US MILITARY FORCE SIZING
FOR BOTH WAR AND PEACE

Mackenzie Eaglen

March 2015
Cover: On the map, stars represent countries and bodies of water that host US military activities.
To plan the size of the US military, Pentagon officials rely on what is known as a force-sizing construct, which reflects the upper limits of what the military is able to do. Most famously, in the wake of the Cold War, Pentagon planners relied on the two-war standard, which called for a military sized to fight two near-simultaneous wars if necessary. But in recent years, the two-war standard has been watered down even as demands on US forces have grown. Not only has it been scaled back, but the force-sizing construct also diminished after it was exposed as inadequate to meet the demands placed on the military in the aftermath of 2001 in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Yet returning to a true two-war standard is a necessary but insufficient step to create a modern force-sizing construct. Rather than only incorporating demands for forces in wartime, the Pentagon’s construct must also include regular peacetime demands on US forces. While steady-state demands such as forward presence abroad, training missions with partner militaries, and rotational deployments do not rise to the magnitude of major contingency operations, they form the backbone of day-to-day US military activities. Moreover, they serve a vital role in shaping the international environment to advance American interests, preserving a norm-based international order, reassuring allies, and deterring potential aggressors.

These peacetime missions represent the most cost-effective and preferred use of American military power. They magnify all other aspects of American national power while upholding stability in vital regions. Only by moving to a force-sizing construct that allows the United States to fight and win two near-simultaneous major wars—while also conducting the multitude of everyday operations that promote global stability—can defense planners more accurately size and budget for the demands on the US military.
US Military Force Sizing for Both War and Peace

While the pace of America’s drawdown in Afghanistan is currently under review, several thousand troops are expected to return home in 2015. It is tempting to view the US withdrawal as an opportunity to reap defense savings, but the reality is that those in uniform are only getting busier. Even in the absence of another protracted conflict, the regular engagement, partnership-building, and forward-presence responsibilities of the US military ensure there will be no letup in activity.

The strategic assumptions of the Obama administration’s force planning have not become reality, including that Europe would remain at peace, that the US was overcommitted across the Middle East, and that a “pivot” to Asia could be achieved without a notable increase in forces. As the bipartisan National Defense Panel concluded last year, the administration has been “widening the disconnect between America’s strategic objectives and the realities of . . . available forces.”

To be fair, previous administrations of both political parties have made other rosy assumptions that have not been borne out, while justifying force reductions, smaller budgets, and diminished strategic aims regarding the use of force.

With demands on US forces growing and new crises emerging because of disease, terrorism, and great-power aggression, the time is ripe for defense planners to incorporate the totality of military demands—and responses to smaller contingencies—into America’s force-sizing construct. Rather than being shaped exclusively to fight two major wars, or some variation therein, the military should be sized to fight two major wars and conduct everyday operations worldwide, including responding to multiple smaller contingencies at once. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan showed that the military was too small and underresourced to fully meet the two-war standard. Today’s smaller, less-capable military cannot therefore be expected to meet current war plans and provide enough capacity to carry out the majority of US operations overseas, which are short of war and intended to keep the peace.

An improved Pentagon force-sizing construct must balance presence, building partner capacity, and engagement requirements of peacetime with those of war-fighting. No longer should combat requirements be considered adequate to achieve both war and peacetime operations. In the past, this assumption has led to an inadequate global force posture that cannot serve as a persuasive deterrent should engagement and training fall short. By shortchanging the metric used to size and shape US military forces, administrations since the end of the Cold War have only ensured that more troops are used in greater numbers once ultimately committed or that the forces used are stretched too thin to quickly and decisively end conflict.

No Rest for American Troops Worldwide

Beyond the forces remaining in Afghanistan for the training- and counterterrorism-oriented Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, just under 190,000 active-duty service members are stationed outside the United States. These personnel are conducting a variety of missions, including counterterror operations, routine patrols through disputed waters, and regular exercises with regional partners and allies. These missions typify what the military calls “steady state” requirements, which form the bedrock of US military activities around the world.

Europe. Since the end of World War II, US forces in Europe, especially Germany, have been a linchpin of America’s overseas military posture. The military’s force posture in Europe has served as a launching pad and
logistics hub for operations in the region, as well as those in North Africa and the Middle East. For instance, US aircraft from Lakenheath, Great Britain; Spangdahlem, Germany; Ramstein, Germany; Sigonella, Italy; and Aviano, Italy, contributed vitally to the early stages of the NATO campaign in Libya. Selected examples of recent US military activities across Europe are depicted in figure 1.

Of the roughly 70,000 US military personnel in Europe, about 43,000 service members are in Germany. The Army comprises the bulk of this presence, with about 28,000 soldiers in country, including the headquarters of US Army Europe at Wiesbaden. These units frequently move about the European theater on exercises and rotations. For instance, the 10th Army Air and Missile Defense Command, based in Kaiserslautern, sent soldiers to Poland from 2010 to 2012 to operate a Patriot missile battery and train local
Soldiers from this unit embarked on a yearlong deployment in December 2013 to Turkey to safeguard against missile threats from Syria.7 The Air Force comprises the second major portion of US forces in Germany, with about 14,000 airmen stationed there.8 Germany is home to Ramstein Air Base, the headquarters of US Air Forces in Europe, as well as Spangdahlem Air Base—one of only seven US fighter bases abroad.9 Last year, aircraft from Ramstein’s 86th Airlift Wing participated in a two-week rotation in Poland, where US and Polish aircraft trained at evading and escaping surface-to-air missiles.10

As Russian aggression in Ukraine continues, the US military has ramped up its support of Kiev and other Eastern European states through an umbrella effort known as Operation Atlantic Resolve. In September, the US joined 14 other nations for the 2014 Rapid Trident exercise. This exercise consisted of multinational battalion-level field training and supported interoperability among the participating nations: Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Canada, Georgia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.11 The exercise featured more than 1,300 personnel from across the participating nations, including the US Army’s 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, based in Vicenza, Italy.12

The US response to Ukraine has also featured the strategic use of air power. In June, five US-based bombers—including two stealthy B-2s—were sent to Europe to train and operate with allied militaries.13 The B-2s in particular have long been used for extended deterrence missions from Europe to the Korean Peninsula for the US to deploy in moments of tension. Fighter aircraft have also played a crucial role in the American response to Russian actions in Ukraine. Four F-15s based out of Lakenheath were conducting a planned Baltic Air Policing rotation over the skies of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania when the crisis in Ukraine first escalated. In the face of Russian aggression, the Air Force added six additional F-15s from Lakenheath to more than double the jets deployed, which lasted through the early spring.14 The Air Force also deployed a dozen F-16s based out of Aviano, Italy, to Poland over the spring as tensions rose.15

The US has also maintained a regular naval presence in the Black Sea.16 Within one week of the Russian invasion of Crimea, the USS Truxtun arrived in the Black Sea to reassure regional partners.17 One of the ships that has contributed to the Black Sea mission, the USS Donald Cook, is newly home-ported in Rota, Spain, the first of four destroyers that will eventually be based there and operate throughout the region.18 In June, the USS Ross joined the USS Donald Cook in Spain as the second forward-deployed destroyer at Rota.19 The USS Ross participated in a set of training exercises with Ukraine, Georgia, Romania, and Turkey in early September in the Black Sea.20 The exercises focused on force protection, navigation, communications, and search and rescue.21

Although these destroyers will bolster America’s naval presence in Europe, not all ships operating in the area are forward-deployed. Besides contributing to patrols in the Black Sea, the USS Vella Gulf, home-ported in Norfolk, Virginia, has been strengthening ties with European partners, including through a recent port call in Romania.22

Congress recently approved the majority of the administration’s request for close to $1 billion for a European Reassurance Initiative.23 More than $630 million will go toward increasing US military presence, readiness, and capabilities in Europe, while $175 million will go toward military assistance for Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. While Congress approved plans only for 2015, potential future measures include increasing rotations of US-based units allocated to the NATO Response Force; maintaining F-15C air-superiority fighters in Europe that had been planned for retirement; assisting Eastern European NATO allies with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities; expanding naval activity in the Baltic and Black Seas; and increasing Marine Corps Black Sea multilateral engagement.24

Elsewhere in Europe, US Army Europe led Saber Strike 2014, a multinational exercise in the Baltics in June, spanning 4,500 personnel from 10 nations.25 Although many of the participating American forces came from units based in Europe, soldiers from the 1st Cavalry Division’s 1st Brigade Combat Team also took part in the exercise. This brigade is a regionally aligned force designed to specialize certain units in a
given region. The units, based in the US, develop language and cultural expertise that they use when on deployment. In this case, the 1st Brigade Combat Team is based at Fort Hood, Texas, and, throughout 2014, periodically rotated soldiers to Europe to participate in exercises and augment existing forces on the continent.26

The Pacific. On the other side of the world, American forces are no less busy. Japan is home to the largest overseas garrison of US forces, hosting roughly 50,000 service members.27 About 40 percent of these personnel are from the Navy, whose 7th Fleet is forward-deployed largely to Japan. The roughly 80 ships of this fleet participate in as many as 125 bilateral and multilateral exercises per year, all while making more than 500 port visits to 25 countries each year.28 For example, last April, the USS John S. McCain—home-ported in Yokosuka, Japan—spent a week in Vietnamese waters as part of an ongoing effort to expand the US military-to-military relationship with Vietnam.29 Some recent examples of US military activities throughout Asia are depicted in figure 2.

Other US forces in Japan include roughly 2,500 soldiers, 13,000 airmen, and 16,000 Marines.30 The 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force, based in Japan, frequently sends units on deployments around the region. In June, a small detachment of Marines participated in Khan Quest 2014, a multilateral exercise held in Mongolia. As part of the exercise, Marines helped renovate an elementary school and install a new playground.31

South Korea hosts about 19,000 Army personnel and 9,000 airmen stationed at fighter bases in Osan and Kunsan.32 One of the major contributions of US forces in Korea—besides providing everyday deterrence—is participating in the annual Key Resolve exercise.33 Key Resolve is one of the world’s most complex simulated exercises and is conducted in concert with allied nations such as Australia, Denmark, Canada, and the United Kingdom. In 2014, Key Resolve featured 5,200 US forces—including about 4,100 stationed in Korea.

Recent US military activity in Asia has come under increased attention because of the American pivot to the region. Unfortunately, tracking the “rebalance” can be difficult because the Pentagon is not always explicit about which activities fall under the pivot. Moreover, many of the rebalance-related activities are similar to programs that were already in place as part of the military’s regular regional presence to deter and reassure. Indeed, one criticism of the rebalance is that it is too light on new policies and too heavy on repackaged existing forces and plans.

With those caveats, several clearly identifiable rebalancing initiatives are underway. For example, as the Navy seeks to expand its engagement in Southeast Asia, the USS Fort Worth deployed to Singapore in the fall. The Fort Worth, home-ported in San Diego, California, is the second Littoral Combat Ship to rotationally deploy to Singapore.34 The Navy’s eventual plan is to forward-deploy four of these ships on a rotational basis to augment US forces in the region. The Navy is deploying MQ-8B Fire Scout surveillance helicopters on the USS Fort Worth, marking the first time it has used unmanned helicopters in the Pacific.35

More broadly, as part of the Navy’s plan to increase its regional presence in Asia, it announced in August 2014 details of a five-year navigation plan that will increase its forward presence in the region to 120 by the year 2020, an increase of 23 ships from the 2014 average.36 Part of this increased presence will include a fourth attack submarine forward-deployed in Guam. Guam was the center of attention in November 2013 after China declared a controversial Air Defense Identification Zone over the contested waters of the East China Sea, with two B-52s flying out of Guam transiting the zone in protest.37

Another component of the pivot is the administration’s plan to establish four Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs) to operate throughout the Pacific.38 Based out of Japan, Australia, Guam, and Hawaii, these will allow the Pentagon to respond to crises and conduct regular engagements from geographically diverse areas. The four task forces are not an entirely new addition to the region, however. They were enabled in large part by the reduction of about 9,000 Marines from Okinawa, with roughly 7,000 Marines to be spread across Hawaii, Guam, and Australia.39 In many ways, the MAGTFs are emblematic of the potential of the as-of-yet-unmet promises of President Obama’s pivot. Although distributed MAGTFs are an important tool
to head off catastrophes and conduct engagement operations, the fact that they were created by reshuffling forces throughout the region—and not by a substantial new influx of forces—suggests budgetary limitations are constraining a larger military buildup.

Also as part of the rebalance, the Pentagon is transforming its presence in the Philippines. Since 9/11, the US military presence in the archipelago has been focused on counterterrorism cooperation, with as many as 600 special operations forces working with the Philippine military. While the US is drawing down its special operations forces in the Philippines and disbanded the Joint Special Operations Task Force–Philippines last year, it is working to expand its conventional footprint as regional concerns over Chinese military power grow. In April, Washington and Manila reached an agreement to expand American access rights to bases in the Philippines. The US-Philippine Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement facilitates a rotational presence of US forces in the Philippines. This agreement was made possible in part by a swell in local support for the US military in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan, when the US military, including the USS George Washington, at the time home-ported in Yokosuka, Japan, responded swiftly to deliver humanitarian aid and assistance.
Also as part of America’s rebalance to Asia, forces based in the United States periodically rotate to South Korea to strengthen the American presence on the peninsula, especially during periods of heightened tensions. Last February, for instance, about 800 soldiers from the Fort Hood–based 1st Cavalry Division deployed to Korea as part of a nine-month rotation. As they returned to the US in September, they left their equipment in Korea for use by future units that rotate through.

Beyond the pivot, yet still crucial to US strategy in the region, about 240 American troops from Pacific Command are deployed in Thailand. The Joint US Military Advisory Group in Thailand oversees a bilateral exercise program that averages over 40 military drills per year and helps facilitate military education, humanitarian relief, and demining programs. Thailand hosts Cobra Gold, Southeast Asia’s largest multinational and multiservice exercise. The 2014 installment included the 4,000 troops from the US—including many from units forward-deployed in Japan—as well as forces from Thailand, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, and Indonesia. The exercise focuses on promoting interoperability and building partner capacity. Although this year’s iteration will be scaled down because of concerns surrounding the political situation in Thailand, the importance of the exercise to American strategy in Southeast Asia means that it is likely to continue despite these humanitarian concerns.

Nearby, in Malaysia, F-22 stealth fighters from Hawaii joined F-15s from the Massachusetts Air National Guard, as well as airlift squadrons from Japan, Hawaii, and Alaska, for Exercise Cope Taufan, conducted over two weeks in June by Pacific Air Forces with the Royal Malaysian Air Force. Over the course of the exercise, units practiced combat missions and worked to enhance interoperability between the two air forces. Moreover, the USS Fort Worth, freshly arrived in Singapore for its 16-month deployment, and the USS Sampson, home-ported in San Diego and on deployment in the Pacific, recently assisted the Indonesian government in the search for Air Asia Flight 8501.

In one of its most important activities last year, the US Navy’s Pacific Fleet hosted the world’s largest multinational naval exercise, Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC), from late June through the beginning of August. As the US Pacific Fleet Command describes, RIMPAC 2014 featured 22 nations, “49 surface ships, 6 submarines, more than 200 aircraft and 25,000 personnel,” and helped expand military-to-military relationships in the Pacific while forging interoperability with partner fleets. For the first time in 2014, China participated in the multinational exercise.

Africa. The American military is also active in Africa, although few US military personnel are stationed on the continent. Rather, US presence requirements and partner relationships are maintained primarily through task forces and military exercises. With 1,200 US military personnel in Djibouti, the Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa helps combat terrorism in East Africa, targeting extremist groups and helping to assist partner nations in strengthening their military capabilities.

In the wake of the attacks on US facilities in Benghazi, the Marine Corps stood up the Special-Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Crisis Response to help support emergency operations on the continent. The 2014 rotation grew to 1,200 Marines deploying from Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, to Moron Air Base, Spain. Last spring, 175 of the Marines from the crisis response force deployed to Romania’s Mihail Kogalniceanu base, where they joined the roughly 300 US-based Marines who were already there as part of the Black Sea Rotational Force. In July, 80 Marines from the unit helped evacuate 150 US Embassy personnel from Libya. Recent examples of US military activities throughout Africa are depicted in figure 3.

In 2014, about 250 US military personnel remained on the hunt for Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony and his Lord’s Resistance Army. And in May, President Obama sent 80 military personnel, along with unmanned surveillance platforms, to Chad in an effort to locate the roughly 300 schoolgirls taken hostage by Boko Haram.

To the west, in June, US Africa Command kicked off Western Accord 14, an annual joint training exercise including US-based Marine reserve forces, held with the Economic Community of West African States in Senegal. Also in Senegal, more than 40 airmen

Meanwhile, the Pentagon deployed roughly 3,000 service members to West Africa for Operation United Assistance to combat the spread of Ebola. These forces were pulled from units based across the United States, including 700 soldiers from Fort Campbell, Kentucky. In December, US forces finished construction of their 17th and final planned Ebola treatment facility in West Africa, several months ahead of schedule. Although the fight against Ebola continues, the worst of the outbreak seems to be over, and hundreds of these American forces are returning home.

**The Middle East.** In the Middle East, with much of the region confronting crises, American regional engagement is more important than ever. From May to June of last year, US forces participated in Eager Lion 2014, a large-scale multilateral exercise held annually in Jordan since 2011. Eager Lion brought together more than 12,500 participants, including about 6,000
American personnel from both the continental US and Central Command and more than 20 nations spanning five continents. In addition to hosting this large US contingent during Eager Lion, Jordan now is home to a Central Command forward-deployment of about 1,500 service members who primarily assist Jordanian security forces. Also last year, the Obama administration deployed additional special forces units to Jordan to augment the training mission.

Elsewhere in the region, the US has about 300 troops in Saudi Arabia, including a training mission supported by forces from US Central Command that works with the Saudi armed forces on professional military education and joint military exercises. These efforts both promote regional security and further America’s strategic partnership with the kingdom.

Kuwait serves as an important launching ground for operations across the Middle East. About 23,000 US military personnel are in Kuwait, including the 1st Infantry Division’s 1st Brigade Combat Team, which deployed from Fort Riley in June for a nine-month rotation. Kuwait also hosts Ali al Salem Air Base and

Sources: *Army Times; US Air Forces Central Public Affairs; US Central Command; Navy Times; Admiral Jonathan Greenert, testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee; Washington Post; Hackett, The Military Balance; Marine Corps Times; US Naval Forces Central Command; Defense News.*
the 386th Air Expeditionary Unit, which provides tactical airlift for US Central Command throughout the Persian Gulf.\textsuperscript{71} Ali al Salem has supported US airstrikes against ISIS.\textsuperscript{72}

Building on the initial successes of its Special-Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Crisis Response, the Marine Corps recently established a similar task force based out of Kuwait.\textsuperscript{73} With about 2,300 Marines, the Special-Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Central Command is close to double the size of the European-based force and carries out noncombat missions throughout the region, including humanitarian assistance, fixed-site security, and embassy evacuations.\textsuperscript{74} Marines from US-based units deployed over the fall to join the task force for seven-month rotations.\textsuperscript{75}

Already, the task force has been busy, deploying a contingent to bolster embassy security in Sanaa as the situation in Yemen has deteriorated.\textsuperscript{76} This crisis response force was recently augmented by the USS \textit{Iwo Jima} and the USS \textit{Fort McHenry} Amphibious Ready Group/Marine Expeditionary Unit team, which entered the Red Sea in late January. The US-based ships and Marines moved into the Red Sea as part of their normal tour and would be able to assist should the situation in Yemen necessitate an embassy evacuation.\textsuperscript{77}

This and other recent examples of US military activities throughout the Middle East are depicted in figure 4.

Other Marine Corps activities in the region are aimed at preventing crises from arising. A good example is Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC), which is realigning after years of heavy focus on Afghanistan. In January, MARSOC forces deployed to the Middle East to help train local militaries and counter insurgencies. MARSOC aims to perpetually maintain a company in the Middle East, one in Africa, and one in the Pacific to work alongside regional partners.\textsuperscript{78}

At the same time, several hundred American active-duty service members are stationed in Egypt as part of the ongoing Multinational Force and Observers peacekeeping mission that originated as part of 1979 Treaty of Peace between Egypt and Israel and helps promote stability on the Sinai Peninsula.\textsuperscript{79} And acting as the hub of the American naval presence in the Middle East, the Navy’s 5th Fleet, headquartered in Bahrain, conducts constant patrols, exercises, and combat operations to fight extremism and support US forces in the region.\textsuperscript{80}

America’s naval presence in the region is especially important during times of crisis. When President Obama decided to begin operations against ISIS last August, the USS \textit{George H. W. Bush} strike group moved from the Arabian Sea to the North Arabian Gulf within 30 hours to conduct combat operations against the group—launching 20–30 combat sorties per day.\textsuperscript{81} Yet, in many ways, the carrier’s greatest contribution to the fight against ISIS was not necessarily its striking power but its proximity to the conflict. If the strike group had been based in the United States, the president’s options would have been much more limited. As it was, the carrier’s routine forward-deployment meant that it was available for use where and when it was most needed.

Land-based airpower has also played an important role in the campaign against ISIS. As the \textit{Washington Post} has reported, land-based attacks against ISIS have likely been led from three major bases in the Gulf: al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, Ali al Salem Air Base in Kuwait, and al Dhafra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates.\textsuperscript{82} Land-based air power was especially crucial during the opening stages of the campaign. Through roughly the first two months of the operation against ISIS, the US Air Force conducted just under three-quarters of all strikes in Iraq and about half of all strikes in Syria.\textsuperscript{83} More recently, through the end of November, the Air Force flew about 60 percent of all airstrike missions against ISIS.\textsuperscript{84} This suggests that regionally based aircraft have been at least as important as carrier-based aviation in the campaign against ISIS.\textsuperscript{85}

Land-based assets used to strike ISIS include AC-130 gunships, B-1B bombers, F-16s, F-15Es, and F-22 fighters.\textsuperscript{86} Also taking part in the strikes are F/A-18 jets taking off from the USS \textit{Carl Vinson}, which recently replaced the USS \textit{George H. W. Bush} as America’s carrier on duty in the Persian Gulf.\textsuperscript{87}

Through the end of 2014, the US and its coalition partners conducted more than 1,400 airstrikes against ISIS, with the Pentagon reporting earlier in the month that the US conducted about 82 percent of coalition strike missions. Yet airstrikes represent only a fraction of total sorties flown.\textsuperscript{88} US and partner nations flew
6,981 combat missions against ISIS through the end of the year.89

Al Udeid Air Base near Doha is a crucial node in Operation Inherent Resolve against ISIS. The Qatari-owned base houses about 8,000 US military personnel and dozens of US jets.90 As is frequently the case in the Middle East, the US is often less than forthcoming about the exact forces it has stationed in Qatar. Yet reports have indicated that B-1 bombers, F-15E Strike Eagles, and F-16 Fighting Falcons deployed at al Udeid have played key roles in the war against ISIS.91 In addition to these kinetic strikes, the Pentagon has stated that C-17s and C-130s based at al Udeid contributed to humanitarian airdrops in northern Iraq to Yazidi refugees.92

Also of key importance is the United Arab Emirates' al Dhafra Air Base, which has housed F-22s since at least 2012—although once again, the Pentagon does not officially acknowledge their presence.93 While the initial motivation for forward-deploying the stealthy fighters at al Dhafra was as a warning to Iran regarding its nuclear program, recent operations have proven the F-22's value in a more contested environment than Iraq and Afghanistan. Although the exact number and type of US aircraft at al Dhafra is confidential, Google Earth imagery captured five F-22s sitting on the tarmac in 2013.94

The US military is also heavily involved with its NATO partner Turkey. In June 2014, for instance, a US Navy cruiser, the USS Vella Gulf, worked with the Turkish navy to improve maritime interoperability, including working on how to counter air, surface, and asymmetrical threats.95 Additionally, Turkey has joined the US-led coalition against ISIS, and after much discussion agreed to help Iraqi Kurdish fighters cross through Turkey on their way to fight alongside Syrian Kurds besieged in Kobani.96 Turkey recently approved US unmanned aircraft missions out of Incirlik Air Base against ISIS, and discussions are underway to allow for manned aircraft missions as well.97

**Latin America.** American troops are also active in the Western Hemisphere. In Central America, for instance, nearly 400 active-duty service members support stability efforts in Honduras and beyond through Joint Task Force-Bravo, run by US Southern Command, which conducts frequent counter narco-terrorism operations and provides humanitarian assistance throughout the region.97

Southern Command also leads Joint Interagency Task Force South, which oversees Operation Martillo's efforts to combat illicit trafficking in Central America.98 Over the summer, about 250 Marines aboard the USS America landing helicopter assault ship participated in a series of port calls and engagements throughout Central and South America, including in Colombia, Brazil, Chile, and Peru, as the newest amphibious assault ship in the fleet transited from Mississippi to its new home in San Diego.99

**Force-Sizing Construct Must Include Steady-State Demands**

Taken collectively, these forces, exercises, permanent and rotational deployments, and operations participating in presence and engagement missions offer a snapshot of the US military's steady-state requirements. They reflect the minimum demands on the United States as a global power to help train with local militaries, patrol the high seas, provide humanitarian assistance, fight extremism, and deter foreign aggression. Today, with airstrikes underway in Iraq and Syria, a resurgent Russia threatening Europe's flank, and escalating Chinese assertiveness in Asia, demands on US forces are set only to grow, even as force structure declines.

Two decades ago, the 1993 Bottom-Up Review found, “The presence of U.S. forces deters adventurism and coercion by potentially hostile states, reassures friends, enhances regional stability, and underwrites our larger strategy of international engagement, prevention, and partnership. It also gives us a stronger influence, both political as well as military, in the affairs of key regions.”

The bipartisan National Defense Panel (NDP) recently reaffirmed this sentiment, arguing, “The effectiveness of America’s other tools for global influence, such as diplomacy and economic engagement, are critically intertwined with and dependent upon the perceived strength, presence and commitment of U.S.
armed forces.” Furthermore, the NDP cautioned, “Absent America’s leadership, large parts of the world would likely evolve to dangerous imbalances, particularly in Eurasia, threatening American trade and investment, and potentially leading to conflicts greatly damaging to the United States.”

In vital strategic regions of the world today, including Asia, we are seeing the NDP’s fears play out. Just as declining American military power is leading to a corresponding decrease in the effectiveness of our diplomacy, so too is rising Chinese military power increasing the effectiveness of its foreign policy, for instance. This trend—and similar ones with other competitors—does not lead the United States in a desirable direction in support of national and economic interests.

To start to reverse this trend, as the NDP argued, the United States must fundamentally revisit its force-sizing construct. Historically, America has sized its military forces against major conflict scenarios. Most famously, the Bottom-Up Review articulated what came to be known as the “two-war standard,” calling for US forces that were structured to “achieve decisive victory in two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts and to conduct combat operations characterized by rapid response and a high probability of success, while minimizing the risk of significant American casualties.”

Although a return to this clear-cut two-war standard is an important and necessary step, it is not sufficient in and of itself. All too often, defense planners largely focus on wartime requirements when it comes to force sizing—ignoring requirements relating to presence and everyday deterrence to their detriment. Instead, the US must turn to a two-war plus steady state force-sizing construct that more properly encapsulates the vast number of missions American forces conduct each day around the globe, as well as frequent military operations that fall below the threshold of a major regional contingency.

The NDP paves the way for the Pentagon to head in this direction. As the panel articulates, “In the current threat environment, the United States could plausibly be called upon to deter or fight in several regions in overlapping time frames: on the Korean peninsula, in the East or South China Sea, in the Middle East, South Asia, and quite possibly in Europe.” What this means, in the words of the panel, is that the US military “must have the capability and capacity to deter or stop aggression in multiple theaters—not just one—even when engaged in a large-scale war.”

This ability to conduct multiple operations around the globe while engaged in a major conflict elsewhere is increasingly vital. After all, the Obama administration came into office looking to decrease America’s military commitments overseas but helped overthrow the Qaddafi regime in Libya; began an air campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria; and participated in major disaster relief efforts in Indonesia, Japan, and the Philippines—all while the war in Afghanistan continued, and even escalated, under its watch. None of these engagements beyond Afghanistan neatly fits into the box of a major regional conflict, yet they are clearly additional responsibilities that have taxed American forces.

The USS George H. W. Bush’s experience over the summer is an important example of how the lines of current conflict are increasingly blurring. Early in its 2014 deployment, the USS Bush was striking enemy targets in Afghanistan before it was ordered to move toward Iraq and the growing threat of ISIS. In this sense, America’s forward-deployed forces—and carriers, in particular—act as free safeties, shifting from one part of their area of operations to another to meet the most pressing threat. Their assignments often shift from peacetime to war and back again—yet this wide variety of missions is often ignored in war planning that neatly categorizes forces as either at peace or at war. Forward-deployed forces serve as both war winners and war preventers—but, under current force planning constructs, no ready categorization exists for these types of missions.

Consequently, it only makes sense that America’s force-sizing construct take these kinds of missions—and daily peacetime requirements—into account. As the NDP notes, in the near future, US forces may face crises or conflicts of varying degrees in two, three, four, or even five places at once. In this kind of environment, being able to fight one full-scale war and aim for something less than victory in another is not good enough for a superpower.

The flexibility to conduct multiple war and peacetime operations at once is essential to America’s
US MILITARY FORCE SIZING FOR BOTH WAR AND PEACE

war-prevention strategy. The US military relies on a sliding scale of persuasion, dissuasion, and deterrence to advance American interests abroad. While persuasion through the positive use of military force is America’s preferred option, military power represents a flexible tool that can become more or less assertive as the situation demands. Maintaining a large and adaptable force means that policymakers will be given a wide array of options to use military force in a manner appropriate to the situation at hand.

Moreover, unlike in the past, the US will not be able to secure its future from the top down. Dissuading or deterring the highest-end threats will not be sufficient to satisfy American national interests. Dissuading or deterring Chinese aggression in Asia, for instance, is not enough to produce a secure world if ISIS conquers even-broader swaths of the Middle East.

Conclusion

Although the ability to meet wartime surge demands is imperative, the reality is that the US military is stretched already in meeting its daily noncrisis obligations. That outcome would worsen under sequestration’s return in 2016 when, for example, a force of 175,000 active-duty Marines would have to operate under a 1:2 deployment-to-dwell ratio (time deployed to time at home) in peacetime—the same ratio the Marine Corps faced during the height of wartime operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. An unrealistic, understated, and underfunded force-sizing construct is no longer sustainable. The world already saw a US military strained to carry out two major combat operations when it was supposedly built to do so last decade. As it becomes increasingly clear that there will be no peace dividend following America’s large-scale involvement in these wars, policymakers need to get serious about the forces and investments required to sustain the daily operations that preserve peace, deter conflict, engage in smaller-scale operations where necessary, and promote prosperity. Incorporating these demands into Pentagon planning would provide a much more accurate picture of America’s defense needs.

Despite the ongoing drawdown in Afghanistan, America’s military commitments abroad are not shrinking, but the size of the force is. Without a clear understanding of how much the US military does to keep the peace in operations outside of war, America’s service members will face growing challenges as they struggle to meet the everyday demands that the nation expects and an increasingly unstable world requires. Only by adding these peacetime demands to a two-war force-sizing construct can the Pentagon plan to win the wars of today and prevent those of tomorrow.
Notes


21. Ibid.


42. Gordon Arthur and James Hardy, “US, Philippines Start ‘PHIBLEX’ Drills as Special Forces Mission Draws Down,” IHS


57. Gould and McLeary, “New US Marine Corps Crisis Unit to Be Based in Kuwait.”


64. Lamothe, “The Pentagon’s Mission against Ebola Is Quietly Shrinking.”


73. Gould and McLear, “New US Marine Corps Crisis Unit to Be Based in Kuwait.”


86. Tony Capaccio, “Pentagon Says Islamic State Fight Costs $7.6 Million/Day.”
89. United States Air Forces Central Command, “Operation Inherent Resolve.”
administration_and_Management/other/515.pdf.

102 Ibid., 11.
103 Aspin, Report on the Bottom-Up Review, 8.
105 Ibid., 26.
107 Ibid., 25.
About the Author

Mackenzie Eaglen is a resident fellow in the Marilyn Ware Center for Security Studies at AEI, where she works on defense strategy, defense budgets, and military readiness. Eaglen has worked on defense issues in the US House of Representatives and Senate and at the Pentagon in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and on the Joint Staff. In 2014, Eaglen served as a staff member of the congressionally mandated National Defense Panel, a bipartisan blue-ribbon commission established to assess US defense interests and strategic objectives. This followed her previous work as a staff member for the 2010 congressionally mandated bipartisan Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel, also established to assess the Pentagon’s major defense strategy. A prolific writer on defense-related issues, she has also testified before Congress.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the high-quality and tireless research and support efforts of AEI research assistant Charles Morrison on this and many projects over the past three years. My thanks also to AEI interns Lauren Demos, Kairlyn Johnson, and Carly Campbell. Additionally, I remain grateful to Claude Aubert for his excellent work in helping to build graphics for this paper, as well as to Christy Sadler and Hilary Waterman for their editorial support.