The United States remains the guarantor of Western security interests outside Europe, and European governments are quite comfortable with this arrangement. However, Europe’s dependence on the United States for dealing with threats to common interests beyond its borders cannot be sustained indefinitely. Indeed, the Senate debate over NATO enlargement offers ample evidence that pressures are mounting on Europe to play a more prominent role in defending common Western security interests.

There are political and military imperatives for Europe to shoulder greater security responsibilities outside its borders. When the United States must use military force far from its shores to defend common Western security interests, the political imperatives for doing so in a coalition with its allies will in most cases outweigh any considerations of military expediency. Under certain circumstances, moreover, a substantial allied military contribution would improve prospects for military success. Without such a contribution, a danger exists that U.S. political and public support for NATO, including further enlargement, will erode in lockstep with U.S. engagement in Europe.

The challenge that the United States confronts is therefore twofold: first, to ensure that allied governments are prepared to carry out missions that go beyond peacekeeping operations in and around Europe; and second, to ensure that allied military contributions are effective in dealing with the external threats that the Alliance is most likely to face in the future. This is especially the case in the Persian Gulf—a region in which Europe remains totally dependent on U.S.
military muscle to protect oil supplies and in which the United States and its European allies face a growing capabilities gap.

This study offers one of the first comprehensive assessments since the April 1999 NATO Summit of European countries’ attitudes toward missions that go beyond peacekeeping operations in Europe. Drawing on other RAND research, it explores the conditions under which the United States would need a substantial contribution from its allies; evaluates allied power projection capabilities; and identifies key means by which the United States and its NATO allies could enhance those capabilities while improving the ability of European forces to operate effectively in military operations outside their borders. Although the study offers a sobering assessment of the political, military, and budgetary challenges NATO’s European countries face, it also sets forth a strategy that is well within their reach for securing a greater allied military contribution in the Persian Gulf. Its conclusions and recommendations, moreover, are relevant to the ongoing debate over the future role of the Alliance.

This study is part of a larger project on the implications of the changing strategic environment in and around Europe for the United States and NATO. The project was sponsored by the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Air Forces in Europe, and by the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, Headquarters, United States Air Force. It was conducted in the Strategy and Doctrine Program of RAND’s Project AIR FORCE. This study should be useful to government officials and outside specialists concerned with U.S. national security and defense planning, particularly with respect to military operations in the Persian Gulf, and the future of NATO and U.S.-European relations.

**Project AIR FORCE**

Project AIR FORCE (PAF), a division of RAND, is the United States Air Force’s federally funded research and development center (FFRDC) for studies and analyses. It provides the Air Force with independent analyses of policy alternatives affecting the development, employment, combat readiness, and support of current and future air and space forces. Research is performed in four programs: Aerospace Force Development; Manpower, Personnel, and Training; Resource Management; and Strategy and Doctrine.