

Forces Required for One (1) U.S. Base in Afghanistan after 2014

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Bottom Line Up Front

- 6,100 troops are required to sustain a single base in Afghanistan.
 - The number can be reduced slightly by marginal paring away of individuals from units, but the net gains will not be more than a few hundred.
- At this level, the single base can provide:
 - Security and life-support for the troops living on it
 - Minimal ability to do more than defend the base
 - Marginal ability to advise some Afghan units
 - No meaningful ability to provide support and/or enablers to Afghan units
- At this manning level, the base cannot support meaningful counter-terrorism operations

What This Footprint Does NOT Provide

- Meaningful counter-terrorism operations
- Embedded advisory or assistance teams for the ANSF at ANY level
- Close air support or artillery support to ANY Afghan units
- Support for US Embassy operations
 - No more military convoys in Kabul (no bases in Kabul)
 - Consulates elsewhere must provide their own security without military QRFs
- Ability in theater to conduct rescue operations for captured American or international personnel
- Special Forces teams supporting Afghan Local Police or Village Stability Operations
- Enablers or support of any kind to ISAF troop-contributing nations willing to remain beyond 2014
 - Therefore all international forces will be forced to leave their positions in Helmand, the West, and the North unless they INCREASE their deployments by sending their own enablers
- Detention capability of any sort
- Support for intelligence-collection efforts outside of Bagram
 - FOB Chapman, in the Khost Bowl on the Pakistan border, where 7 CIA operatives were killed in December 2009, is not sustainable without U.S. military forces in Khost.

How Troop Numbers Are Calculated

- The process of determining how many troops are needed is called “troop-to-task” analysis or TTT.
 1. What tasks must be accomplished to achieve the mission the troops are given?
 2. How many troops (and of what kind) are needed to accomplish each task?
 3. What functions must be performed to support and enable those troops?
 4. How many troops are needed to perform each support and enabling function?
 5. What additional risks might threaten either the mission’s success or the safety of the troops and how can those risks be mitigated?
- The outputs of a TTT exercise should be a topline number, a detailed exposition of the types of troops needed, a cross-walk of the troops against essential tasks, and an assessment of the risks to mission success and to the safety of the troops.

Mission for Post-2014 Afghanistan

- The president, secretary of defense, and other administration officials have repeatedly said that the post-2014 mission will include
 - Conducting counter-terrorism operations
 - Advising the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)
- No clarity has been given on what is meant by “advising” in the post-2014 context
- It remains unclear whether the administration intends to provide “enablers” to the ANSF, such as air support, logistics help, intelligence support, and medical support.



Click to play video of Obama outlining post-2014 tasks
From the White House website; 1/11/2013

Key Tasks

- Secure U.S. forces operating in Afghanistan
- Provide life-support services, including necessary medical care, to those forces
- Maintain uninterrupted air lines of communication to ensure support and emergency assistance to U.S. forces
 - For units in Afghanistan, this task mainly translates into the requirement to maintain a fully operational airbase able to handle large cargo aircraft and combat aircraft that are not permanently stationed there.
 - Afghanistan is a land-locked country, and U.S. forces will be unable to keep roads open reliably. We must assume that all supplies and troops will move by air into the theater and around the theater.
- Identify high-value terrorists and acquire time-sensitive targetable locations for them.
- Strike identified terrorist targets with air assets or Special Forces units
- Advise Afghan units in a manner to be determined
- Adhere to the Law of Armed Conflict with respect to accepting the surrender of enemies rather than killing them and treating detained enemies, including the provision of medical care.

Initial Assumptions

- The U.S. will retain one (1) base in Afghanistan after 2014
- The base will be at Bagram Airfield
 - This is the most developed and defensible position, and it is already designed to serve as a theater logistics hub
 - It is poorly located from almost every other standpoint—there are no Afghan forces or terrorist safe-havens nearby
- U.S. forces will reside only on facilities secured by U.S. personnel.
 - Under no circumstances will American troops be stationed at bases entirely secured and run by Afghans, although they may commute to those bases on a temporary basis.
- The threat posed by enemy groups will remain at the current level or deteriorate moderately but not severely.

Enemy Capabilities

- Enemy groups will retain their current capabilities and may be able to focus them on the single remaining U.S. base.
- Those capabilities include:
 - Accurate 107mm rocket attacks
 - Accurate mortar fire
 - Accurate 82mm recoilless rifle fire
 - Truck-borne IEDs, including the tactic of employing multiple truck bombs in succession to breach perimeters in conjunction with light infantry attacks
 - Light infantry attacks, possibly including formations as large as 50 insurgents using crew-served weapons such as heavy machine-guns, artillery, and mortars, as well as rocket-propelled grenades and accurate sniper rifles.
- The enemy does not now have access to advanced surface-to-air weapons systems, but has used crew-served anti-aircraft machine guns against NATO aircraft with limited success

RUNNING AN AIRFIELD

Technical Requirements and Scalability

- On-site maintenance needs to be capable of performing all aircraft maintenance short of depot level aircraft rebuilding.
 - Required maintenance includes routine preventive maintenance and emergency repair for foreign object ingestion into engines / abrasion damage to helicopter blades (both common events in Afghanistan).
- The basic airfield manning requirements to conduct operations apply whether aircraft are permanently assigned or not.
 - Any air operations require a functional tower with air traffic control personnel, airfield maintenance personnel to maintain the airfield runways and taxiways, as well as a ground electronics division to maintain radios, radars, and navigational aids.
- These baseline requirements are largely not scalable based on amount of air traffic.
 - Whether the base launches one sortie a day or 100 the runway, radios, radars, navigation aids, etc. must all be kept in operational condition.

Detailed Requirements

Airfield physical maintenance (runways, taxiways, cleaning, painting, filling cracks)	200
Airfield electronics maintenance (radios, radars, navigation aids, lights)	200
Transient aircraft maintenance	300
Aircraft parts supply depot	100
Fueling services	100
Weather forecasting	25
Flight planning	25
Ground transportation vehicles for airfield personnel, flight crews, fuel trucks, and fire trucks	50
Maintenance for ground transportation vehicles	50
Fire Department for crash and rescue on the airfield	100
MEDEVAC helicopter for rescue in case of crash outside of the airfield boundaries	25
Air Traffic Control	50
Basic physical security of the base and flight line. Even in a completely permissive environment, you need this, as at bases in CONUS.	100
Cargo and passenger terminal	75
TOTAL:	1,400

RUNNING A BASE

Base Security

- Must be able to stop complex attacks with multiple truck-bombs and accompanying guerrilla infantry. That requires:
 - Multiple defensive lines with wire, and earth berms or concrete T-wall
 - Multiple guard-towers with crew-served weapons
 - Artillery and mortar tubes for counter-battery fire against enemy artillery positions
 - Armored vehicles (MRAPs)
 - Layered entry-control checkpoints
 - Mobile and armored Quick Reaction Force (QRF)
 - Observation and listening posts on key terrain outside the wire
 - Continuous technical surveillance of the surrounding area
 - Periodic aerial patrols of known enemy launch-points
 - Periodic ground patrols into populated areas immediately surrounding the base to maintain situational awareness and contact with neighbors

Base Security Detailed Requirements

- A base with a runway long enough to handle heavy cargo aircraft has a long perimeter.
- 2 infantry companies (300 troops) are needed to provide 24/7/365 security on the wire, in the guard towers, and at the entry control points
- 1 infantry company (150 troops) is needed as the Quick Reaction Force
- The security force needs a command and staff element
- The net requirement is an infantry battalion at around 600 troops

Helicopter Aviation Requirement

- Helicopters are needed to
 - Support manning and defending observation posts
 - Conduct aerial reconnaissance of firing positions
 - Move leaders, advisers, and troops to Kabul or other Afghan cities and bases
 - Attack enemies threatening the base
 - Provide medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) for personnel injured outside the base

The Combat Aviation Brigade

- The Army's formation for providing helicopter support to troops is the Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB)
- A single CAB can include:
 - 1 headquarters company
 - 1 attack reconnaissance battalion (24 AH-64 Apache helicopter gunships)
 - 1 attack reconnaissance squadron (30 OH-58D Kiowa Warrior reconnaissance helicopters)
 - 1 assault battalion (30 UH-60 Blackhawk transport helicopters)
 - 1 general support battalion (5 UH-60 command and control birds; 12 CH-47 Chinook heavy-lift helicopters; and a MEDEVAC company with 12 HH-60 MEDEVAC birds)
- The CAB also includes ground support and maintenance personnel to keep the helicopters running
- 2,700 troops are in a CAB

Do We Need So Many Helicopters?

- U.S. military helicopters always fly in pairs over hostile ground, in case one is forced down by mechanical failure or hostile fire
- Afghan climate is tough on equipment, so some helicopters will always be undergoing repairs, in addition to routine maintenance
- The U.S. does not have helicopters that can fly from bases outside of Afghanistan into the theater—the Indian Ocean is more than 700 miles away, and the U.S. base in Kyrgyzstan, Manas, is farther
- So helicopters must be flown in on C-5 or C-17 aircraft in various states of disassembly. After arrival in theatre, they must be reassembled and pass a maintenance functional check flight before flying any missions, a manpower intensive and time consuming process that precludes rapid reinforcement
- Cutting the number of aircraft would not save many troops either—maintenance and overhead requirements are the same, and aircrews are very small (2 for an Apache or Kiowa Warrior; 4 for a Blackhawk or Chinook).
- Breaking-up aviation units degrades their effectiveness and efficiency and puts lives at risk.

Medical Requirements

- The theater must have a medical facility that can perform emergency surgery—otherwise, seriously-wounded troops would have to fly to Landstuhl in Germany for treatment, which would significantly increase mortality and the frequency of amputations and other life-altering injuries
- A “Role 3” medical facility is the smallest the U.S. military has to provide such care
- The medical facility at Bagram today is a Role 3 unit
- 200 personnel are needed to man a Role 3 hospital

Drones

- Base security also requires access to armed unmanned aerial vehicles (often referred to as “Predators,” the armed version is actually the MQ-9 Reaper)
 - Reapers can fly in weather that grounds helicopters
 - Reapers can maintain a persistent stare at known or suspected enemy positions (helicopters have much shorter endurance)
 - Reapers are integrated into the global intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) system in ways that most helicopters are not
- USAF Lieutenant General David Deptula noted that “unmanned aerial vehicle” is a misnomer, since scores of personnel are needed to operate a UAV
- In particular, at least 50 personnel must be co-located with the Reaper in theater to conduct launch-and-recovery operations, including fueling, maintenance, repair, re-arming, and so forth.
- Reapers deploy in sets of 4 called CAPs, with 50 support personnel per CAP
- At an arbitrary minimum of 5 CAPs to maintain situational awareness in the immediate environs of the base, the Reapers would require 200 support personnel on the ground
- These Reapers would not be available to conduct counter-terrorism operations far removed from the base (and the base is not near any known bed-down or safe-haven locations for international terrorists)

Headquarters

- Someone has to command and control all of these small units, which entails:
 - Intelligence collection and analysis
 - Planning and conduct of operations
 - Logistical support, including
 - Accounting for all materiel
 - Storing and distributing materiel
 - Contracting with local Afghan companies for basic supplies
 - Personnel matters, including
 - Transfers
 - In- and out-processing
 - Promotions and pay
 - U.S. military reporting requirements
 - Legal (Judge Advocate General) affairs, including
 - Investigations and disciplinary actions
 - Legal advice and oversight of contracting
 - Military Police
- An overall theater headquarters would normally have well over 1,000 people executing these tasks. The proposed footprint is small, but it is still larger than an Army brigade
- A Special Troops Battalion would provide such support to an Army brigade, with roughly 500 personnel

Other Basic Functions

- Dining facilities have to be maintained and run (100 personnel)
- Barracks have to be maintained and repaired (100 personnel)
- Engineers are needed to maintain, repair, and alter the base and its defensive perimeter as necessary (300 personnel)
- The base needs a gymnasium and some kind of morale, welfare, and recreation facility (50 personnel)
- These very important odds-and-ends add up to 550 personnel in all

THE BILL

Total Manpower Requirements

Airfield operations	1,400
Base security	600
Helicopter support	2,700
Medical support	200
Drone support (for base security)	200
Headquarters	500
Other life-support functions	550
Grand Total	6,100

Requirements Detail

Airfield operations	
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Air Traffic Control	50
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Cargo and passenger terminal	75
SUB-TOTAL:	1,400
Base security (1 infantry battalion)	600
Helicopter support (1 Combat Aviation Brigade)	2,700
Medical support (1 Role 3 Medical Facility)	200
Drone support for base security (5 Reaper CAPs)	200
Headquarters (1 Special Troops Battalion)	500
Other life-support functions (engineers, food, barracks, MWR, etc.)	550
Grand Total	6,100