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RAND Research Brief

U.S. Security Needs for the 21st Century

How ready will the United States be to face the security challenges of the 21st century? The answer will depend greatly on choices made by U.S. defense planners over the next few years. Given a demanding national security strategy, evolving threats, and continuing constraints on defense resources, the margin for error is not great. One option for adjusting the U.S. defense posture is a "business as usual" approach that makes only modest changes in warfighting concepts and force mix. Another option is to embark on a fundamental assessment of U.S. strategy and defense planning—one that takes full advantage of emerging capabilities and exploits technological, organizational, and operational innovations to make a smaller force more capable.

Strategic Appraisal 1997: Strategy and Defense Planning for the 21st Century, RAND's second book in an annual series that reviews defense planning issues, makes a number of strong arguments in favor of the second option. In the RAND study, various experts examine the key dimensions of such a fundamental reassessment:

The Need for a Grand Design. The opening essay sets out the case for an ambitious strategy of global leadership to guide U.S. defense planning in upcoming decades.

Defense Planning in a New Context. The authors of this essay argue that the context for defense planning has been dramatically altered in recent years. They believe, however, that future forces can be planned in the face of inevitable uncertainties by identifying enduring missions and by carefully assessing the conditions under which those missions might have to be executed.

An Effective Defense Posture for the Future. The essay points out the shortcomings of conventional "threat-based planning," describes an alternative planning frame-

work, and identifies broad, force-posture options that should be assessed within it.

New Principles in Force Sizing. Building on the previous discussion, this essay addresses force-sizing issues and suggests types of reengineering needed to prepare for future combat and peacetime operations while reducing long-term costs.

Capabilities for Major Regional Contingencies. The authors review claims and counterclaims regarding U.S. capabilities in future theater conflicts, highlight key problems, and suggest possible program changes that would mitigate shortfalls in capabilities.

Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW). This essay considers present and future MOOTW demands on the U.S. Army and Air Force and suggests new approaches that would minimize readiness problems and other difficulties associated with these demands.

Overseas Presence and Policy. With the disappearance of traditional threats, U.S. overseas posture lacks a convincing rationale. The authors call for a new posture that shifts emphasis from preparing for big wars to becoming a regional security manager.

Shrinking Defense Budgets. Upcoming defense budgets will likely necessitate smaller sustainable forces than those now planned; given that forecast, the authors discuss tradeoffs that would produce different results.

Infrastructure Reductions. Efforts to cut infrastructure typically encounter enormous obstacles. Setting aside the questions of how much and what to cut, this essay considers the most effective ways to achieve significant reductions in infrastructure.

RAND research briefs summarize research that has been more fully documented elsewhere. This research brief describes work done for RAND's Project AIR FORCE; it is documented in Strategic Appraisal 1997: Strategy and Defense Planning for the 21st Century, edited by Zalmay M. Khalilzad and David A. Ochmanek, MR-826-AF, 1997, 379 pp., ISBN 0-8330-2456-6, available from RAND Distribution Services (Telephone: 310-451-7002; FAX: 310-451-6915; or Internet: order@rand.org). Abstracts of all RAND documents may be viewed on the World Wide Web (<http://www.rand.org>). Publications are distributed to the trade by National Book Network. RAND is a nonprofit institution that helps improve public policy through research and analysis; its publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of its research sponsors.

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