This report describes the challenges policymakers and defense planners faced in the first decade after the Cold War. It does so through the lens of an assessment of the three major force structure reviews that took place in the 1990s: the 1989–1990 Base Force, the 1993 Bottom-Up Review (BUR), and the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR).

The post–Cold War era—which arguably can be dated to the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989—has been one of immense change, and one that created equally formidable challenges for defense planners. During this period, profound transformations took place in all key elements of the policymaking environment, including the shape of the international environment, the threats to U.S. interests, and U.S. national security and military strategy. Changes also occurred in the assignment of forces, in the patterns by which forces were employed abroad, and in U.S. military force structure and personnel levels. In addition, substantial reductions were made in defense budgets. These concurrent changes—which occurred at different rates and at times moved in opposing directions—placed tremendous strain both on the machinery used for deliberative planning and on the policymakers who sought to strike a balance between strategy, forces, and resources.

This report is a work of both history and policy analysis that aims at providing contextual background for the QDR in 2001. It focuses on three key elements—strategy, forces, and resources—and compares the key assumptions, decisions, outcomes, planning, and execution of the three reviews.
The assessment was guided by the following questions:

- What was the state of the world at the time of each force structure review?
- What was the U.S. military (and especially Air Force) posture going into each review?
- What were the major assumptions, conclusions, and outcomes of each review?
- What was the subsequent postreview experience?
- What lessons can be drawn from the past for the next QDR?

**ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT**

This report is organized by review, with one chapter devoted to each review. Each chapter first describes the assumptions, decisions, and outcomes of the review in question. Assumptions include beliefs about the threats and opportunities in the environment, the shape of future presence operations, and the probable missions assigned to U.S. military forces. Decisions and outcomes include the assignment of forces to underwrite the strategy, force structure goals, and priorities for the allocation of resources. Each chapter then describes the planning and execution of the decisions and outcomes of the reviews. Accordingly, Chapter Two focuses on the 1989–1990 Base Force; Chapter Three assesses the 1993 BUR; and Chapter Four discusses the 1997 QDR.

In Chapter Five, we summarize what we believe are some of the key lessons drawn from our historical analysis of the last decade’s defense reviews, identify some common features of these reviews, and offer some general conclusions about how defense planning can avoid some of the problems that were encountered over the past decade.

The major force structure reviews discussed in this report took place independently of, but were influenced by, a number of other policy-relevant developments over the decade. For example, strategic nuclear and mobility forces, which were not considered in detail in the reviews, were addressed in separate, more detailed studies. Additionally, the base realignment and closure (BRAC) process for
reducing infrastructure and other efforts to reform defense management were pursued to free up resources. Finally, several commissions addressed issues such as roles and missions and future strategy and force needs. The present report concentrates on the major force structure reviews and discusses these other influences only when additional context is necessary.