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U.S. AIR STRIKE MISSIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

THE QUANTITATIVE DIFFERENCES OF TODAY'S AIR CAMPAIGNS IN
CONTEXT AND THE IMPACT OF COMPETING PRIORITIES

JUNE 2016

Operations to degrade, defeat, and destroy the Islamic State (ISIL), al-Qaida, and the Taliban are being waged primarily by the U.S. Air Force's inventory of aircraft, ISR assets, and munitions. The current campaign has cost the DoD \$11.5 million per day, but the number of air strikes and weapons delivered pales in comparison to previous U.S.-led air campaigns. If DoD leadership continues to increase operational tempo (optempo), what level of additional funding does Congress need to provide? What would historical air campaigns cost DoD today? And if the fiscal environment remains constrained by budgetary realities, what DoD priorities will be excluded from the FY2017 appropriations bill?

The following analysis examines today's military operations, the quantitative differences between Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, the historical context of these air campaigns, and how optempo scenarios will impact DoD funding and resource requirements.

Resurgent Insurgents

In March 2016, the U.S. launched a series of airstrikes on Somalia's al-Qaida affiliate, al-Shabaab, killing more than 150 militants at a training camp that posed an "imminent threat" to both U.S. and African Union troops. In April 2016, DoD conducted four airstrikes in Yemen against al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula militants, a group that many in the U.S. Government still believe poses the greatest threat to the homeland.

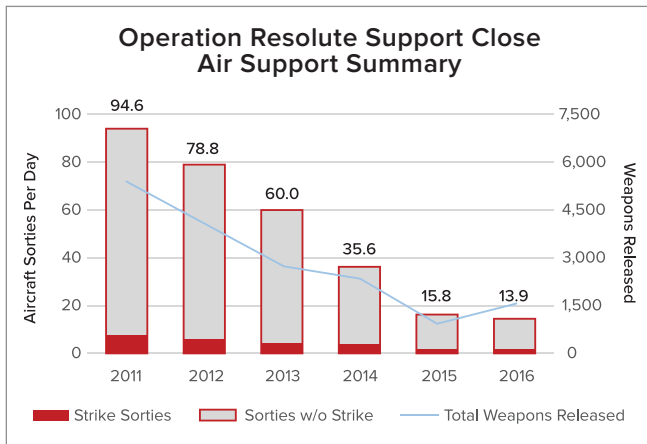
Taliban leader Mullah Mansour was killed by a DoD drone strike on May 21, 2016 – a rare acknowledgement by the U.S. Government of operations in Pakistan. The Joint Special Operations Command operation 40+ miles inside of Pakistani airspace was considered a defensive operation, indicating the renewed threat posed to U.S. troops by the Taliban insurgency. Just two days later Iraqi forces, led by Shiite militias, shelled Fallujah in preparation for an offensive to reclaim the city from ISIL. One day later the U.S.-backed Syria Democratic Force (SDF), led by the Kurdish YPG militia, launched preliminary attacks on Raqqa in advance of a full scale assault to liberate the city from ISIL control.

Impact of Air Power on Insurgent Success

Recent Taliban attacks coupled with the continued threat from al-Qaida, the terrorist franchise the Taliban provided sanctuary to pre-9/11, begs the questions – what is the U.S. doing, or not doing, in Afghanistan that has allowed this resurgence? President Obama has favored power projection from the skies rather than with "boots on the ground;" however, data provided by U.S. Air Forces Central Command shows drastically reduced levels of optempo for Operation Resolute Support, the NATO training, advisory, assistance, and counterterrorism mission in Afghanistan.

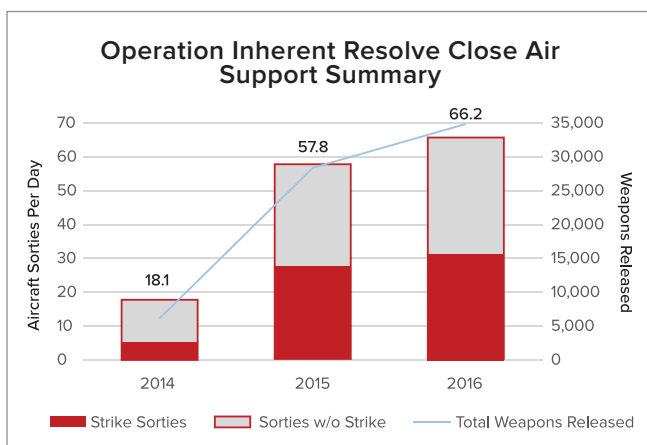
Close air support, escort, and interdiction activity fell by -36% CAGR between 2011 and 2015 and the total number of annual weapons released decreased by 4,464 over the same period (-35%

CAGR). The total number of sorties per day has continued to fall in the first four months of 2016, but the number of strikes per day has increased 32% from 2015-levels (weapons released per day has increased by 16%).



Source: U.S. Department of Defense, Fairmont analysis

Conversely, U.S. and coalition optempo in support of Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq and Syria has increased dramatically since beginning in August 2014. Airpower, in coordination with U.S. Special Operations Forces and allies on the ground, has applied consistent pressure on Raqqa, stabilized Anbar, and paved the way for Iraqis to eventually recapture Mosul from ISIL control.



Source: U.S. Department of Defense, Fairmont analysis

In 2015, over 30 times the number of weapons were released in Iraq/Syria than in Afghanistan (28,675 and 947, respectively). And over the past 64 months, 15,926 weapons have been released in Afghanistan while 44,402 weapons have been released in Iraq/Syria in just 21 months of operations. The percentage of close air support, escort, and interdiction sorties that employ weapons versus those that do not is also significantly higher in Iraq/Syria (~47% of all sorties) than in Afghanistan (between 7% and 11%).

The ultimate success of U.S. and partner counterterrorism and counterinsurgent operations depends upon a host of factors other than simply airpower but, absent the commitment of additional ground forces, increased airpower is necessary to limit enemy freedom of movement and battlefield victories.

Comparing Current to Previous Air Campaigns

Despite the increased optempo in Iraq/Syria, the combined airpower being applied in support of Operations Resolute Support and Inherent Resolve is still significantly below the airpower applied in both previous minimalist operations and previous full-scale war operations.

The “shock and awe” tactics in Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003) included 25 times the number of strike sorties per day and delivery of 15 times the number of weapons per day than in Operation Inherent Resolve.

	Days	Sorties	Strike Sorties	% Strike	Strikes per Day	Weapons	Weapons per Day	Est. Total Cost (2016 \$M)
Gulf War ('91)	43	120,000	42,000	35.0%	976.7	265,000	6,162.8	\$28,834
Bosnia ('95)	17	3,515	2,470	70.3%	145.3	1,026	60.4	\$862
Kosovo ('99)	77	38,004	14,112	37.1%	183.3	28,018	363.9	\$6,195
Afganistan ('01)	76	20,600	6,500	31.6%	85.5	17,500	230.3	\$3,117
Iraq ('03)	26	41,000	15,500	37.8%	596.2	27,000	1,038.5	\$6,589
Libya ('11)	210	25,944	9,700	37.4%	46.2	7,642	36.4	\$3,594
Afganistan ('11-)	1,971	105,590	7,786	7.4%	4.0	15,926	8.1	\$3,445
ISIL ('14-)	663	35,647	15,622	43.8%	23.6	44,402	67.0	\$7,625

Source: U.S. Department of Defense, Council on Foreign Relations, Fairmont analysis

* The evolution of munitions technology makes the number of strike sorties per day more appropriate to measure optempo than the total number of weapons released. The advent of precision guided munitions (PGM) allows the U.S. to employ a fewer number of weapons to engage a specific target than it would take to destroy the same target with gravity, or "dumb" bombs. In the Gulf War, an estimated 10% of weapons delivered were PGMs but in operations today, approximately 90% of weapons are PGMs.

Historically, U.S. air campaigns have utilized overwhelming force in short durations but today's operations are the opposite – multiple years of sustained, low optempo.

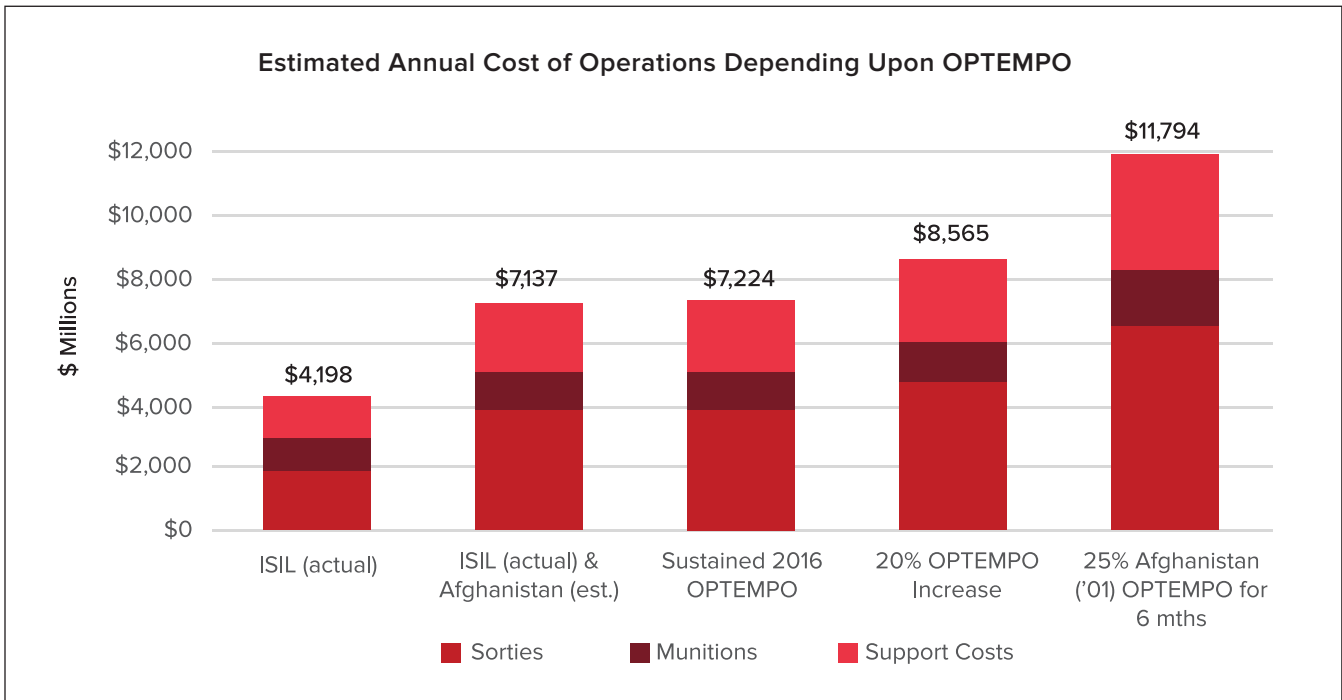
Implications for the DoD Budget

The confluence of a rising threat environment in the Middle East, recent increases in optempo, and continued DoD presence in 'inactive' war zones (Yemen, Somalia, Libya, and others) will likely require the U.S. Government to fund DoD above President Obama's FY2017 Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) request of \$58.8 billion. While the President's request complies with current legislation, it does not increase OCO above FY2016-levels that would appear to be required to support increasing operations to combat ISIL and al-Qaida. Additionally, GOP leadership in Congress has proposed moving \$23 billion of the OCO request to the base budget to address modernization and readiness shortfalls. While these shortfalls are real issues within DoD, it would imply that only enough money was budgeted to keep military efforts in

Afghanistan and Iraq/Syria funded through the first seven months of the fiscal year. Building the capacity and capability of the U.S. military is critical for national security, but in the current budget environment enhancing investments in these areas implies a tradeoff versus current overseas operations.

So what do kinetic attacks on enemies cost and how does that change if optempo increases? Current operations in Iraq and Syria cost the DoD an average of \$11.5 million per day, including \$2.7 million of munitions cost per day.

If the observed 2015-2016 changes in optempo hold through the end of FY2017, the OCO budget would only need to be increased to \$59.5 billion. If optempo increases 20% from 2015-levels, the OCO budget would need to be increased to \$70.6 billion. If the U.S. committed just one-quarter of the airpower needed to dismantle the Taliban in 2001 in order to defeat today's threat in six months, the OCO budget would need to be increased by 65% to \$97.2 billion.



Source: U.S. Central Command, Fairmont analysis

The U.S. has many competing long term challenges to address via defense spending – the political outcome in the Middle East, DoD modernization and readiness shortfalls, and the rise of near-peer adversaries (Russia, China), to say nothing of the trade-offs with other non-defense Government budget priorities. Enhancing focus on these other challenges could potentially come at the expense of adequately resourcing the mission to degrade, defeat, and destroy ISIL, al-Qaida, and the Taliban insurgency. Providing these resources without disrupting the need to invest in other priorities would entail a DoD budget increase

of \$1-12 billion annually in order to prosecute a long-term, sustained air campaign. Budget increases of \$30-50 billion in FY2017 would need to be authorized if a more expedient military objective is the administration’s goal – an outcome that seems unlikely in the current fiscal and political environment. In any scenario, in the absence of an increase the DoD budget’s topline, the President and Congress must consider the exchange between longer-term procurement priorities and near-term needs to fully fund and resource deployed troops and overseas operations.

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