INTRODUCTION

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NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

Global, long-range defense planning has changed enormously since the end of the Cold War. The task has become more difficult in several respects.

First, the sources and types of conflict for which military establishments must plan have become more diverse and less predictable, even if less dangerous in the worst case. For the United States in particular, the end of the Cold War has opened up new debates about how, where, and why the employment of military forces should be considered. The range of potential adversaries is larger, despite the likelihood that the United States will have no true military peers through the year 2000 and beyond.

Second, the range of missions for military forces now gives considerable weight to low-intensity and nonconflict capabilities often considered marginal during the Cold War.

Third, and perhaps most important with regard to future demands and constraints on military forces, the nature of security itself is changing on a global basis. The security agenda has expanded in functional terms. Formerly peripheral challenges such as migration and economic competition, together with more obvious risks from the spread of weapons of mass destruction, now compete with conventional military rivalries as factors affecting the use of force.

Functional changes in the nature of security "problems," together with post–Cold War political transformations, are also changing the geographical terms in which policymakers, military leaders, and analysts must think about long-range planning. Simply put, many of the traditional distinctions between theaters are eroding under the pressure of cross-regional challenges—from migration and terrorism to the steadily increasing range of weapons systems available worldwide. The latter phenomenon is especially striking in its potential effects on U.S. freedom of action, and may ultimately reintroduce the issue of "homeland defense" as a leading element in strategic planning. The increasingly interdependent character of security across key regions—a reality noted at many points in this book—poses new intellectual and practical challenges for a defense community whose thinking and organization are still necessarily influenced by planning for *regional* security: in "Europe," the "Middle East," "Asia" and elsewhere. That said, it remains true that key regions of concern to the United States continue to exhibit characteristic trends, with significant implications for how and where conflicts might arise.

Looking beyond the next five to ten years poses formidable challenges for the imagination. How many of today's leading adversaries, from Iran to North Korea, will remain adversaries long after the end of the century? Leaderships will change, perhaps many times. Longstanding allies may change their orientation. New opponents, whether state or nonstate actors, might arise as a result of ideological, latent economic, or geopolitical cleavages. Systemic changes in the global economy, communications, and, not least, military technology might alter strategic stakes and capabilities. There is a need to consider alternative strategic "worlds," including those that might flow from dramatic shifts in power and security perceptions.

THE STUDY APPROACH

The chapters in this volume were originally prepared as contributions to a project on "Sources of Conflict and Their Implications for Air Force Operations." The Strategy and Doctrine Program of RAND's Project AIR FORCE undertook this work to bring regional security expertise to bear on Air Force planning concerns. With the Air

Staff devoting considerable effort to long-range planning throughout 1996, the timing seemed especially useful.

The study objective was to provide a systematic description of the range of future demands and constraints likely to be imposed on the U.S. Air Force as a result of developments in critical regions. Our description took two forms: (1) analysis of key trends affecting the strategic environment, roughly through 2025, including a discussion of "alternative strategic worlds"; and (2) development of regional scenarios offering varying demands and constraints on the use of air power. Overall, we have sought to characterize the kind of environment the United States will face in employing military power over the next three decades. What will our forces be called upon to do? What sort of opponents will we face? Who will help? What specific opportunities and constraints will arise as a result of the likely location and nature of conflict or nonconflict scenarios?

In consultation with our research sponsors, we focused on three regions critical—and, in our judgment, likely to remain critical—to U.S. defense planning throughout the period under consideration: Asia, the greater Middle East, and Europe and the former Soviet Union. We have not treated Latin America or sub-Saharan Africa, although these regions—especially Latin America—could have considerable importance as sources of conflict and demands on military forces. Both regions are certainly worthy of assessment, especially in the context of military operations other than war (MOOTW). Only constraints on time, and a desire to concentrate our efforts on regions central to current planning debates, prevented our doing so. However, Chapter Two, an overview of the future security environment, offers a number of conclusions relevant to the evolution of the strategic environment beyond the three regions under discussion.

We have also gone beyond regional dynamics and strategic futures to offer insights about the kind of Air Force the nation will need to protect and advance its interests through the first 25 years of the next millennium. We focus the discussion on four qualities we believe will be critical to that Air Force:

- *Global awareness*. The future U.S. Air Force will increasingly find itself in the information business.

- *Global reach*. The conflicts of the early 21st century will break out all over the world.

- *Rapid reaction*. Clear and direct warning will remain a rare and elusive commodity.

- *Appropriate force*. The Gulf War showed that air forces no longer need to deliver immense explosive power to have strategic impact on a war's outcome.

Many features of the world painted by our analysis remain dangerous and challenging, but are very different from those the United States is used to facing. Technological diffusion means that adversaries might field weapons, sensors, and systems that are roughly comparable in quality to those used by U.S. forces. Furthermore, enemies might have access to information of a quality and a quantity that have hitherto been available only to U.S. commanders. While fundamental U.S. interests—the survival of the nation, for example— do not face the kind of threat they did during the Cold War, lesser objectives seem likely to be under almost constant challenge. In particular, an increasing burden of humanitarian and peacekeeping functions and other MOOTW will likely be levied on the U.S. military.

As the only superpower, the United States will to some extent enjoy the luxury of picking and choosing if and when to get involved in combating these less salient and more ambiguous threats. If history is any guide, however, the United States certainly *will* get involved here and there, time and again. In doing so, it will want to conduct these optional military expeditions with expectations of "zero defects": few casualties, limited material losses, and rapid success. At the same time, the nation will want to maintain the capability to respond powerfully to any threat to its core interests. Such a capability presupposes both shaping the security environment in ways that preclude or make difficult the rise of a global adversary and reconstituting or reinforcing U.S. military strength in time to counter any emerging competitor.

The U.S. Air Force that will operate successfully in this world, in defense of the United States, will face real challenges and difficult tradeoffs. At first blush, it appears to us that this U.S. Air Force will emphasize quality and agility over quantity and mass. Quick, decisive responses to rapidly changing demands will be the hallmark of

this Air Force, and flexible adaptive planning and execution will be its keystones.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

In Chapter Two, "Overview of the Future Security Environment," David Shlapak and Zalmay Khalilzad (with Ann Flanagan) offer a series of propositions about the future world in security terms, including the character and scope of U.S. engagement. The authors put forth three alternative "worlds"—from the evolutionary to the benign to the malignant—and identify important "wild cards" capable of upsetting straight-line analyses. This overview summarizes the implications of the three regional analyses to follow.

The subsequent chapters provide a detailed discussion of regional trends and their meaning for strategy and planning. In Chapter Three, Ashley Tellis, Chung Min Lee, James Mulvenon, Courtney Purrington, and Michael Swaine examine changing trends and sources of conflict in Asia. Their discussion pays particular attention to the evolution of economic and military power relationships in the Asia-Pacific region, and the consequences for stability and U.S. freedom of action. In Chapter Four, Bruce Nardulli and Lory Arghavan join me in exploring trends shaping the future of the greater Middle East, from North Africa to the Persian Gulf, with emphasis on the security links to adjacent regions and the implications of the spread of weapons of mass destruction and longer-range delivery systems. In Chapter Five, John Van Oudenaren examines likely developments in Europe and the former Soviet Union, with a strong emphasis on the social, political, and economic trends shaping European and Eurasian futures.

In a final chapter, Zalmay Khalilzad and David Shlapak offer "Conclusions and Implications for the U.S. Air Force of 2025," emphasizing strategic-level observations, their meaning for air and space power and for national security policy more broadly.

The appendix brings together a selection of the regional scenarios developed over the course of the study and written by various authors. David Shlapak's introduction offers some thoughts on what we can and cannot expect of scenario building as a planning tool.