Most USAF MOOTW are relatively short, small-scale disaster-relief or humanitarian-aid missions. Both these common operations and many of the less frequent ones (e.g., search and rescue) do not significantly increase peacetime operational tempo. Recent peace operations, by contrast, have proved to be problematic because of their size, duration, overlapping nature, and demands on specialized assets (e.g., AWACS, intelligence platforms, and SOF aircraft) and on the fighter force. Indeed, although they represent only 9 percent of USAF MOOTW since 1989, peace operations are responsible for 90 percent of the USAF sorties flown in MOOTW during this same period.

As the USAF force structure has been reduced, the remaining forces and personnel have been stretched thinner and thinner across these peace operations, combat training, and exercises. As a result, many units are experiencing annual TDYs greatly exceeding the USAF 120-day goal and, for some fighter units, peace operations have cut significantly into time and sorties available for combat training. Thus, if the current pace of peace operations continues, particularly if additional force-structure reductions are made, the USAF is likely to face growing training, readiness, and morale problems. In short, peace operations are the cause of the USAF’s optempo problem: Solve this problem and the “MOOTW problem” will go away.

A NEW APPROACH TO PEACE OPERATIONS

The USAF and DoD have several options for dealing with this challenge. First, they might determine that a somewhat lower combat
readiness is acceptable for some units or the USAF at large, given expected threats and warning times. Second, they might determine that a greater percentage of USAF force structure needs to be in the active component, where it can assist more readily with peace operations. Finally, they might attempt to influence the demand side of the equation by seeking to limit the number or size of DoD commitments to peace operations.

The first option does not appear to be credible in the near term, given short-warning threats in Southwest Asia and Korea. It may be worth reconsidering in the future if the threat situation changes fundamentally. The second option is likely to be problematic in view of the increased costs associated with moving forces from the Reserves to the active force, but it nevertheless deserves a closer look. At the least, the USAF should explore ways that Reserve forces might contribute more to ongoing peace operations.

We judge the greatest near-term leverage on this problem to be found on the demand side. What we have in mind is not so much that DoD question the wisdom of participating in peace operations, although there is value in asking tough questions prior to sending forces to these operations. Rather, we suggest that the Joint Staff, theater commands, and the services look very hard at the putative requirements for these operations. Current deployments, plans, and concepts for air peace operations reflect an operational orientation more appropriate to high-intensity combat than to peacekeeping. Therefore, a new approach to peace operations is called for that employs military forces in a manner consistent with the unique political and military objectives of peacekeeping.

The Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, USAF, and theater planners need to look hard at U.S. objectives in a particular operation to ensure that the deployed forces are sized to those objectives rather than to more-demanding combat tasks. For example, it is appropriate to ask what U.S. (and allied or U.N.) leaders hope to accomplish when they create and enforce a no-fly zone. In many cases, the objective is likely to be to deny the adversary routine use of some specified airspace. To accomplish this mission, it is not necessary to hermetically seal the no-fly zone; under these circumstances, combat air patrols need not be flown 24 hours a day. Good surveillance, combined with random patrols, should be sufficient to deter
most flights. This approach could significantly reduce the number of aircraft necessary to enforce no-fly zones, easing optempo for all affected units. We propose that the USAF take the lead in developing this cop-on-the-beat approach to operations.

Finally, technology can make a major contribution by reducing the number of expensive manned platforms that need to be deployed to such contingencies. UAVs and air-implanted ground sensors can meet many surveillance requirements at lower cost and with fewer deployed personnel than can manned platforms. Investing in these systems may, ironically, be the most cost-effective way of enhancing USAF capabilities for MRCs. By freeing expensive manned systems to focus on their MRC tasks, relatively cheap UAVs and ground sensors can contribute to both the MOOTW and MRC missions.

**LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

In this report, we identify ten existing and four new operational-level tasks that the USAF is either currently doing, is expected to be prepared to accomplish, or could plausibly be assigned in the next 10 to 20 years. In our judgment, such taskings are going to come to the USAF whether or not the institution finds MOOTW an attractive mission. Even if the USAF makes no special effort to develop MOOTW capabilities, the inherent characteristics of air and space power—particularly global situational awareness, responsiveness, long range, precision strike, and potential to minimize friendly casualties—will make it the force of choice in many situations.

If the USAF chooses to embrace MOOTW and develop some of the technologies described in this report, air and space power could become the most versatile military instrument of the twenty-first century. It could decisively influence the outcome of events spanning the spectrum from peace operations to major conflicts. For this vision to be realized will require more than the development of new technologies. It will require that air-and-space-power theorists think more expansively and creatively about the application of that power in unconventional settings, and develop new doctrine, tactics, organizations, and procedures to meet the messy challenges of the early twenty-first century.