

Assessing the Global Operating Environment

Measuring the “strength” of a military force—the extent to which that force can accomplish missions—requires examination of the environments in which the force operates. Aspects of one environment may facilitate military operations; aspects of another may work against them. A favorable operating environment presents the U.S. military with obvious advantages; an unfavorable operating environment may limit the effect of U.S. military power. Any decision as to whether an operating environment can or cannot support U.S. military operations depends on several factors: the capabilities and assets of U.S. allies, the strength of foes, the region’s geopolitical environment, and the availability of forward facilities and logistics infrastructure.

When assessing an operating environment, one must pay particular attention to any U.S. treaty obligations with countries in the region. A treaty defense obligation ensures that the legal framework is in place for the United States to maintain and operate a military presence in a particular country. In addition, a treaty partner usually yields regular training exercises and interoperability as well as political and economic ties.

Additional factors—including the military capabilities of allies that might be useful to U.S. military operations; the degree to which the U.S. and allied militaries in the region are

interoperable and can use, for example, common means of command, communication, and other systems; and whether the U.S. maintains key bilateral alliances with nations in the region—also affect the operating environment. Similarly, nations where the U.S. has already stationed assets or permanent bases and countries from which the U.S. has launched military operations in the past may provide needed support to future U.S. military operations. The relationships and knowledge gained through any of these factors would undoubtedly facilitate future U.S. military operations in a region and contribute greatly to a positive operating environment.

In addition to U.S. defense relations within a region, additional criteria—including the quality of the local infrastructure, the political stability of the area, whether or not a country is embroiled in any conflicts, and the degree to which a nation is economically free—should also be considered.

Each of these factors contributes to an informed judgment as to whether a particular operating environment is favorable or unfavorable to future U.S. military operations. The operating environment assessment is meant to add critical context to complement the threat environment and U.S. military power assessments that are detailed in subsequent sections of the *Index*.

Note: This *Index* refers to all disputed territories by the name employed by the United States Department of State and should not be seen as reflecting a position on any of these disputes.