



Chapter Title: Introduction

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1. Introduction

The U.S. Air Force (USAF) is at a potential turning point. It has been engaged in expeditionary operations for more than two decades, developing and adapting its force management concepts to cope with changing demands first in Iraq, then in Afghanistan, and then again in Iraq, as well as elsewhere. As those operations wind down, so do some of the demands that have strained the force for many years, potentially leaving a window within which to reset and prepare for future operations.

Recent defense guidance has shifted the focus toward Asia, emphasizing missions that may stress USAF capabilities in new ways. The USAF is currently reexamining its force presentation and management construct, raising questions about how the force will position and prepare itself for the future. Additionally, fiscal pressures make resource trade-offs even more weighty and difficult.

The USAF has an opportunity both to reassess the size and shape of its forces and the policies it uses to govern them in light of potential future demands. However, this task is difficult, given the scope of USAF capabilities, the range of its missions, and the inherent complexity of the current security environment. This report describes and illustrates a method for sizing and shaping the USAF's agile combat support (ACS) forces to meet a range of future operations.¹ We present a framework that can be used to develop a robust force that can support both expeditionary and home-station commitments, and that makes explicit important assumptions and planning inputs.

Challenges to Shaping the Future ACS Force

The USAF is an expeditionary force, meaning that it fights from forward operating locations that generally do not house permanently stationed forces. These forward operating locations range in size, austerity of conditions (i.e., level of infrastructure), and severity of threat. To support the range of military operations at these various forward operating locations, the USAF maintains a wide array of manpower and equipment to deploy and employ forces rapidly.²

The USAF was organized, sized, and shaped for a more-traditional Cold War model of fighting,³ which involved preparing to fight predominantly from garrison bases throughout

¹ In this report, we use *ACS* in the broad, enterprise sense, not merely to refer to the portion of the force defined by the current service core functions.

² In this report, we use *manpower* to refer to the billets or "spaces" that the USAF plans and budgets for, while we use *personnel* in reference to a base population being supported, e.g., "base personnel."

³ An example of this Cold War model is wing-sized deployments with support forces sized and shaped to support the entire wing in major combat operations.

Europe and northeast Asia. Although it developed new capabilities and concepts to support the expeditionary operations that emerged in the 1990s, the USAF has not yet embraced structural changes that could better posture it to fight more-recent expeditionary operations.⁴

The 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance lists as primary missions for the U.S. armed forces a range of mission types, many of which could challenge the USAF.⁵ These mission sets, which include counterinsurgency (COIN), building partnerships (BP), and major combat operations (MCOs) with anti-access/area denial (A2AD) threats, not only differ from one another in their demands but are also distinct in size and shape from the traditional model of warfighting around which the USAF is structured.⁶ These missions sometimes entail operating in increasingly austere environments and under extremely high threats, often with dispersed forces, and sometimes outside the traditional boundaries of air bases. The impact of such conditions is felt most by the USAF's support forces, which the USAF calls *agile combat support*.

In addition to these mission sets, the USAF faces the specter of sustained commitments in the Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility (AOR). Even though the war in Iraq has been concluded⁷ and forces in Afghanistan are drawing down,⁸ the USAF may yet play a significant role in regional stabilization in and around those countries for years to come.⁹

An additional factor complicating the planning of the USAF's resource mix for future operations is the rate at which the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) plans and guidance change. Presidential administrations change every four or eight years, and each one rightly reassesses the geopolitical environment and the appropriateness of U.S. national security and military strategies. Administrations also respond to emerging changes in the security environment, and OSD appropriately responds to these changes, as well as foreseeable changes in threats, by issuing new guidance and planning scenarios around which the military services can plan and program.

⁴ Raymond E. Conley, Albert A. Robbert, Joseph G. Bolten, Manuel Carrillo, and Hugh G. Massey, *Maintaining the Balance Between Manpower, Skill Levels, and PERSTEMPO*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-492-AF, 2006. This report found that while the USAF was drawing down its forces in the 1990s and conducting more deployed operations, it did not change its manning to meet the simultaneous tasks of support deployments and sustaining garrison operations. It also found that during deployments, non-deploying personnel assigned to many functional areas (mostly within ACS) within the wings and commands were severely stressed and could not perform their normal home-base missions without working long hours. This was already true in the 1990s and early 2000s. Since then, the USAF has neither increased nor balanced ACS manpower to support these commitments.

⁵ Barack Obama, *Sustaining U.S. Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century*, Washington, D.C., January 2012.

⁶ See United States Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington, D.C., February 2010a; and United States Air Force, *USAF Strategic Planning 2010–2030 Strategic Environmental Assessment*, March 11, 2011b.

⁷ Matt Negrin, "The Troops in Iraq: Sent Home, as Promised," ABCNews.com, July 7, 2012.

⁸ "Obama Announces 34,000 Troops to Leave Afghanistan," *BBC News Online*, February 13, 2013.

⁹ "Obama Announces 34,000 Troops to Leave Afghanistan," 2013.

OSD utilizes a cyclical process by which it creates, releases, and further refines a range of planning scenarios, including those for steady-state (i.e., rotational) operations, surge (i.e., major combat) operations, post-surge demands, small-scale contingencies, and irregular wars. New scenarios are released almost monthly, and even overarching force-shaping constructs change within a single administration.

As an example, in 2009, when the Obama administration took office, OSD's force-sizing construct was called the *Integrated Security Posture* (ISP). This construct contained sets of surge and steady-state scenarios arranged to create a potential future against which military planners could assess their force structure (and hence resize and shape them). In 2010, the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) included three different sets of scenarios (later called *integrated security constructs* [ISCs]) against which the services were directed to size and shape their forces.¹⁰ Because the details of those scenarios did not yet exist, OSD and service planners set about developing them. In 2012, before the last of the three ISCs was completed, the Obama administration released the new U.S. Defense Strategic Guidance, which again changed the strategic and operational objectives against which the military services were to size and shape their forces. To be clear, the Obama administration has merely exercised its proper authority over the military by changing its strategic and operational objectives. However, the evolving planning priorities create a difficult problem for the service planners, who must sustain a healthy force while responding to the changing security environment.

A final issue affecting planning for ACS manpower is budget. In spite of the increasing demand for ACS forces, the USAF has reduced its ACS forces to underwrite the recapitalization of its aircraft fleets.¹¹ In addition, all the services face increasing budgetary pressures, including rising health care costs,¹² the Budget Control Act of 2011 caps on annual appropriations, and the automatic spending reductions that took effect at the beginning of March 2013.¹³

Even in less-lean times, it was a complex task for the USAF to balance its portfolio of ACS manpower and equipment to best support its array of operational missions, but this task proves even more challenging today.

Project AIR FORCE Research to Assess the USAF ACS Manpower Mix

RAND Project AIR FORCE (PAF) began conducting research to inform these issues several years ago. In fiscal year (FY) 2008, PAF conducted research to estimate emerging future

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, 2010a.

¹¹ Rodney McKinley, *Roll Call*, January 12–16, 2007.

¹² Robert M. Gates, "Opening Summary — House Appropriations Committee—Defense (Budget Request)," Washington, D.C., March 2, 2011; and Congressional Budget Office, *Long-Term Implications of the 2012 Future Years Defense Program*, Washington, D.C., June 2011.

¹³ Public Law 112–25, Budget Control Act of 2011, Section 365, 125 Stat. 240, 2011.

demands for USAF deployment capabilities across a range of mostly steady-state operations,¹⁴ assess the USAF's ability to meet the demands of that security environment, and evaluate the potential of a few strategic policy levers to address manpower capability imbalances.¹⁵ This initial research focused on midterm scenarios in which forces in Iraq and Afghanistan surged and then drew down, and it also explored what types of requirements indirect operations (those in which U.S. forces play a supporting role to indigenous forces or in which ACS is in a supported, rather than supporting, role) might hold for ACS forces.¹⁶ One key finding of that report was that the then-current ACS manpower mix would not have been able to support mid-range defense steady-state OSD scenarios without significant shifts in manpower and/or major policy changes.

In FY 2010, PAF expanded on this research with a project that assessed the capacity of the ACS posture at the time to meet a range of future scenarios (both major combat and steady-state scenarios) for four key ACS functions associated with expeditionary basing: civil engineering, communications, medical, and security forces (SF). That research found significant imbalances between the manpower postured by those career fields and the demands of a range of near- and long-term MCOs.

This report expands that expeditionary analysis to other ACS functions and identifies policy options that can best prepare the USAF's ACS forces for the emerging security environment. While many aspects of the USAF's ACS resources are worthy of analysis in this context, the project sponsor directed our research team to focus first on manpower, as it consumes such a significant portion of the USAF's budget. For the USAF, one of the challenges inherent in determining expeditionary manpower requirements is the impact on home-station operations when personnel deploy. We address this challenge in our methodology, explained later.

Purpose and Scope of This Report

This report examines how the USAF can become better prepared for future operations by assessing alternative ACS manpower realignments. We describe a more enterprise-focused approach to determining the ACS manpower requirements needed to address the range of planning scenarios for which the USAF must be prepared. In this research, we sought to answer three key research questions:

¹⁴ *Steady-state* generally refers to military deployments short of major combat operations, which are of extended duration, and are supported by forces on temporary duty, which rotate forward in successive deployments. The word *surge* is meant to signify major combat operations.

¹⁵ Patrick Mills, David A. Shlapak, Ricardo Sanchez, and Robert S. Tripp, *Combat Support Beyond Iraq: Implications of the Future Security Environment for the USAF*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-1034-AF, 2011, not available to the general public.

¹⁶ Examples of indirect operations explored in that research are humanitarian assistance, reconstruction, and ACS training and advising.

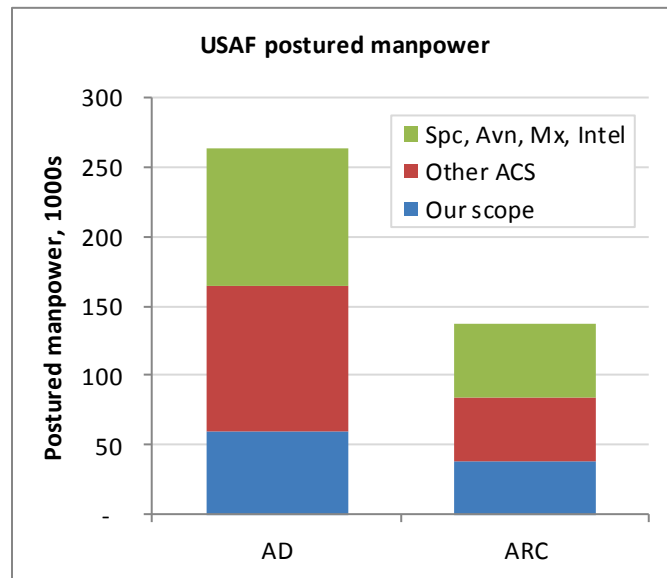
- What will future operations require of the ACS manpower mix? We begin by investigating what tasks ACS will perform in the future security environment.
- How well is the current ACS manpower mix prepared to meet the requirements of future operations? We then assess the ability of the current force to meet those requirements.
- What can the USAF do to better meet the requirements of future operations? Finally, we investigate an approach to mitigating the shortfalls we identified.

To make our analytic problem tractable, we narrowed our scope to include only a subset of ACS career fields that are critical to expeditionary basing and have a significant population. We included the following functional capability areas in our scope: SF; services; explosive ordnance disposal (EOD); fire protection; emergency management (EM), which handles chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) threats;¹⁷ engineering operations (i.e., Prime Base Engineer Emergency Force, or PRIME BEEF); contracting; fuels support; logistics readiness; expeditionary medical support (EMEDS);¹⁸ and transportation (excluding air transport). Figure 1.1 shows the proportion of manpower included from the active duty (AD) and air reserve component (ARC).

¹⁷ In this analysis, we include only emergency management capabilities managed by civil engineering, and exclude those managed by medical services, like bioenvironmental engineering.

¹⁸ The scope of unit type codes (UTCs) we include for EMEDS can be found in Mills, 2012. It mostly includes EMEDS basic UTCs and preventive aerospace medicine for a 3,000-person deployment package.

Figure 1.1 Postured Manpower Included in This Analysis



NOTE: Spc = space, Avn = aviation, MX = maintenance, Intel = intelligence.

The two columns in Figure 1.1 show the totality of AD and ARC manpower positions postured in the Unit Type Code Availability (UTA) data file.¹⁹ The height of each column shows the postured manpower. Of the 263,000 AD manpower positions postured, about 60,000 positions are in our analytic scope (blue wedge). Another 99,000 are in operations and maintenance positions (green wedge), and thus would not be appropriate to include in our analytic approach (for reasons we will explain in the next chapter). Our analysis could be expanded to include many, but not all, of the remaining 104,000 or so positions (red wedge), most of which are in ACS. The proportions and applications are consistent for the ARC also.

Outline of This Report

The remainder of this report is divided into four chapters:

- In Chapter Two, we measure the expeditionary capacity of the current ACS force. We explain how we derived new metrics to measure that capacity, describe how we distilled current OSD guidance down to its key drivers of ACS demands, and show how well the current ACS force can support OSD plans.
- In Chapter Three, we explain how we developed alternative manpower mixes driven by expeditionary demands and show how well those alternative mixes perform against OSD plans.

¹⁹ The entire USAF is not postured in the UTA. Institutional positions are excluded, and these make up the bulk of the 50,000-position gap between the numbers in the figure and the official USAF end strength.

- In Chapter Four, we discuss several additional factors that are not directly addressed in our analysis but that we feel are important for the USAF to consider.
- In Chapter Five, we offer some concluding thoughts, including a discussion of what would be necessary to implement the manpower realignments described in this report.