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**PREDICTING THE SCOPE OF FUTURE U.S.  
INVOLVEMENT IN MOOTW**

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In this chapter, we move away from an assessment of problems associated with the USAF's current high optempo and toward the future. We begin by discussing the global developments that have made MOOTW more central to U.S. defense planning and operations. We then consider the evidence for and against a continuation of the current high level of U.S. involvement in MOOTW.

**THE INCREASED SALIENCE OF MOOTW SINCE THE END OF  
THE COLD WAR**

Since the end of the Cold War, MOOTW have moved from being perceived as a military "sideshow" to occupying center stage. If this is a temporary state of affairs, the USAF can make do with short-term fixes to the high-optempo problem. If, however, large-scale MOOTW are here to stay, more-permanent fixes such as those proposed in Chapter Three will be necessary. In looking ahead, therefore, force planners need to know whether to expect the increased salience of MOOTW to continue to be a feature of the geopolitical landscape. To answer this question, we must first consider what has caused the increased U.S. involvement in MOOTW since the end of the Cold War.

One view is that the increased involvement derives from the political volatility generated in the post-Cold War world by the collapse of communism. Communist regimes had repressed a great deal of potential ethnic strife. When they ceased to exist, the underlying animosities that had lain dormant for decades became active, most notably in the former Yugoslavia and in some regions of the former

Soviet Union (primarily the Caucasus, but also in Central Asia). In addition, according to this view, the Cold War itself imposed a certain stability on the world: The superpowers, concerned about the possibility of escalation, often restrained their client states from overt acts of violence. With the end of the Cold War, this restraint was no longer imposed.

At the same time, the “failed-state” phenomenon appears to be growing worse. Somalia and Liberia are the clearest examples of states that have completely collapsed under the pressures of civil war.<sup>1</sup> For some states, this process may have proceeded further than it would have during the Cold War, when one or the other superpower may have felt compelled to intervene more forcefully to prevent a client government from collapsing or to forestall intervention by its rival.

In addition, population pressure, resource depletion,<sup>2</sup> and the various pressures of “modernization” (increased urbanization,<sup>3</sup> disruption of subsistence agriculture, etc.) can cause instability and the disruption of traditional ways of life. A common reaction to this disruption is the growth of fundamentalist religious sentiment, as people search for a traditional anchor in the midst of progressively stormier seas; this fundamentalism can, in turn, lead to civil war and violence, directed either against a nonfundamentalist government or religious minorities.

While many of these trends in fact exist, it is not clear how fully they explain the increase in U.S. MOOTW activity. Aside from the fact

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Kaplan presents a pessimistic assessment of this phenomenon in “The Coming Anarchy,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1994, pp. 44–76.

<sup>2</sup>For an insightful analysis of resource competition as a cause of conflict, see James Winnefeld and Mary Morris, *Where Environmental and Security Concerns Meet: Green Conflict in Asia and the Middle East*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, MR-378-RC, 1994.

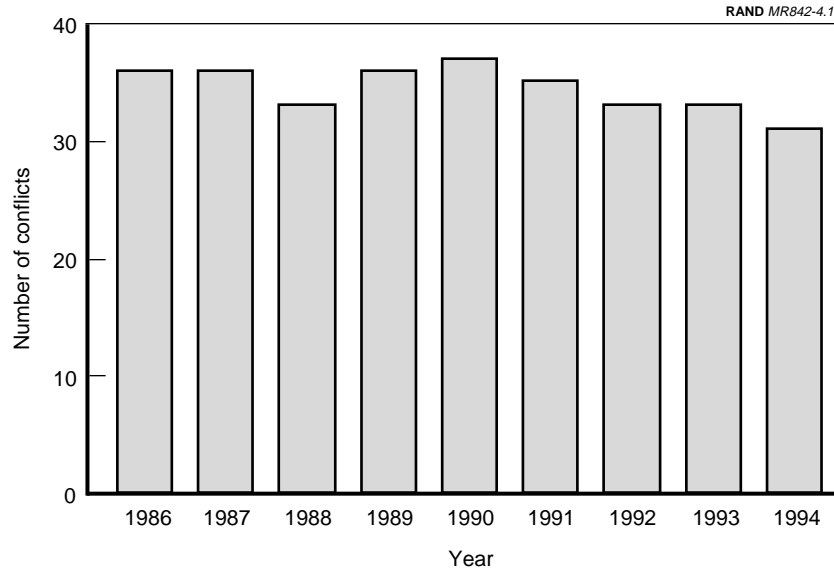
<sup>3</sup>It is interesting that the greatest urban population growth is occurring in the developing world. For example, Africa’s urban population is projected to be three times that of North America by the year 2025. See Jennifer Taw and Bruce Hoffman, *The Urbanization of Insurgency*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, MR-398-A, 1994, p. 3, and Eugene Linden, “The Exploding Cities of the Developing World,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 1996, Vol. 75, No. 1, pp. 52–65.

(discussed more fully below) that the amount of disorder in the world does not necessarily correlate with the amount of U.S. military action to deal with it, a number of countervailing trends can also be discerned.

For example, the collapse of the Soviet Union has also meant that there is less support for anti-Western insurgencies throughout the world. This trend is most noticeable in Latin America. The economic crisis in Cuba, brought on by the cessation of Soviet subsidies, deprives anti-American groups throughout the hemisphere of a potential source of support. There has also been a decrease in the number of former Soviet client regimes against which insurgencies are being waged, either because the communist regime has ceased to exist (e.g., the Sandinistas in Nicaragua) or because the United States or other anti-communist states no longer have an incentive to oppose them (e.g., U.S.-supported insurgencies in Angola and Mozambique). Finally, the end of Soviet support for clients in the Middle East (e.g., the Palestine Liberation Organization [PLO] and Syria) has increased the chances of peace in that region of the world.

It is difficult to assess how these trends balance; however, data compiled by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) show a relatively stable number of armed conflicts in the world during the period 1986 through 1994 (see Figure 4.1). Explaining the increased U.S. MOOTW involvement as resulting from the greater amount of disorder in the world would be difficult. Furthermore, this disorder represents, at most, one side of the equation: the “demand,” as it were, for U.S. involvement. The other side is the “supply”: U.S. willingness to become involved in this disorder.

For U.S. involvement, the end of the Cold War has probably been an important factor for several reasons. Most important, U.S. moves are less constrained by the possibility of Russian counters. For example, Somalia (and the Horn of Africa generally) had been an important geopolitical battleground during the Cold War; the U.S. insertion of 30,000 troops into the region would have been a major event in the U.S.-Soviet competition and could easily have provoked a massive counteraction. Obviously, these types of considerations no longer posed a restraint to U.S. action in December 1992.



SOURCE: SIPRI, *1987 SIPRI Yearbook*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 297; *1988 SIPRI Yearbook*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 287; *1989 SIPRI Yearbook*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 399; *1995 SIPRI Yearbook*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 24.

**Figure 4.1—Global Number of Armed Conflicts, 1986–1994**

More generally, the end of the Cold War has meant that the United Nations can be more energetic and play a greater role in dealing with disorder throughout the world. The general paralysis of the Security Council (except in crises, such as those in the Middle East, that posed a serious enough threat to peace to require the United States and the Soviet Union to reach a compromise solution) no longer exists. At the same time, the United States could play a bigger role in peacekeeping operations, which, under Cold War circumstances, tended to be the preserve of a handful of small states, “neutrals,” and essentially mercenary troops, such as those from Fiji and Nepal, whom both sides could trust to behave in an apolitical and strictly humanitarian manner.

## PROJECTING THESE TRENDS INTO THE FUTURE

As for the future, the evidence is inconclusive. On the one hand, much of the current wave of ethnic strife seems to be a temporary phenomenon traceable to the end of communist repression. Unless a new anti-Western superpower emerges, anti-Western insurgencies, terrorist groups, etc., will not have an obvious source of potential support to turn to as they did during the Cold War. Thus, over the next decades, the collapse of communism could lead to a general trend toward a more peaceful world.

On the other hand, the other causes of instability discussed above may continue or increase. In particular, Samuel Huntington has predicted a more violent future, caused by a “clash of civilizations” among the Islamic, Chinese, Slavic-Orthodox, Western, and other groups.<sup>4</sup> This conflict could lead to large-scale warfare between such groupings or increased low-level violence (e.g., terrorism) as weaker civilizations seek to undermine and harass those they dare not confront in conventional combat.

The latter possibility might come about as Western influences impinge on more-traditional ways of life, particularly in the Muslim world. As the world becomes more interconnected through improved telecommunications, increased international trade, and a more global economy, then—according to this view—the differences between civilizations, instead of fading away, may become exacerbated. The reason: The pressures of modernization would produce a backlash as peoples around the world feel uprooted from their traditional way of life and uncertain about the future; in response, they would cling (or return) to their traditional ways, but with a certain fanaticism bred of insecurity and the sense that these traditional values are under attack. For example, the rise in India of the Hindu nationalist party in opposition to the cosmopolitanism of the Congress party could be understood along these lines. The victory of Islamic

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<sup>4</sup>See Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, Vol. 72, No. 3, pp. 22–49. Bernard Lewis discusses the possibility of a “clash of civilizations” between the Muslim and Western worlds in his “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990, pp. 47–60. For a critique of Huntington’s thesis, see Fouad Ajami, “The Summoning,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 1993, Vol. 72, No. 4, pp. 2–9.

fundamentalism in Iran in reaction to the Shah's program of rapid modernization and Westernization is another example.

Many of these groups see the United States as a threat to their traditions and have engaged in violent acts against U.S. interests.<sup>5</sup> Although the collapse of communism has removed one source of support for such groups, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Libya all have sufficient resources to meet the relatively modest needs of those terrorist groups that wish the United States harm. Furthermore, terrorist organizations are becoming increasingly adept at exploiting the weaknesses of advanced nations.

This "clash of civilizations" may lead to instability in some cases. But instability is not a necessary outcome. For example, the vigorous promotion of "Asian values" (in opposition to Western "decadence") by such modernizing states as Singapore and Malaysia carries with it no reason to expect violence or instability to occur.

## **DETERMINANTS OF U.S. POLICY IN THE FUTURE**

It would generally appear that there is no way to predict whether global instability will mushroom. In any case, there is not necessarily a correlation between such instability and U.S. involvement in MOOTW.

### **Evolution of National Security Policy**

Instead, the degree of U.S. MOOTW involvement will depend primarily on how U.S. national security policy evolves. So far, U.S. policy in the post-Cold War world has been very internationalist in orientation; indeed, it has had a strong idealistic side, as is evident in the terms used to summarize it, such as the "New World Order" of the Bush administration and the "Engagement and Enlargement" of the Clinton administration. In both cases, the explicit goal of promoting democracy has been an important part of the overall strategy.

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<sup>5</sup>For an assessment of the link between religion and terrorism, see Bruce Hoffman, *"Holy Terror": The Implications of Terrorism Motivated by a Religious Imperative*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, P-7834, 1993.

The Clinton administration has also set a goal of strengthening and energizing the U.N., to make it more relevant and to enable it to fulfill the functions initially envisioned for it. While the emphasis on this component of national security policy has decreased since the beginning of the administration, it remains a possible impetus for MOOTW involvement. In addition, the U.S. desire to preserve the vitality of its Cold War alliances provides a motive for MOOTW involvement, as exemplified by the U.S. contribution of ground forces to the NATO Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia.

While the overall level of U.S. MOOTW involvement will probably be determined more by trends in U.S. national security policy than by any other factor, events in the world will, of course, serve as triggers for individual operations regardless of the policy preferences of a particular administration.

### **Instability or Violence Abroad**

The greatest pressure will probably be felt in cases in which Americans, especially officials such as those serving in embassies, are endangered by instability or violence abroad. Noncombatant evacuation operations may be required in such cases, leaving very little choice for the administration. Examples include the evacuation of embassy staff from Somalia (1991) and Liberia (1996), the evacuation of Americans caught in the civil war in Lebanon (1976), and the rescue of the medical students in Grenada (1983), although, in that case, other, strategic motivations were probably more important.

Threats posed to Americans at home or abroad by terrorism or weapons of mass destruction are also likely to lead to military action. Military forces might intervene to stop a planned or ongoing terrorist operation, to rescue hostages, or to retaliate after a terrorist attack. Similarly, U.S. military forces might strike WMD production or storage facilities to prevent an attack or to retaliate after hostile use

of WMD against U.S. interests.<sup>6</sup> One increasingly worrisome possibility is that terrorists will use WMD against the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Instability that threatens a neighbor, ally, or strategically important nation could lead to U.S. intervention, despite the United States' desire to stay out of the counterinsurgency business. Unrest that threatened to provoke a massive flow of refugees, either to the United States (e.g., Haiti in 1994) or to an ally (the massive flight of Kurdish refugees to Turkey in 1991), may also prompt an administration to intervene.<sup>8</sup>

Other mechanisms that could force the United States to engage in MOOTW can also be imagined. For example, instability that threatened a regime possessing WMD or similar dangerous materials (plutonium, toxic materials, etc.) might force the United States to intervene to ensure that these items or the lethal infrastructures that produced them did not fall into the wrong hands.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, an outbreak of a highly contagious disease, in an area where the government was unable to maintain order and provide appropriate medical care, might frighten the United States (and others) into taking action to try to contain the spread of the epidemic.<sup>10</sup>

### **Fear of a Wider War**

Beyond these situations in which an administration might feel compelled to take action lies a vaguer set of motives for MOOTW. In

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<sup>6</sup>U.S. military forces might also be involved in operations to protect allies from WMD. For example, Lesser and Tellis argue that European exposure to WMD threats in the Mediterranean will result in demands for additional U.S. guarantees, particularly during coalition operations such as Desert Storm. See Ian Lesser and Ashley Tellis, *Strategic Exposure: Proliferation Around the Mediterranean*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, MR-742-A, 1996.

<sup>7</sup>A balanced discussion of this possibility is found in Walter Laquer, "Postmodern Terrorism," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 1996, Vol. 75, No. 5, pp. 24–36.

<sup>8</sup>For a thoughtful analysis of the military role in responding to refugee flows, see Barry Posen, "Military Responses to Refugee Disasters," *International Security*, Summer 1996, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 72–111.

<sup>9</sup>We want to thank RAND colleague Bruce Nardulli for identifying this potential task.

<sup>10</sup>Laurie Garrett argues that such outbreaks will become more common, in "The Return of Infectious Disease," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 1996, Vol. 75, No. 1, pp. 66–79.



some cases, the fear of a wider war that could affect the United States or its allies might prompt action. For example, initial U.S. involvement in Bosnia was motivated in part by the fear that war could spread to Kosovo and elsewhere in the Balkans. In Bosnia, for example, the war did not spread (although it is hard to know whether or not it would have, had the United States and others not taken the actions they did, such as deploying peacekeeping troops to Macedonia).

### **Humanitarian Concerns**

Finally, there is what may be called the “CNN effect”: intervention justified by humanitarian concerns and having little or no visible strategic rationale, such as the deployment to Somalia in 1992. A global U.S. responsibility is argued in one variation or another: If *X* is a serious enough problem, then the United States should do something about it. Thus, policymakers often feel compelled by public and media pressures to intervene in situations whether or not there is a clear U.S. interest.

### **CONCLUSION**

Thus, the key issue for the future of MOOTW is the evolution of U.S. national security policy. If the general policy orientation remains “engagement and enlargement” or something similar, then the current high tempo of MOOTW is likely to continue. If, conversely, there were a turn toward a more nationalist or even isolationist policy, then involvement in certain types of MOOTW (particularly peace and humanitarian operations) would likely decrease. A reduction in peace operations would ease the optempo burden and combat-readiness problem but would not eliminate MOOTW challenges altogether. MOOTW directed at narrower national goals (e.g., counterproliferation, counterterrorism, NEOs, and counterdrug operations) would probably continue under any conceivable national security policy.

These latter operations are increasingly likely and will drive U.S. MOOTW involvement over the next decade. Thus, even if the need for peace operations goes away or the next few administrations choose not to participate in them, the USAF will, nevertheless, face

significant MOOTW challenges: responding to terrorism, proliferation of WMD, and instability that directly affects American interests. These operations may not produce the optempo problems associated with current peace operations, but they present a host of technical, operational, and diplomatic problems and tasks for dealing with those problems.

In the next chapter, we identify and analyze those specific tasks the USAF has been called upon to accomplish in past MOOTW and offer some thoughts on what additional tasks the USAF will face in the future. We then present four CONOPs for exploiting new technologies and enhancing the USAF capability to accomplish the additional tasks.