

Military Operations and Planning Scenarios Referred to in This Report

In describing the past and planned use of various types of forces, this primer mentions a number of military operations that the United States has engaged in since World War II, as well as a number of scenarios that the Department of Defense (DoD) has used to plan for future conflicts. Those operations and planning scenarios are summarized below.

Military Operations

1950–1953: **Korean War.** U.S. forces defended South Korea (the Republic of Korea) from an invasion by North Korea (the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea). North Korean forces initially came close to overrunning the entire Korean Peninsula before being pushed back. Later, military units from China (the People’s Republic of China) intervened when U.S. forces approached the Chinese border. That intervention caused the conflict to devolve into a stalemate at the location of the current border between North and South Korea.

September 1950: **Inchon Landing.** U.S. marines led an amphibious assault on the South Korean port of Inchon. At the time, Inchon was well behind the North Korean military’s lines, and the insertion of U.S. forces there contributed to the collapse and retreat of the North Korean invasion force.

1964–1975: **Vietnam War.** U.S. forces attempted to defend the government of South Vietnam (the Republic of Vietnam) from communist insurgents backed by North Vietnam (the People’s Republic of Vietnam) and from military incursions by North Vietnam’s ground forces. Ultimately, the United States withdrew ground forces from South Vietnam in 1973 and air support from the country in 1975. Subsequently, all of South Vietnam was conquered by North Vietnamese ground forces, uniting the two countries under a single government.

1965–1972, intermittently: **Bombing of North Vietnam.** Several U.S. bombing campaigns were conducted on the territory of North Vietnam during the war (as opposed to air operations in South Vietnam, which were essentially continuous in support of U.S. and South Vietnamese ground forces). The most notable campaigns included Operations Rolling Thunder, Linebacker, and Linebacker II.

1972: **Easter Offensive.** This offensive, launched by North Vietnamese ground forces, was largely defeated by South Vietnamese ground forces along with heavy air support from U.S. forces.

1975: **Spring Offensive.** This was the final offensive launched by North Vietnamese ground forces during the war. Unlike in the Easter Offensive, the United States did not provide air support to South Vietnamese ground forces, and North Vietnamese forces fully conquered South Vietnam.

1980: **Operation Eagle Claw.** U.S. special-operations forces attempted to rescue hostages held in Tehran in the wake of the Iranian revolution. The operation failed to meet any of its objectives.

1982: **Falklands War.** The United Kingdom recaptured the Falkland Islands from Argentina, which had occupied them. The campaign involved a U.K. naval task force that secured the seas around the Falklands prior to an amphibious assault by commandos and royal marines that retook the islands. The war included some of the few examples of modern naval combat since World War II: A U.K. nuclear submarine sank an Argentinian ship (the ARA *General Belgrano*), and Argentinian aircraft sank several U.K. ships (most notably, the HMS *Sheffield*) with bombs and cruise missiles.

1986: **Operation El Dorado Canyon.** Air Force and Navy aircraft bombed targets in Libya in response to terrorist attacks sponsored by the Libyan government.

1987: **USS *Stark* Incident.** During the Iran–Iraq War, an Iraqi fighter aircraft fired two cruise missiles at the USS *Stark*, a U.S. frigate on patrol in the Persian Gulf. Both missiles hit the *Stark*, causing casualties and damaging the ship.

1990–1991: **Operation Desert Shield.** U.S. forces were deployed to Saudi Arabia to protect that country from a potential invasion by Iraq in the aftermath of Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait. The first U.S. ground troops deployed were the 82nd Airborne Division, but the deployment ultimately involved a large enough force to invade Iraq and liberate Kuwait (see **Operation Desert Storm**, below). The U.S. military also enforced a naval blockade of Iraq. During that blockade, two U.S. warships, the USS *Princeton* and USS *Tripoli*, were damaged by Iraqi sea mines.

1991: **Operation Desert Storm.** During Operation Desert Shield, the United States' goals shifted from defending Saudi Arabia from an Iraqi attack to removing Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Operation Desert Storm was the operation to liberate Kuwait and destroy Iraqi ground forces. After an air campaign lasting 42 days, the United States launched a ground campaign that achieved its primary goals within 4 days. This conflict saw the first use of the Patriot missile system to defend against Iraqi Scud missiles fired at Saudi Arabia and Israel.

1991–2003: **Operations Northern Watch and Southern Watch.** This pair of operations was the U.S. effort to maintain northern and southern no-fly zones over Iraq (intended to protect Iraqi Kurds and Shiites, respectively) between Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

1992–1993: **Operation Restore Hope.** This operation was the U.S. military component of the United Nations' effort to restore order in Somalia to allow for the distribution of humanitarian aid. During the October 1993 battle of Mogadishu, a U.S. special-operations force was pinned down and isolated in Somalia's capital by hostile militias and suffered several casualties—an incident featured in the book and film *Black Hawk Down*. That incident eventually led the United States to abandon the operation.

1994–1995: **Operation Uphold Democracy.** Initially planned as a U.S. invasion of Haiti to overthrow the Haitian government, this operation became a peace-keeping mission after a diplomatic settlement was reached in which the leaders of the Haitian government agreed to step down.

1998: **Operation Infinite Reach.** Navy ships launched a series of strikes with Tomahawk cruise missiles at targets in Sudan and Afghanistan in response to the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania earlier that year.

1999: **Operation Noble Anvil.** This was the U.S. contribution to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) operations against Serbia, intended to force Serbia's leadership to relinquish control of the province of Kosovo. The majority of the operation consisted of a three-month bombing campaign against targets in Serbia and against Serbian military units in Kosovo. A diplomatic settlement was ultimately reached in which the Serbian leadership agreed to NATO's demands.

1999: **Task Force Hawk.** A component of the U.S. campaign against Serbia, this Army task force was originally intended to deploy a battalion of AH-64 attack helicopters to Tirana, Albania. For a variety of reasons, the task force grew in size, was slow to deploy, and never participated in the campaign.

2000: **USS *Cole* Bombing.** In this incident, a small boat loaded with explosives was used to launch a suicide attack against the destroyer USS *Cole* while it was docked in the port of Aden, Yemen. The resulting explosion blew a large hole in the hull of the *Cole*, killed 17 sailors, and wounded several others.

2001: **Operation Enduring Freedom.** Although this name technically applied to a wide variety of operations (also referred to as the Global War on Terror), the main component of this operation was the invasion of Afghanistan to oust the Taliban government and apprehend Osama bin Laden after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States. Major portions of the offensive involved U.S. special forces supporting Afghan ground forces of the Northern Alliance and an air assault by U.S. Marines on the city of Kandahar.

December 2001: **Battle of Tora Bora.** U.S. special forces attempted to capture Osama bin Laden and other

elements of the Al Qaeda leadership in a mountainous region of Afghanistan. Despite U.S. confidence that bin Laden was present in the region, he was not found, although it is unclear whether that outcome occurred because he was not present or because of operational missteps.

2001–Present: **Operation/International Security Assistance Force.** Since Operation Enduring Freedom, the United States has continuously maintained military forces in Afghanistan (often as part of a NATO security assistance force) in an effort to support the Afghan government against insurgents, warlords, a resurgent Taliban, and other destabilizing elements (since 2015, under the name **Operation Freedom's Sentinel**). For much of that time, U.S. forces in Afghanistan consisted of between one and three brigades of ground troops, but those forces were temporarily increased in 2009 as part of a surge.

2003: **Operation Iraqi Freedom.** U.S. forces invaded Iraq with the goal of destroying the government of Saddam Hussein. Army and Marine forces advancing from Kuwait formed the bulk of the U.S. offensive power, but U.S. Army and Kurdish forces in the north of Iraq and an extensive U.S. air campaign were also key parts of the operation. After three weeks, U.S. forces captured Baghdad, and Saddam Hussein's government disintegrated, although some pockets of resistance remained.

2003–2011: **Occupation of Iraq.** The United States maintained military forces in Iraq for eight years after Operation Iraqi Freedom in an effort to support the Iraqi government against insurgents, loyalists of the former regime, local militias, and other destabilizing elements, especially during the Iraqi civil war of 2006 and 2007. For much of that time, U.S. forces in Iraq consisted of between 15 and 18 brigades of ground forces, but those forces were temporarily increased in 2007 as part of a surge.

2011: **Operation Neptune Spear.** U.S. special forces raided a compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, with the intent to capture or kill Osama bin Laden. The raid was a success, and bin Laden was killed in the action.

2011: **Operation Odyssey Dawn.** This was the U.S. contribution to NATO's operations against Libya, intended to enforce a no-fly zone against the government of Muammar Gaddafi. The operation included cruise

missile strikes and a naval blockade, but the majority of the campaign involved using tactical aviation to attack and destroy Libyan government military units. Libyan rebel groups captured and killed Gaddafi during the operation, ending his regime.

2014–Present: **Operation Inherent Resolve.** The United States is currently conducting air strikes against the Islamic State group (known variously as ISIS, ISIL, and Daesh) in Iraq and Syria. The United States has also committed a limited number of special forces to assist Kurdish groups fighting the Islamic State.

DoD Planning Scenarios

The Department of Defense uses scenarios for planning purposes to prepare for the types of conflicts that it considers especially relevant or challenging. Such scenarios are not war plans; they are descriptions of hypothetical conflicts that can be used in various types of analytic exercises rather than detailed plans that could be used in the event of an actual conflict. DoD's scenarios are not necessarily considered likely possibilities—some are useful as examples of worst-case planning, whereas others incorporate features that are considered important for understanding future developments in warfighting. Some of the scenarios that DoD uses involve the following areas:

North Korea. Scenarios for North Korea typically postulate an attack by that country's ground forces on South Korean territory that requires U.S. assistance to repel. North Korea is assumed to use ballistic missiles to try to complicate the U.S. response in various ways, such as by attacking ports and airfields in South Korea with chemical weapons to hinder the arrival of U.S. reinforcements or attacking the United States' allies in the region (such as Japan) to reduce diplomatic support for U.S. goals. Those scenarios allow DoD to consider a variety of issues, including how to provide missile defense to allies, how quickly U.S. forces can be deployed, and how to respond to the use of chemical weapons.

Strait of Hormuz. Scenarios for the Strait of Hormuz (the narrow waterway that connects the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea) typically postulate a conflict in which Iran attempts to use submarines, cruise missiles, and small boats to close the Persian Gulf to U.S. Navy warships and civilian shipping at the Strait of Hormuz. Those scenarios allow DoD to consider such factors as the difficulty of projecting naval power in coastal regions

(where defenders have many advantages), ways to counter nontraditional threats such as small boats, and other antiaccess challenges.

Taiwan. Scenarios for Taiwan typically postulate an attempt by China (the People's Republic of China) to force Taiwan (the Republic of China) to reunite with it or to prevent Taiwan from making a formal declaration of independence. China is assumed to use air strikes, cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, and possibly an amphibious attack against Taiwan, while attempting to use its air and naval forces to prevent the United States from defending Taiwan. Such scenarios allow DoD to plan for dealing with a powerful adversary that has a variety of advanced weapons, especially in a naval context. The naval angle is important because combat between modern warships has occurred only once since World War II (during the 1982 **Falklands War**), and the scarcity of such examples means that there is a great deal of uncertainty about what combat between warships might look like now.

South China Sea. Scenarios for the South China Sea typically postulate that the United States would respond to a request for military assistance from one or more of the countries that dispute the claims of sovereignty that China (the People's Republic of China) has made over several islands and their territorial waters in the South China Sea. In those scenarios, China is assumed to have used military force to resolve territorial disputes in its

favor, and U.S. air and naval forces would be required to do one or more of the following: defend the opposing countries against Chinese attacks, remove the Chinese military presence from disputed islands, or restore freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. For the purpose of force planning, such scenarios resemble Taiwan scenarios, requiring similar forces against the same opponent in almost the same theater of operations. But they suggest different forms of peacetime preparation, including establishing cooperative agreements with the governments of countries that border the South China Sea, such as the Philippines or Vietnam.

Two Major Regional Conflicts or Major Theater Wars.

In the 1990s, U.S. planners used a pair of scenarios (called major regional conflicts or, later, major theater wars) occurring at the same, or nearly the same, time as the formal benchmark for most planning decisions about the military's force structure. One scenario was the **North Korea** scenario described above. The other scenario was an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia (essentially, a hypothetical variant of **Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield** in which Iraq's offensive did not stop at the Saudi Arabia–Kuwait border). That pair of scenarios was DoD's planning framework, with some variations, for about a decade. It dominated the department's planning during the period between the collapse of the Soviet Union and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.