting from reduced supplies on the world market.
conventional military aggression, attacks using weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and terrorist attacks by countries or groups hostile to Western interests. Third, the United States will continue to bear the lion’s share of the risks and costs of assuring security in the Persian Gulf. Finally, there is growing dissatisfaction among members of Congress and the American public with the European contribution to Gulf security and, more broadly, with Europe’s effort to limit NATO’s responsibilities to peacekeeping and crisis management operations in Europe. This disenchantment has been exacerbated by the growing strains placed on U.S. forces by their expanding global military commitments, particularly peacekeeping operations in Europe.  

Taken together, these factors suggest that the United States’ ability to continue to bear the brunt of maintaining Gulf security is becoming increasingly problematic. As a consequence, the United States has pressed its European allies to increase their power projection capabilities to encompass a full spectrum of missions both within and beyond Europe. Although some European governments have programs and plans to restructure their forces for power projection, most face domestic opposition to expanding NATO’s security responsibilities beyond Europe—opposition arising primarily from political, historical, cultural, and philosophical constraints on NATO’s use of force outside Europe. This apprehension is reflected in European opposition to a “global NATO.” European governments also balk at the cost of restructuring forces for power projection.

Transatlantic disputes over burden sharing and American concern about European power projection capabilities are at the heart of the debate over the Alliance’s future role outside Europe. There is a growing recognition in NATO that threats outside Europe affect allied interests and cannot be ignored. This perception is reflected in

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the Alliance’s new Strategic Concept as well as initiatives approved at the April 1999 NATO Summit—including the Defense Capabilities Initiative (DCI), which focuses on developing improved Alliance power projection capabilities. Some allies (the U.K., France, and the Netherlands) are already moving to acquire power projection capabilities. Nonetheless, two fundamentally divergent views of the Alliance’s raison d’être and of security threats in the post–Cold War security environment have emerged that were papered over with vague language in the Strategic Concept.

The first view, which is Euro-centric and increasingly preoccupied with ethnic conflicts in Europe, holds that NATO’s primary purpose should be to preserve stability and security in Europe—and that Alliance (and European Union [EU]) military planning and preparations should therefore focus on peace support, crisis management, and humanitarian missions within Europe. In keeping with this conception of the Alliance’s purpose, proponents of this view welcomed the new Strategic Concept, which defines NATO’s role as extending security and stability throughout the Euro-Atlantic region, as well as the EU’s commitment to take on greater security responsibilities in Europe.

The second view is more outward-looking and focuses on global threats and responsibilities. It argues that the fundamental purpose of the Alliance should be the defense of common security interests against new threats and challenges, many of which—including WMD and ballistic missile proliferation and threats to critical oil supplies—emanate from beyond Europe. Proponents of this view believe that NATO’s transformation remains incomplete. They argue that the Alliance should attach the highest priority to improving allied power projection capabilities and the ability of European countries to operate effectively with the United States in military operations inside Europe, as well as beyond Europe’s borders. Advocates of a more equal partnership between the United States and Europe also believe that NATO should make more energetic efforts to improve its coun-

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4 See in particular Kamp, “A Global Role for NATO?” and Gasteyger, “Riskante Dopplerweiterung.”

terproliferation capabilities, including the deployment of theater ballistic missile defenses.

At the same time, there is a debate within U.S. military circles over the degree to which the United States needs its European allies for the defense of common security interests. Many U.S. defense planners are skeptical about the political will of European countries to use force outside Europe as well as the value of the military contribution these countries could make. The air campaign against Serbia during the Kosovo conflict, which was constrained in particular by European political and military limitations, could reinforce this “go it alone” mentality. Reflecting these doubts, U.S. operational and force plans essentially assume that the United States will conduct unilateral military operations in major regional contingencies, even though America’s “grand strategy” embraces the concept of coalition warfare. In a similar manner, NATO does not undertake the kind of combined planning that is needed to wage effective coalition operations outside Europe.

The USAF has an important stake in the outcome of this debate. At issue is whether U.S. national military strategy and defense planning should be based on the expectation that allies will fight alongside the United States to defend vital common interests. From the USAF perspective, the degree to which it can count on a contribution from allied air forces in the Persian Gulf could have a significant bearing on its plans and military operations, both in peace and war.

**APPROACH AND ORGANIZATION**

This study is designed to illuminate the issues and choices that are central to these debates. It addresses several key questions:

- What are the major threats to energy supplies in important energy-producing regions?
- On which allies can the United States rely for participation in defense of the Gulf?
- What improvements would provide allied forces with the capabilities to make a meaningful contribution to protecting Gulf oil?
In Chapter Two, Richard Sokolsky and Ian Lesser present an overview of potential scenarios in key energy-producing regions that could cause a significant disruption in energy supplies. While the discussion addresses the threat of large-scale conventional aggression by hostile forces, it also highlights other threats that merit attention by the United States and its allies.

In Chapter Three, Richard Sokolsky, F. Stephen Larrabee, and Ian Lesser examine how NATO is being transformed to deal with contingencies outside Europe and the conditions under which NATO allies might join coalition operations to protect critical energy supplies. Their discussion focuses in particular on allied perspectives on the use of force outside Europe with a view toward determining whether the U.S. military should continue its current practice of planning to conduct unilateral military operations in the Persian Gulf.

In Chapter Four, John E. Peters, David Shlapak, and Timothy Liston examine current and planned allied air force projection capabilities. In particular, they assess the extent to which the allies are currently capable of prompt deployment and sustainment of air power over long distances for extended periods of time and describe plans for improving the power projection capabilities of their air forces.

In the concluding chapter, Richard Sokolsky, F. Stephen Larrabee, and Stuart Johnson discuss how the USAF can best utilize allied military contributions for operating in the Persian Gulf. Their discussion focuses on two key questions: First, what adjustments, if any, should the USAF make in organization, doctrine, planning, training, and equipment to accommodate allied forces? And second, what changes should the United States press its allies to make to improve their ability to contribute to coalition air operations in the Persian Gulf?