HAVING CONSIDERED IN CHAPTER 2 where the world’s most likely strategic fault lines on land may lie, in this chapter I begin to narrow down this book’s discussion of land warfare writ large to a more specific set of scenarios of relevance to American force planning.

This chapter and the next do not offer a comprehensive list of plausible scenarios. There are clearly too many, if we consider the entire planet and project several decades into the future. Nor is it realistic to think that somehow the U.S. intelligence community will find the tools to narrow the list to the point that the future becomes inherently more predictable. Any such expectation ignores the fundamentally contingent nature of future world events and of human history. Rather, my goal is to examine all, or at least most, major types of potential conflicts. The goal is also to be sure that relatively more demanding scenarios are considered. This methodology is designed to attempt to bound the demands and complexities of other possible scenarios that may not be foreseen or easily foreseeable.

How can one know whether a given possible intervention or mission is in the national security interest of the United States? Richard Haass’s distinction between wars of necessity and wars of choice provides a very useful analytical springboard. Yet there is often considerable challenge
in determining which type of possible war is which. As such, I do not expect all of my own scenarios to be equally compelling to all readers. Indeed, by including them here, I do not mean to prejudge the need for possible American military intervention in any, only to acknowledge the possibility.

This chapter does not attempt to resolve the question of simultaneity, that is, the issue of determining how many conflicts at a time U.S. forces should be capable of handling. That matter is considered in chapter 5, which deals with general principles for future U.S. force planning and with a proposal for a specific force posture for the U.S. ground forces.

The scenarios considered in this chapter involving Russia and China are quite unlikely, one hopes, and are analyzed with that premise in mind. Many contingencies in the next chapter are more plausible examples of where force might actually be employed. Those involving Russia or China are viewed as important primarily for ensuring successful deterrence—indeed, for keeping certain scenarios virtually unthinkable for potential adversaries. That said, some type of Russian challenge to nations such as the Baltic states in the months and years ahead seems less unthinkable now than it may have just a couple of years ago. There is a spectrum of likelihood associated with these scenarios, and no simple and easy categorization scheme.

No sweeping assumptions are made about the roles of allies and other security partners. These are assessed on a case-by-case basis. Nor is a certain standard international legal framework assumed for any and all possible operations. However useful UN Security Council approval of a given mission might be, I do not presume it as an absolute prerequisite to action for all cases.

Overseas military scenarios are not the only concern when building an army or a marine corps, of course. Peacetime engagement, forward presence, regular exercises, crisis response capabilities, and numerous other activities contribute in important ways to the deterrence of would-be adversaries and the assurance of allies. Domestic emergency contingencies must be part of the mix, too, and one such scenario is considered in the next chapter. Smaller operations than discussed here are also important to bear in mind. But this chapter and the next focus primarily on larger-scale responses to violence abroad that could involve major roles for U.S. ground forces, since such responses will do the most to determine the broad size, shape, and character of the nation’s Army and Marine Corps.
The scenarios that follow involve a wide range of needed capabilities. Even though the assumed missions are large, the goal is not to emphasize only traditional high-end combat as the main scenario for future U.S. Army and Marine Corps planning while somehow treating all other operations as lesser included or less important cases.

My approach in analyzing scenarios in this chapter and the next is to provide enough texture of the challenges of a given case so as to give some meaningful way of doing rough force sizing, without getting bogged down in detail or prejudging the specific characteristics of weapons and warfare as they might exist in 2020 or 2030 or 2040.

Some similar scenarios are undoubtedly being analyzed within the Department of Defense already. But there is value in assessing them independently in a book like this nonetheless. First of all, much DOD thinking on such scenarios is classified, meaning that it cannot easily inform the broader policy debate about future military strategy, missions, and budgets. Second, some of the missions considered here may be too sensitive for a government agency to investigate, even in a classified context, for fear of leaks. Third, independent analysts using their own methods and imaginations may think of certain ideas that official Pentagon assessments do not (and vice versa). Fourth, the government’s current disillusionment with large-scale stabilization missions may discourage creative thinking about certain categories of scenarios, or at least may keep such thinking from being particularly influential when fundamental decisions are made about U.S. military force posture, as happened, for example, in past periods of U.S. history, such as the post-Vietnam era.

Following the same basic geographic sequence as in chapter 2, the scenarios proposed here are as follows. The first three, which could involve Russia or China, are addressed separately in this chapter. The remaining seven are examined in the next chapter.

—A Russian invasion threat to the Baltic states.
—A second Korean war, including possible Chinese involvement.
—A maritime conflict between China and Japan or China and the Philippines that spills over onto land.
—A fissioning of Pakistan, perhaps combined with a complex humanitarian emergency sparked by a major natural disaster in South Asia.
—Indo-Pakistani war, perhaps over a terrorist strike, with Kashmir providing the spark.
—Iranian use or threatened use of nuclear weapons against a neighbor.
A major international stabilization operation in the Middle East—perhaps in Syria after a negotiated peace.

—Civil war accompanied by terrorism and perhaps a biological pandemic in Nigeria.

—An increase in the brutality and reach of criminal networks in Central America.

—A major domestic emergency in the United States.

**A RUSSIAN INVASION THREAT TO THE BALTIC STATES**

The behavior of Vladimir Putin in 2014 in regard to Ukraine, including the claim to a right to protect ethnic Russians wherever they may be, raises serious questions. Could Russian ambitions extend to areas that were once part of the Warsaw Pact—or at least the Soviet Union, especially those parts inhabited by large numbers of Russian speakers? Putin and successors must have no doubt about the credibility of NATO’s Article 5 commitments to all its members, lest they be tempted to use force in such places. Of course, maintaining adequate military capacity is only one part of the equation; America must project the credibility and the resolve to use that force in defense of its allies to create the necessary deterrent effect. But military capacity is an essential ingredient.

Whether one supported the expansion of NATO to include these countries in the first place or not (and I have argued against it over the years myself), the validity of any Russian claims to neighboring NATO territories must not be countenanced. There can and should be major efforts to find a diplomatic solution to the Russia-Ukraine crisis of recent times (if these comments are still germane when this book is published). But the clarity of the NATO commitment to the Baltic states and other NATO members must be sustained, in light of the dangers associated with any other path. The United States and its allies need to have a credible capacity to defend these forward nations. Investigating just what that entails is the subject of the analysis for this scenario. Over time, the United States and allies could consider alternative security structures to perhaps supersede NATO. But it certainly seems ill-advised to undertake such thinking at the point of a Russian gun. Hence, NATO must be sustained for the foreseeable future, and America’s combat capacity must be kept robust as well. And even a successor organization would need credible combat power backstopped by the U.S. military against possible contingencies, like the one addressed here.
Russia could threaten one or more of the Baltic states in numerous ways, including everything from cyberattacks, to the “little green men” used in the stealthy invasion of Crimea in 2014, to some type of partial naval blockade against key shipping in and out of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. But for planning the main ground forces of the future U.S. military, the most stressful case is probably a classic overland invasion, though it could be coupled with one or more of these other types of limited attacks as well.

As such, my military analysis begins with an examination of how much force Russia could realistically employ against one of the Baltic states, and how quickly it could use it. I start from the premise that the United States and NATO should not rely exclusively on nuclear deterrence to address a possible Russian threat to the Baltics. Indeed, Russia’s aims might not be complete conquest of such a state so much as “liberation” of the eastern swaths of the targeted country, where many ethnic Russians and Russian speakers live. Threatening a nuclear reprisal to deter Russia from carrying out such a conquest and annexation—or, perhaps even harder, to force it to remove troops once they have already taken a chunk of Baltic territory and created a fait accompli—might not be a wise course.\(^6\) The history of the cold war underscores the difficulty of effecting such extended deterrence and compellence as well.\(^7\)

The NATO charter’s binding Article 5 mutual defense pledge reads as follows:

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.\(^8\)

Thus, American military force may not be an automatic consequence of an attack on a NATO ally, but the option of such a military response is important to retain.

Ideally, NATO would be capable of a reinforcement capacity that would allow the establishment of a fairly robust defense at the first
serious sign of possible trouble. It is unrealistic to think that NATO could permanently station enough forces on the territories of its eastern members to have a reliable counter to any such hypothetical Russian threat. What, then, is the realistic standard that the alliance should seek to attain? At its Wales summit in September 2014, NATO proposed creating a rapid reaction force of 4,000. Such a force, however useful for trip-wire deterrence, would constitute a meager combat capability against plausible Russian threats.

What would it take to mount a more stalwart defense? And what kind of counteroffensive capacity would make Russia think that, even if
it secured initial control of elements of the Baltic nations, it could lose them as supply lines from western Russia were threatened by a NATO maneuver operation that cut them off?

NATO would almost surely not need quantitative parity with Russia for the defensive mission, if its goal was simply to deny the Russians any guarantee of a quick and easy win. As the late Trevor Dupuy found in his examination of numerous cases, an attacking country with simple quantitative parity had a slightly better than 50 percent chance of winning a given battle. If it had a three-to-one advantage, its prospects of success improved to something closer to 65 to 75 percent—but still nowhere near 100 percent. So if NATO’s goal was simply to complicate the calculations of Russian planners and make victory seem less than guaranteed, being able to rapidly deploy one-third as much defensive capability in the Baltics as Russia was thought capable of mustering for an offensive might be deemed adequate, especially in light of NATO’s technological advantages.

Continuing in broad strokes and with rough numbers, Russia might be able to deploy 300,000 troops to its borders with the Baltic states on short notice in the years ahead, as a ballpark estimate, plus or minus several tens of thousands. Of the total, perhaps three-fourths to four-fifths of them might be ground troops. This would be a major undertaking and major achievement, including in terms of logistics and sustainment, and may or may not be realistically achievable for the Russia of 2015. But as a credible worst-case scenario for U.S. force planning it represents a reasonable standard against which to plan for the medium-term future.

According to the above logic, NATO might elect to have the capacity to deploy 100,000 to 150,000 of its own forces there quickly, in order to have a reasonably good prospect of successful defense. I will assume for the sake of conservatism that it might be 150,000. The associated number of NATO ground troops might be two-thirds of that total, given recent precedent, or about 100,000. Depending on the future course of events, NATO might choose to station some fraction of this total on the Baltic state territories permanently, especially if Russian behavior became even more threatening. An additional fraction of the troops could reside elsewhere as long as their equipment was prestationed on the potentially endangered territory and plans were in place to fly them in during a crisis (assuming enough NATO forces were permanently present in the Baltics to protect the equipment depots and staging areas while they awaited the arrival of reinforcements).
The future of land warfare

The above represents one option. However, it puts a premium on either permanent stationing of large NATO forces in the Baltics or a large capacity for rapid reinforcement, or both.

If these measures were not feasible, NATO would need a different approach to ensuring the safety of its allies. That might take the form of a counteroffensive capability of several divisions, as in the canonical “major theater war” construct the Pentagon has used since the 1990s. The idea might be to liberate any territory that Russia had taken.

In preparing for such an operation, NATO would need to ensure not only enough force to defeat Russian units in the field but also enough to protect its own supply lines. If, for example, it envisioned a movement of 100 miles along the Russian border with one or more Baltic states, and sought to secure its internal lines of communication throughout the process, an additional two to four divisions might be required to sustain logistics lines. (This estimate is based loosely on the notion that a modern division is often expected to be able to hold 25 to 50 kilometers of front per division—though such numbers are extremely rough at best, as Joshua Epstein has persuasively argued).\textsuperscript{19} Bearing in mind that divisions of some 15,000 soldiers generally require at least as many additional forces to help sustain and enable them, the overall troop requirement associated with two to four divisions could grow further, making for a total NATO ground force capability of 200,000 (these figures include helicopters for both Army and Marines, and fixed-wing aircraft as well for the Marine Corps, so they are not strictly just ground troops). Again, given the ratios of ground forces to Air Force and Navy capabilities witnessed in recent major U.S. wars, an aggregate ground force of 200,000 implies a total force in the range of perhaps 300,000.

One can also check these same points with one version or another of formal—or at least approximate—combat modeling. There is little point in attempting to be particularly precise about a scenario that may unfold in, say, 2025 or 2030, with different weapons than are in use today, along with other changes in the strategic landscape. However, a back-of-the-envelope approach is a useful validation of the above, more qualitative argument.

One way of doing this is with a modified version of Trevor Dupuy’s combat model. Although several unclassified models have been usefully employed over recent decades, including those contributed by distinguished scholars such as Richard Kugler, Barry Posen, and Joshua Epstein, the Dupuy method is probably the simplest, without sacrificing
Scenarios with Russia or China

accuracy. The actual formula developed by Dupuy has a number of factors associated with it that can make it somewhat difficult to employ; I choose, therefore, to simplify it, as noted below.20

The Dupuy method first requires that one calculate the “power” of each side’s relevant forces. This power factor can be represented as the product of three terms: the size of the forces in terms of numbers of troops; their overall quality, including equipment and training; and the situational factors that may influence their effectiveness in a given situation, such as surprise, terrain, and weather conditions.

The crucial variable here for this scenario is probably making a fair assessment of the second of these, or the relative quality of NATO forces compared with those of Russia (as the units are arbitrary, the quality of Russian forces can be arbitrarily defined as being equal to 1, so the question becomes how good NATO forces are on this same scale). For example, historically, Israeli forces have usually displayed a relative quality of at least 3:1 relative to Arab adversaries.21 The United States and coalition partners probably exceeded 10:1 in the maneuver phases of the 1991 and 2003 wars against Iraq.22 In the cold war, NATO tended to assume little or no such advantage against Warsaw Pact forces when doing its war planning, though that may have been the result of excessive conservatism.23

As these types of calculations are inherently imprecise, it is best to avoid pursuit of a single estimate and instead seek to establish a plausible range of outcomes by using two sets of assumptions about performance, one of them optimistic, the other more pessimistic.24 As such, I would propose assuming a 1.5:1 NATO advantage in the conservative or pessimistic case and a 2:1 advantage in the optimistic case. There is a good argument to make the 2:1 figure even higher, to reflect the improvements in technology that NATO forces, led by the United States, have achieved in recent decades.25 But for the sake of conservatism, and because Russia may close the technology gap in coming years, no greater advantage than this is assumed, even in the optimistic case—especially in light of the fact that the airfields and ports the United States and allies would need to reinforce their initial positions could become vulnerable to the very same precision munitions that in recent decades have improved net American advantages in certain types of conflicts. (Ships carrying U.S. supplies across the ocean could also be vulnerable to submarine interdiction.)26
Cyberattacks could slow down reinforcements as well, particularly if targeted on certain underprotected civilian infrastructure crucial to the war effort, such as key transportation hubs. Even chemical attacks by Russian forces against such infrastructure or against deployed NATO troops cannot be excluded. Since chemical agents have caused 10 percent or more of the total casualties in previous wars in which they were widely used, their effects on combat performance and power would likely be at least that great in quantitative terms, especially if one considers all the precautionary and protective measures that even fears of their possible use can require.27

As for the situational term, historically this variable can double (or halve) combat performance under a typical range of circumstances. Taking it as equal to 1 for Russia, it is then reasonable to vary it from 0.75 to 1.25 for NATO. The lower figure implies that NATO forces suffer from being surprised, the higher figure assumes that they benefit from fighting from defensive positions, with the reverse applying to the case in which NATO forces go on the counteroffensive.28

So, for the case in which Russia has 300,000 troops and NATO just 100,000, the optimistic and pessimistic cases look like this:

**Optimistic Case**

- Russian Power: \((300,000)(1)(1) = 300,000\)
- U.S./Baltics/NATO Power: \((100,000)(2)(1.25) = 250,000\)

**Pessimistic Case**

- Russian Power: \((300,000)(1)(1) = 300,000\)
- U.S./NATO Allies’ Power: \((100,000)(1.5)(0.75) = 112,500\)

The next step in the Dupuy method is to estimate a daily loss rate for each side. This will change with time, and therefore the method requires an iterative series of calculations to be completed properly. However, for our present back-of-the-envelope purposes, simply comparing the initial loss rates relative to initial force size gives an adequate sense of where the direction of battle is headed. The loss rate for each side is, in my simplified approach, the product of a normalizing factor (the same for each side, and designed as a rough gauge of the intensity of combat and thus of daily loss rates), that same side’s troop size, and the ratio of the power terms for the two sides:
Scenarios with Russia or China

Optimistic Case
U.S./NATO Allies’ Loss Rate: 
\[(0.01)\times(100,000)\times\frac{300,000}{250,000} = 1,200 \text{ casualties per day}\]

Russian Loss Rate: 
\[(0.01)\times(300,000)\times\frac{250,000}{300,000} = 2,500 \text{ casualties per day}\]

Pessimistic Case
U.S./NATO Allies’ Loss Rate : 
\[(0.01)\times(100,000)\times\frac{300,000}{112,500} = 2,666 \text{ casualties per day}\]

Russian Loss Rate: 
\[(0.01)\times(300,000)\times\frac{112,500}{300,000} = 1,125 \text{ casualties per day}\]

In the optimistic case, the two sides fight to an effective standstill, as the U.S./allies’ loss rate is less than half Russia’s, and the allies could presumably muster some reinforcements during this period too, given the huge standing size of their land armies. In the pessimistic case, by contrast, Russia clearly wins, especially because it begins with a much larger force and so can afford to suffer attrition more than NATO forces could tolerate.

Put differently, a NATO defensive force of 100,000 might be adequate for a forward defense, especially if it can get into position well enough that it suffers few downsides from being surprised and benefits from the natural tactical and terrain advantages of a defender. But it is a close call, and this calculation suggests that it might not be prudent to count on it.

As for the case in which NATO might mount a counteroffensive, this kind of operation would leave NATO forces quite vulnerable if it failed. As such, it is appropriate to focus the calculation on the case in which NATO’s advantages are less strong—specifically, where it has only a 1.5:1 quality advantage (even if we assume it does benefit from surprise in this case). Then, considering those 300,000 Russian forces in the theater to be available for opposing the U.S./allied forces’ counterattack, aided by perhaps 100,000 more reservists and other later deployers, the equations would be:

Russian Power: 
\[(400,000)\times(1)\times(1) = 400,000\]

U.S./NATO Allies’ Power: 
\[(300,000)\times(1.5)\times(1.25) = 562,500\]

Russian Loss Rate: 
\[(0.01)\times(400,000)\times\frac{562,500}{400,000} = 5,625 \text{ per day}\]

U.S./NATO Allies’ Loss Rate: 
\[(0.01)\times(300,000)\times\frac{400,000}{562,500} = \text{about 2,000 per day}\]
This is an acceptable result from NATO’s perspective, as the Alliance’s loss rate is much less than half of Russia’s even in this conservative case, and the NATO force is three-fourths the size of Russia’s. One would want a decisive advantage as evidenced above, in light of the risks of operating near Russian territory (and the possibility that Russia might be able to reinforce more easily than NATO in the longer term, should the battle bog down).

Of that figure of 300,000, perhaps three-fourths, or 225,000, would have to be American. It would be ideal if European and Canadian contributions could be larger, but that may not be realistic. The front-line Baltic nations, while modest in size and military strength, would nonetheless be able to devote virtually all of their forces to the fight. Other NATO nations might collectively provide the other 50,000 troops, based largely on a rough estimate of their capacities by reference to the Afghanistan mission (where their collective contributions peaked at somewhat less than that level). It is also roughly consistent with the aggregate size of the various EU and NATO response forces that exist today. Perhaps Europeans could muster closer to 75,000 troops, and presumably they could mobilize larger forces over time, but a prompt response capacity of 50,000 seems a safer estimate.

Of the total of 225,000 or more Americans, based on the precedent of previous major conflicts, some 150,000 would likely be U.S. soldiers and Marines.

Again, these calculations are notional and very rough. The use of several significant figures in the above results should not be taken literally, and the numbers employed are clearly approximate.

I do not truly anticipate a war with Russia. Indeed, under certain types of worst-case Russian attacks of one type or another on a country like Latvia, Estonia, or Lithuania, it might be more prudent to employ indirect or asymmetric economic or military responses rather than a direct counteroffensive. But it is important that Russia not perceive itself as the undisputed preeminent land power of Central and Eastern Europe.

**WAR IN KOREA—AND POSSIBLE CHINESE INVOLVEMENT**

American ground force planning currently emphasizes Korean contingencies, as it rightly should. But an even broader range of contingencies in that region could be relevant to long-term U.S. military planning.
Another Korean war is perhaps the only case where a large-scale encounter could credibly occur between Chinese and American land armies in the future. I do not predict such an outcome. It would take a complete breakdown of diplomacy, and much more, for such a direct confrontation between the twenty-first century’s superpowers to happen. But there are plausible paths by which it could occur in the context of a war pitting the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) against the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea) and the United States. Even if the peninsula were someday reunified, the United States might wish to maintain the capacity, when combined with ROK capabilities, of a credible land defense option for Korea against any possible Chinese threat—in this case, less because of the likelihood of an actual use of force and more to keep such thoughts unthinkable in Beijing.

Thankfully, another Korean war seems very unlikely. But events in recent years on the Korean Peninsula, including the sinking of the Korean frigate Cheonan and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island, demonstrate that even relatively small incidents risk triggering a wider conflict.

Consider how a Korean scenario could unfold in the near future. According to the so-called 5027 War Plan for the United States, North Korea might have initiated another major attack on South Korea, presumably without Chinese help, which would then require a major South Korean and American response. The North Korean attack might not begin as the earlier one did in 1950 but could grow out of a more limited exchange of lethal force—for example, something like that 2010 Cheonan sinking, in which North Korea murdered forty-six South Korean sailors in cold blood, but in this case followed by a South Korean retaliatory strike. South Korean military rules of engagement issued after that incident, as well as political realities, make it less likely that a subsequent North Korean provocation would be tolerated. Such dynamics could lead to all-out war—not as their most likely outcome but as a possibility, however remote, after a series of escalatory steps by both sides.

It is also at least possible, if less likely than in the nuclear crisis of 1994, that if North Korea continues to construct a new nuclear reactor suitable for producing large amounts of plutonium, the United States and South Korea will preemptively destroy it. That could of course lead to possible DPRK retaliation against them.

Alternatively, as envisioned in the 5029 plans developed by the Combined Forces Command in Seoul, North Korean collapse or another
type of internal chaos could create a situation of unrest adequate to justify a major response by ROK and American forces. This might result largely from fear that the DPRK’s nuclear materials could wind up in the wrong hands.\textsuperscript{32}

Either one of these scenarios could lead to a major conflict. Large elements of North Korea’s million-man armed forces, and ultimately many reservists, would be pitted against South Korea’s half-million-strong active duty military, the nearly 30,000 American troops in Korea, and a similar number perhaps from Japan (though some of the American forces now in Japan would surely stay there to help with the protection of Japan itself, as well as with logistical support and possible refugee issues related to the Korea conflict). Over time, Korean reservists and U.S. reinforcements would enter the fight as well. The latter might ultimately number in the hundreds of thousands, depending on the course of the conflict. The presumed goals for the Combined Forces Command would be to eliminate the North Korean threat to South Korea in general and Seoul in particular in the first instance, to neutralize the North Korean army, and to control the territory and population centers of North Korea, with an eye toward restoring order while also securing weapons of mass destruction. These goals would probably be most realistically achieved by also overthrowing the North Korean government.

There would be a premium on rapid and substantial American response in this case. Some argue that today’s military balance on the Korean Peninsula no longer necessitates significant contributions by U.S. ground forces. They assert that, with South Korea’s military just over half a million strong and North Korea’s twice that size but far less well prepared, the South now has military superiority over the DPRK and can handle any conflict on its own without much more than U.S. airpower in support. The logic of this thinking is part of what has driven the idea that Operational Command of Combined Forces can change, with the United States no longer playing the top role in an integrated hierarchy but the two sides essentially sharing different elements of the command responsibilities in any conflict. However, this thinking is flawed. North Korea’s nuclear capacities, combined with its preexisting conventional forces, put a premium on rapid and comprehensive defeat of the DPRK regime—quite likely necessitating a major U.S. role and a tightly integrated allied effort.
To apply the Dupuy method here, I begin by assuming that South Korea has a military edge over the North comparable to what Israel has had against Arab neighbors over recent decades, roughly 3:1 in quality. I further assume that North Korea enjoys no net benefit from surprise (that is, any North Korean benefit of surprise would be modest and at least offset by allied forces’ advantages in fighting from defensive positions). Nor do I assume that either Korea benefits from its many reservists, if the scenario is an attack on South Korea, since those reservists are generally not equipped with a great deal more equipment than small weaponry and take some time to mobilize. The calculation is then:

South Korean Power: \((500,000)(3)(1) = 1,500,000\)
North Korean Power: \((1,000,000)(1)(1) = 1,000,000\)
South Korean Loss Rate: \((.01)(500,000)(1,000,000/1,500,000) = 3,667\) per day
North Korean Loss Rate: \((.01)(1,000,000)(1,500,000/1,000,000) = 15,000\) per day

By this calculus, even with the United States left out entirely, South Korea successfully defends its own territory, in that its daily casualty rate is only about one-fourth of North Korea’s and it begins with a force half as large. And again, this is meant as a conservative calculation from the point of view of the U.S. allies.

However, this assumes a protracted war of attrition during which Seoul could be bombarded repeatedly—and after which the North Korean regime would likely remain in place. Neither of these circumstances is likely to be acceptable to Seoul or Washington. A counterattack by allied forces into North Korea would likely be their response, not a simple defensive holding action.

In any ROK-U.S. counterattack, North Korea’s 6 million reservists could come into the equation. They are poorly equipped, but many are well indoctrinated and likely to be tenacious.

North Korea’s nuclear arsenal creates huge uncertainties for the analysis. Above, I assumed that it would not be used in an attack on South Korea, perhaps out of fear of retaliation. But if allied forces moved northward toward Pyongyang, North Korean calculations could change, and incentives to employ nuclear weapons could grow. Might the DPRK then use a nuclear weapon or two to blow a hole in allied defenses in one
sector of the front lines by using an airburst that would minimize fallout—and thus permit fairly rapid North Korean exploitation of the subsequent weakness in Combined Forces lines? Nuclear attack to generate electromagnetic pulse to damage U.S. and ROK electronics would also be plausible.

The American Dimension

These latter considerations would put a premium on U.S. maneuver forces. While South Korea has a fine army—perhaps one of the five best in the world, in quantity and quality—its capacities for amphibious and aerial movement are limited. As such, and as the above Dupuy equations imply, its success in a future war would likely be largely a matter of defeating North Korean forces in detail by attrition. But that approach would allow lots of time for North Korean fissile materials to move about, for North Korean reservists to be mobilized, for Seoul to be threatened, and for China to weigh multiple options for its own role (see below).

Thus, an American maneuver capability would be hugely advantageous. It could in theory help secure the perimeter of much of North Korean territory, to make it hard for nuclear weapons and fissile materials and any leaders bent on escape to depart. It could also help create the capacity for a victory achieved less by defeat in detail of the enemy than by a pincer movement that would cut off many of its forces from their leadership and capital. The U.S. force could be spearheaded by the 101st Air Assault division, with its helicopter mobility, and by a U.S. Marine division deploying by amphibious ships and maritime prepositioning ships. It could further include an army division or more also marrying up with equipment from prepositioning ships and deploying by fast sealift. Together, this would constitute a corps-level capability that would be robust against North Korean counterattack even when deployed on North Korean soil.

Such a U.S. force would have a size of up to 150,000 ground forces, perhaps, and be complemented by another 75,000 naval and air personnel. They could thus possess a combined power by the Dupuy equations of 2,250,000—assuming a quality advantage of 10:1 against DPRK soldiers, not unlike what was observed in U.S. air-ground engagements against Iraqi forces in recent decades. This could roughly equal the realistic capacities of those 6 million North Korean reservists, many of whom
might never make it to the fight and most of whom might not fight well—but nonetheless a force whose sheer numbers require some degree of balancing by the allies.

The Nuclear Dimension

Further reinforcing the case for a strong U.S. capability of the size and type outlined above is the North Korean nuclear arsenal. American nuclear weapons would provide a strong deterrent against this capability, as well as a hedge in the event that North Korean use of weapons of mass destruction complicated any conventional effort. But it is too simple to assume that U.S. nuclear weapons would fully counter and checkmate any possible North Korean employment of the DPRK’s own nuclear arsenal. First of all, given the presumed stakes in this scenario—overthrow of the North Korean regime—there is little reason to think that DPRK leaders would be dissuaded from resorting to any and all means of halting an invasion of their country, according to standard deterrent logic. Perhaps they could be told that, while their unseating from power was the inevitable goal of any such military effort, they might be spared the death penalty or even offered eventual asylum if they desisted from such abominable actions. Yet the credibility of such a pledge in the middle of wartime operations could be difficult to establish. Moreover, North Korean leaders might really think that by using a nuclear weapon or two in a battlefield mode to slow an advancing army, while implicitly or explicitly threatening the use of other nuclear weapons against Seoul, they might find a credible pathway toward a negotiated settlement. Former Combined Forces commander General B. B. Bell has argued persuasively that to think North Korea would be fundamentally averse to using its nuclear weapons in war is wishful thinking, were regime survival on the line, especially when one bears in mind that the United States itself used nuclear weapons in the past.\(^{33}\)

Simply retaliating with nuclear weapons, in a proportionate manner, against North Korean forces or other targets might not be a full answer to the dilemma either. Beyond the humanitarian implications, it is doubtful that North Korea’s armed forces would be as concentrated geographically or as dependent on specific targetable assets such as airfields, major ports, highways, and command centers as the Combined Forces would be. The North Korean nuclear strikes might be airbursts near key military assets and units, detonated high enough to avoid the creation of large
amounts of fallout—that is, at roughly 1,700 to 1,800 feet of altitude, as with the roughly 20-kiloton Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs. To achieve comparable effects, the United States might need to employ a dozen or more nuclear weapons of its own. It would have the capacity to do this, to be sure, but might not have the will in light of the likely repercussions in terms of human costs and in broader political and strategic terms. It also might wish, initially at least, to withhold use of nuclear weapons in order to deter further North Korean escalation. Perhaps most credibly, it could use a nuclear weapon or two in response to signal to Pyongyang that it would not be intimidated from responding in kind, but it might choose the location of the attack in such a way as to minimize the lethal effects, especially on civilians. This might mean that the military benefits would be limited as well, and U.S. force planning would therefore wisely proceed from the assumption that the key response to North Korean nuclear aggression would be conventional.

As such, the allied forces would need a margin of error. They would also need to operate in a sufficiently dispersed way that they limited their vulnerability to a single nuclear burst or two. In rough terms, a weapon of Hiroshima or Nagasaki force could severely damage most vehicles out to about half a mile to a mile distance and kill or severely injure most people out to 2 to 3 kilometers from ground zero, below the point of detonation. In a major offensive, a modern military might concentrate its forces such that a brigade was placed every 5 to 10 kilometers within a general zone of advance. That might not be prudent in a potentially nuclear environment.

On balance, in light of the normal geographic zones over which advancing mechanized forces generally would operate, it is prudent to assume that perhaps a brigade of unsuspecting Combined Forces Command ground forces plus corresponding support could be destroyed or severely degraded for each nuclear weapon used. This is a very notional and rough estimate, clearly. But assuming a rough rule of 10,000 allied forces lost for every North Korean nuclear weapon employed is probably a reasonable guide. As such, perhaps 30,000 to 50,000 additional allied troops should be built into planning requirements to cover this contingency. Some fraction of those could be South Korean reservists, but this kind of concern again validates the case for a robust American contribution to the allied war capability of at least the size discussed above. Indeed, a 250,000-strong U.S. force, with up to 175,000 of them Army
and Marine Corps personnel, is hardly an excessive estimate of the U.S. military personnel that might be needed in such a scenario.

The China Dimension

How would China likely respond to all of this? The presumption among many American analysts has been that, recognizing North Korea as the chief source of the conflict, China would do everything possible to limit its own involvement. Why implicate itself in the mistakes of the world’s last bastion of Stalinism? Why risk direct war with the United States? The idea that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in its modern guise would behave in a manner analogous to what Mao had done in the early days of the cold war would seem to smack of absurdity.

However, there are reasons to be concerned that China would not simply stand by. Fearing refugee flows, if not the leakage of nuclear or chemical materials from the DPRK, China might wish to seal its border with North Korea. And if protecting the border were the goal, doing so from a forward position could strike many Chinese military minds as sound policy. Creating a buffer zone 50 or 100 kilometers into North Korea might appeal. In short, there are reasons to think the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) might wish to intervene in a Korea contingency.

Chinese decisionmaking would also be influenced by assessment of the longer-term consequences of North Korea’s collapse. Beyond concerns about border security, Chinese leaders could be thinking about postconflict force dispositions on the peninsula. Expecting that the United States might try to retain forces in Korea even after reunification and stabilization efforts were complete, they might seek to establish leverage against that possibility. This scenario is particularly credible in light of two Chinese views. The first view is that an American military presence on the Asian mainland is inimical to the long-term Chinese interests of creating a greater sphere of influence and security for itself while avoiding encirclement by a pro-U.S. coalition. The second is that Korea historically falls within any such Chinese sphere as a “tributary” state.

Creating a fait accompli of tens of thousands (or more) of Chinese troops on Korean territory might seem a good bargaining chip in this context. Beijing’s argument, explicit or implicit, might be that it would of course be happy to remove its troops from Korean soil once the peninsula was again stable—provided that the United States agreed to remove its own forces as well. Such a motivation might lead China to seek to deploy
its forces further south than was required for a border-related operation, and perhaps to employ larger numbers of troops than it otherwise would have. It is also possible that China would hope to retain some kind of rump North Korean state after hostilities, as a buffer between itself and the United States and Republic of Korea, even if it recognized that such a North Korean state could require a new government.

China’s military modernization efforts in recent years have focused more on maritime domains, but a number of its programs could empower—and perhaps embolden—PRC leaders to consider a direct role in a conflict in Korea. The most notorious Chinese programs in modern times include the DF-21 antiship ballistic missile, Kilo attack submarines and Sovremenny destroyers purchased from Russia, aircraft, including the J-11B and J-20 and perhaps now the J-31 too, and the PLA’s first operational aircraft carrier, the Liaoning. But while the overall thrust of these and other programs is probably to address disputed territories and waterways in the western Pacific, a number of the relevant systems, including the aircraft, could also be very helpful in a major overland operation. More generally, China’s army has been streamlined and professionalized in recent decades, making it an even more formidable potential foe on the peninsula than it was from 1950 through 1953. In recent times it has emphasized greater use of information, combined-arms and joint operations, and mobility, while improving training and logistics as well. The PLA still has a way to go in many of these areas, of course. That said, even before all these recent innovations and improvements, it showed in the 1950s that it was well capable of deploying large forces to the Korean Peninsula.

A PLA intervention in Korea could be a prescription for disaster. That is especially true as the U.S. and Chinese militaries have had very little contact or discussion about Korea over the years. Some hard-liners in both South Korea and the United States could be expected to call for a firm, even forceful response by the Combined Forces Command to such a Chinese encroachment. Inadvertent escalation owing to miscommunication or the assertive actions of local commanders could also result. Even if top-level political leaders did not advocate or authorize it, any ambiguity they conveyed in their orders might allow a direct clash.

For a Chinese military that has not gone to war in a generation, it is possible that the dangers of combat might be downplayed or underappreciated. As the scholar Andrew Erickson has pointed out, the modern
Chinese military has not gone through its own version of a “Cuban missile crisis”—meaning it has not been sobered by a deeply unsettling and frightening experience. Overconfidence could result. So could an inadequate appreciation of the dangers of war, or a hope that new technologies would permit shorter and more decisive wars than in the past—a tendency of many militaries and many leaders over the generations.

The above considerations also suggest that both sides not only have much to lose by failure to coordinate their response to crisis but indeed, might have a lot to gain through coordination. The United States and the Republic of Korea should consider that a Chinese role in a future Korea scenario might in fact be helpful rather than threatening. It could lower the risks of inadvertent war. It could also reduce U.S. and ROK troop requirements for stabilizing the northern part of North Korea and provide reassurance to the North Korean people that their legitimate interests would be protected in a unified Korea. China too has much to gain from prior coordination with the Republic of Korea and the United States, although this would necessarily need to be highly confidential, given the likely anxiety it would cause in Pyongyang.

But none of this sort of cooperative endeavor can work absent a strong American capability, including the capacity to deploy corps-scale forces rapidly. The United States needs to be in a strong position vis-à-vis China to maintain the kind of leverage and influence required to make collaboration with the PLA a truly sound idea. Beijing should not gain the perception that it would be the most important and influential outside player in a future Korean war. Should China come to such a conclusion, its incentives for asserting its own prerogative to act as it saw fit might increase. This logic provides additional grounds for favoring a U.S. capacity for Korea in the range of a corps of ground forces—three to four divisions, plus support—complemented by substantial airpower and other assets, for a net strength of some 250,000 GIs, as argued earlier. Again, the logic is not to assume the need to defeat China in battle, only to have Seoul and Washington in a strong position to set the main parameters by which the PLA might credibly contribute to a positive outcome in a future war scenario.

It is also important not to trivialize the difficulty of the operation once acute hostilities and combined-arms maneuvers are complete. Sporadic resistance from North Korean units might continue for a time; land mines, chemical weapons, and other dangerous materials could remain
strewn throughout much of the country; not all nuclear materials might be quickly accounted for. Stabilizing a population of some 25 million, as North Korea may boast at the time of the postulated conflict, would in theory require 500,000 to 600,000 forces, according to the Amos-Petraeus criteria from the U.S. military’s counterinsurgency manual.\textsuperscript{46} (In fact, the plausible range is wider, based on historical cases; for example, in post–World War II Japan, force levels were much lower and in post–World War II Germany they were much higher, by way of historical perspective.)\textsuperscript{47} Again, South Korea would provide most of this stabilizing force over time, but it could have its own country to worry about, too, given the likely casualties and damage a war could cause to Seoul and environs. A substantial U.S. role should not be ruled out.

\textit{U.S. Requirements after Possible Korean Reunification}

What about the longer term? If Korea is someday reunified, whatever the mechanism or the pathway, what would be the implications for U.S. force planning? For the purposes of this book, such a question is just as important as the immediate issue of the U.S. government’s 5027 or 5029 War Plans.

Of course, the primary voice in any future decision about long-term peninsular security must be Seoul’s, and that of the Korean people. It is entirely plausible that, if and when the peninsula is reunified, Koreans will decide that they are best off without any enduring military alliances, and take a path forward, not unlike, say, Finland, or Vietnam. In this case, the United States can wish the Korean people well, viewing them fundamentally as an economic partner, a friend, and a security partner for out-of-area missions rather than as a formal ally bound by a mutual defense accord. If the Koreans decide to go it alone, they may have to accept that doing so will be a permanent decision, with no wartime rescue from America (as in 1950) in the event that the calculation proves erroneous. It would simply be too hard for the United States to project power to that location, especially if one assumes the future aggressor against Korea might be China.

Just as plausibly, therefore, Seoul may decide that a sustained alliance with the United States does indeed serve its interests even in the absence of a North Korean threat. If so, the United States should consider retaining the alliance too, assuming that South Korea remains serious about providing for its own security and remains a stalwart ally of the United
States in the region and the world in general. Such circumstances seem likely. Few allies around the world have been as dependable friends of the United States, or as impressive in their own accomplishments. Korea is now a major international economic player that contributes substantially to the world economy, even if it possesses no particular resources that make it irreplaceable as such. It is also an important exemplar of global democratic and human rights norms, and of nuclear nonproliferation norms as well.

If a reunified Republic of Korea and the United States of America decide to sustain their formal alliance after the DPRK threat is no more, the question remains of how that should be done. Specifically, should the United States consider the territorial defense of Korea to be a realistic and desirable defining mission for its future ground forces?

There are two main ways to think about U.S. ground force planning in regard to a reunified Korea and a possible Chinese threat to it. One way is to think of deploying a trip-wire force that would make it nearly inevitable that any attack would cause American casualties and therefore, quite likely, entrain further American responses—be it a major reinforcement of its initial positions on the peninsula, a sustained bombing campaign against lines of communication into and out of Korea, an asymmetric attack on Chinese interests elsewhere in the world, or the possibility of nuclear escalation. Such a trip-wire force could be deployed in a relatively nonprovocative way. Given likely Chinese concern over the possibility of U.S. troops stationed on its land border, the United States could agree to keep any future American forces south of the 38th parallel and to reduce their number and capabilities relative to prewar totals, drawing on the model adopted in the post-unification arrangements for Germany in NATO. The remaining forces, say 10,000 strong, could be focused on multilateral missions such as training for peace operations that could involve Chinese and other regional forces, perhaps at some kind of a regional peace operations training center in the general vicinity of the current Korean DMZ.

The other approach would seek to have a sufficiently strong U.S. Army and Marine Corps that, in the event of Chinese attack, a reunified Korea and the United States would be capable of defending Korean territory even without the use of nuclear weapons. This is a very demanding requirement, but one worth examining. The motivation would be less any concern that such a conflict might someday actually happen and
more to discourage Beijing from ever thinking that it was the only outside power with credible ground-combat capability on the peninsula.

As such, a military calculation is informative, even if it applies to a scenario that almost surely would never play out. Assume that China could benefit from proximity to deploy 2 million military personnel to the peninsula, out of a 2014 active duty force of 2.3 million. Korea would have its entire force, presently about 650,000, as noted, with many more in reserve. For the sake of conservatism, assume further the U.S.-unified Korean qualitative advantage to be 1.5:1. Then, if the United States could manage to get half a million personnel to the peninsula, the math would look roughly like this:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Allies' Power:} & \quad (1,150,000)(1.5)(1) = 1,725,000 \\
\text{Chinese Power:} & \quad 2,000,000 \\
\text{Allies' Loss Rate:} & \quad (0.01)(1,150,000)(2,000,000/1,725,000) = 13,333 \text{ per day} \\
\text{Chinese Loss Rate:} & \quad (0.01)(2,000,000)(1,725,000/2,000,000) = 17,250 \text{ per day}
\end{align*}
\]

By this math, the outcome is a win for China, but not an easy or inevitable one. And if unified Korean reservists are worth anything, their enormous numbers might at least be able to make China pay a huge price for trying to occupy the peninsula (whether or not the reservists could prevent the initial invasion). As such, if the goal here was to create doubt in the minds of Chinese planners about the chances for a successful invasion attempt, it might be attainable, for a force of the presumed size.

The above would require deploying most American forces to the peninsula quickly, before Korea had been overrun. It would require large numbers of U.S. forces that were either on active duty or in a high state of readiness within the National Guard, able to be mobilized within weeks. Even assuming ready units, two to three months would be needed to get the majority of forces across the ocean, and the full deployment might take three to six months. Loading and unloading most ships can easily take a week per vessel; the ocean voyage is typically two weeks; getting equipment to the port of debarkation in the first place is often time-consuming, with preparations measured in weeks; sometimes two or more trips must be made by a given ship since transport assets are limited in number. So success in this mission would require maintaining very capable and ready transport assets as well.
China could, of course, oppose the movement of these U.S. reinforcements across the ocean, using its submarines and other assets. It is not an unreasonable estimate to think that, even with antisubmarine warfare convoys protecting the shipping, submarines could penetrate the barriers and typically achieve several torpedo shots before being destroyed. Moreover, barrages of antiship cruise missiles from submarines, ships, or aircraft could saturate the defenses of incoming U.S. ships and cause significant numbers of losses, if reliable targeting information was available. There are various ways to get at estimates of losses. Simple historical analogies from World War II convoy loss rates, when reconnaissance technologies and precision strike assets were far more primitive, suggest that loss rates for surface shipping could reach 5 to 10 percent, depending on the specific balance of measures and countermeasures available to attacker and defender. Loss rates today could be higher. In recent decades, antiship missiles aimed at ships with working defenses have typically found their way to their target 25 percent of the time.

The PLA could seek to disable or destroy major infrastructure in Korea—ports, airfields, rail lines, marshaling yards—needed to absorb this incoming equipment and material. Such attacks are far more foreboding in the modern era of precision missiles than in the past. They could, at a minimum, significantly slow the arrival of reinforcements. To some extent, air bases can be repaired quickly, if fuel and command and control capabilities are underground, aircraft shelters are available, and runway repair equipment is adequate to the task. But there would still be considerable risks to large transport aircraft, which commonly do not have access to shelters of sufficient size, and in any event, these kinds of threats could significantly slow operations. A similar observation can be offered about ports and unloading infrastructure: even if roll-on/roll-off ships are employed, ships need access to harbors, wharves, and safe marshaling yards where unloaded equipment can be temporarily stored. Again, likely loss rates for ships, planes, and thus supplies could be in the range of some 5 to 25 percent for many scenarios. If China or North Korea chose to employ tactical nuclear weapons as well—however unlikely the odds of Beijing electing to do so, for what would be for the PRC a limited war—these uncertainties would increase.

To be sure, the United States would not be the only party vulnerable to such attacks. Chinese forces, even if moving largely through their own territory, would still depend on certain ports, airfields, railway
marshaling yards, bridges across the Yalu, and other crucial infrastructure. And the United States would likely still have the most advanced weaponry in the world for engaging targets through such deep interdiction campaigns. Fighters and bombers flying from Japan and Guam and other locations, perhaps to include Alaska, as well as other long-range systems that could include conventionally armed ballistic missiles, as well as America’s extremely potent submarine forces and its surface Navy, could approach Chinese targets and exact punishment. So some of the uncertainties sketched out above would cut both ways.

The bottom line in rough numbers might be that, to generate a presence of one-half million U.S. uniformed personnel on the peninsula, the United States might need to send 600,000 or more personnel, to allow for possible losses in transit. Roughly two-thirds of the total forces might be ground troops, as with the previous estimates for the Russia case, meaning 400,000 soldiers and Marines. This scenario stretches the limits of a realistic criterion for future U.S. Army and Marine Corps force sizing, given its extreme unlikelihood, but it may be worth keeping in the back of one’s mind.

A SOUTH CHINA SEA SCENARIO: A MAJOR CHINESE THREAT TO THE PHILIPPINES

There may be other ways in which American land power could be relevant to military scenarios involving China. Specifically, if Chinese tensions with a U.S. treaty ally such as the Philippines or even Japan dramatically intensified, one could imagine Chinese threats to some of the islands making up those nations today. Perhaps China would use missiles and raids to destabilize or punish the islands, such as Okinawa, or Palawan in the Philippines— islands relatively near areas where maritime disputes could intensify. Or perhaps Beijing would attempt to seize one of these islands, to prevent its military use by the sovereign country against Chinese maritime interests or as punishment of the other state, as well as to project an implied threat that other national territory could be threatened as well. In this kind of situation, U.S. ground forces might be relevant to garrison the same or other islands and to protect military and civilian assets on them.

Because Chinese writers have sometimes raised the possibility of challenging Japan for control of the Ryukyu Islands, that scenario could be
Scenarios with Russia or China

considered. One could ask what size Japanese and American deployment would be adequate to maintain a robust defense of Okinawa from a plausible invasion force, or what size force would be needed to liberate the island from PRC control if somehow China was able to seize it. (Of course, any comprehensive military analysis would need to consider air and naval aspects of such a scenario as well.)

However, on balance, this scenario strikes me as very implausible. China’s own government does not lay claim to Okinawa, or any other islands now controlled or administered by Japan beyond the Senkaku/Diaoyu, and the difficulty of amphibious operations against a high-technology defender in the modern era is enormous. Moreover, Beijing could hardly doubt Tokyo’s and Washington’s willingness to fight for what is an important part of Japan, where more than 1 million inhabitants now live.

By contrast, the Philippines might represent a more believable target for Chinese aggression. While Manila and Washington do have a formal alliance, it is less rock-solid than the U.S.-Japan relationship. As such, America’s willingness to defend its ally might be less credible in Chinese eyes. Main U.S. forces are not based in the Philippines today, either. The Philippines have a small defense budget and a fairly small military to defend a huge land mass with many islands. It is doubtful that China would see any of those islands as useful prizes of war in their own right. But if a sustained maritime campaign developed between the two countries over islands, fishing beds, and underwater resources, China might consider seizing an island from the Philippine archipelago to punish Manila and deter any further Filipino uses of armed force. Palawan island, for example, a long island running north-south in the western part of the Philippine archipelago, with only a modest indigenous population, might be a tempting target. By holding it, China would prevent the Philippines from using any bases there against its own forces, would punish Manila for what Beijing perceived as bad behavior, and would potentially deter further such behavior by implicitly showing the Philippines what could happen if it retaliated (more islands could be seized).

Most of what is discussed below could ensue even if China did not try to seize Palawan but simply acted increasingly aggressively in the vicinity near the western edges of the Philippine archipelago. As such, even though a Chinese invasion of that island is assumed in the following discussion, many of the implications for U.S. ground forces in other types of South China Sea scenarios might be similar to what is estimated in the
following pages. If maritime domains in Southeast Asia became contested in some way, the United States, working with Manila, might have to consider establishing airfields and other facilities in the Philippines, and garrisoning a number of islands in the Philippines with ground forces to help protect these assets.

China does not have a large power projection force at present, and it may not have a large one in the time when this scenario is contemplated—say, in the 2020s or 2030s. Its amphibious fleet is expanding somewhat at present, but not radically so. As such, it might have only the equivalent of roughly a division’s worth of amphibious lift and a comparable amount of air assault capability in this scenario (about 15,000 troops each). But that might be of limited comfort. First of all, Palawan is not heavily defended. Second, even if U.S. naval and air assets were in the region, not knowing the destination of Chinese amphibious and airborne forces, they might choose not to shoot at them—thereby essentially conceding the initial victory to the PLA. Third, unless the United States immediately changed its approach thereafter, China could build up airfield and port facilities and reinforce its initial positions with adequate forces to solidify control of the island and create the rudiments of an island defense against a possible counterassault led by the U.S. military.

Depending on how far this scenario progressed before a reaction was considered, the United States and the Philippines would, together with any other countries supporting them, have a number of options. One would be to prepare, over a period of months if necessary, a massive flotilla from Luzon or another major Philippine island and ultimately set sail to attempt to retake Palawan (with much of the necessary air support coming from planes based on other Philippine islands). This approach would have the disadvantage, however, of being vulnerable to possible Chinese interdiction with attack submarines and other assets—and would necessitate in the end a bloody liberation of the island. A second would be to attempt a naval quarantine of Palawan, though that would have the effect of punishing the islanders along with the occupying Chinese troops.

A third and potentially more appealing option would be to garrison some of the other nearby Philippine islands to prevent any further Chinese conquests while building an international coalition to apply asymmetric pressure on China, through military interdiction of sea lanes and/or a regime of international economic sanctions. To put it differently, and bluntly, this would amount to the containment strategy of China that
Beijing complains about even today—but in this case, China would be right that it was truly being applied.\textsuperscript{55}

What might such garrisoning entail? American and Philippine ground forces would likely focus on protecting key bases, including airfields, against missile attack, special operations raids, and the like. They could also conduct offensive operations in the broader maritime domains. Army forces could play a role in the latter activities with shore batteries capable of ranging targets at various distances at sea, as then Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and Deputy Secretary Robert Work both have discussed in more generic terms in recent years.\textsuperscript{56} Protection of main civilian population centers on Luzon and elsewhere in the central Philippine archipelago could be left to the Philippine armed forces, given the unlikelihood of a Chinese assault over such distances.

How many bases might be needed? It is difficult to know in advance, absent precise information on what kind of a force China might be able to sustain on Palawan, and in its vicinity. One point of reference, however, might be to consider the number of airfields used in recent major U.S.-led military operations. Presumably, even if a campaign against Chinese military assets and perhaps shipping assets in the region were less intensive in many ways than, say, the 1999 Kosovo War or Operation Desert Storm in 1991, there would be an even greater expanse of territory to monitor, and even greater worries about airfield vulnerability in this case. The Kosovo War involved some twenty to twenty-five air bases, as did Desert Storm.\textsuperscript{57} As of the fairly recent past, the Philippines had about a dozen airfields throughout its archipelago, though more could be constructed if need be, of course.\textsuperscript{58} Take these various numbers as rough guides, it is plausible that the United States and the Philippines would seek to establish one to two dozen bases to establish superiority in air and naval domains against anything China could realistically sustain at such a distance (it is just under 1,000 miles from Hainan Island to Palawan).

Standard army doctrine would suggest using roughly a brigade, of perhaps several thousand troops, for each such facility.\textsuperscript{59} That is enough to maintain perimeter monitoring, rapid-reaction capability, air and missile defense, and command and control for a base that could be several miles long on a dimension, and thus with a perimeter of 10 to 20 miles. Assuming a roughly equal mix of U.S. and Philippine army units suggests a total of up to twelve U.S. brigades at a time for the operation. That could
mean a total of 40,000 soldiers and Marines in the brigades themselves and a grand total of some 100,000 ground forces, including support.

Then there is the matter of a rotation base. This defensive operation could last some time, as other tools of national power, including air and naval forces, pressured China in other ways. In theory, unless the brigades were to be simply stationed on the islands and left there for the duration of any standoff, without relief, sustaining twelve brigades could involve a force structure three times as large. That could include elements of the National Guard, since there would be time to prepare for such rotations.

CONCLUSION

The scenarios considered in this chapter are almost surely less likely to occur than those that follow in the next. At least, one hopes that to be the case, since they could involve hostilities against nuclear-armed major powers. Indeed, the possibility of the actual use of weapons of mass destruction is an additional reason why the types of calculations offered here are imprecise: the possible mushroom clouds of war must be added to Clausewitz’s fog of war, and all the other realities that make military force planning difficult and inaccurate. As such, U.S. planners need to remember the importance of building in a cushion when carrying out force sizing analyses.

Despite the various problems that have plagued U.S.-China and especially U.S.-Russia relations in recent years, I see no particular evidence that the premises driving these contingency analyses—namely, a direct Russian threat to the Baltic states or large-scale Chinese threats against Korea or the Philippines—are acute worries at present. But the goal of force planning should be, in part, to keep them unthinkable.

The scenarios considered here imply the need for anywhere from several tens of thousands to several hundreds of thousands of U.S. ground troops, depending on circumstances and specifics. Once force requirements are estimated for the seven contingencies examined in chapter 4, we will then have the grist for proposing a future force structure for the Total Force of the U.S. Army and the U.S. Marine Corps.