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COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S  
REPORT TO THE CHAIRMAN, HOUSE  
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

FUTURE NATO FUNDING AT  
COLLOCATED OPERATING BASES  
SHOULD FOCUS ON KEY NEEDS

D I G E S T

In a military contingency in Europe, the United States will send hundreds of aircraft, along with the supporting personnel and equipment, to augment U.S. and allied forces permanently stationed there. Some of these air forces will deploy to existing U.S.-operated bases, but to avoid over-crowding and reduce vulnerability many squadrons plan to operate out of foreign air bases under the so-called collocated operating bases program.

To implement this program, the United States has negotiated a series of bilateral agreements with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies in Europe. These agreements identify allied bases that could accept U.S. air forces, and they call on the allied country to provide some facilities and support for the U.S. forces. Since the program began in the late 1960s, the United States and host countries have identified about 70 bases in 9 countries to be included as collocated operating bases.

Because many of the bases in the program do not have facilities adequate to handle the deploying U.S. squadrons, support facilities such as fuel and ammunition storage must be constructed. Over \$240 million has been spent for construction projects at collocated operating bases, some provided by the United States and some through the NATO Infrastructure Program--a common fund used to build military facilities required to implement alliance defense plans.

This report, prepared at the request of the Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, assesses the status and implementation of the collocated operating bases program. Since GAO's first look at the program in 1977, the Committee has been concerned about the increasing requests for U.S. funding of construction projects for the program. This report recommends steps to



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improve program management and the determination of construction priorities. It also recommends that the United States seek a NATO commitment to concentrate on the funding of key collocated operating base facility needs within a reasonable time frame to alleviate the need for U.S. funding.

NEED FOR REALISTIC ASSESSMENT  
OF BASE CAPABILITIES

Where does the program stand? After 15 years and \$240 million spent on construction, the Air Force command in Europe says that only a limited number of bases are fully able to support the assigned forces. These bases have the parking and storage facilities suitable to sustain the force for a 7-day period of hostilities. The Air Force refers to bases having this 7-day capability as having Minimum Essential Facilities.

More bases do not have the minimum facilities because:

- much of the funding has been spent on aircraft shelters and other items that are very expensive and useful, but are not considered part of the minimum facilities essential to operate;
- available funding has been spread among many bases to provide some limited capability in many places;
- funding from NATO has been sporadic and inconsistent.

Despite the limited number of bases meeting the minimum construction standards, there is more capability available in the program than the Air Force acknowledges. Air Force assessments of base capabilities often do not consider support facilities provided by the host nation, either right on the same base or close by. Because NATO standards provide for 7 days of on-base fuel and ammunition storage, the Air Force does not consider nearby off-base storage in assessing the viability of a base. In some countries, adequate fuel or ammunition is available very nearby. In addition, the Air Force assessment

- does not factor in initiatives by U.S. logistics planners to preposition fuel and munitions stocks closer to some bases and
- does not adequately assess the joint demands of U.S. and allied aircraft on existing facilities.

In addition to improving the criteria used to measure operational capability, the Air Force needs to improve its collection of the type of data necessary to realistically assess the operational status of each collocated operating base. The Air Force should increase its effort to maintain accurate and up-to-date information on host nation plans that have an impact on the availability of facilities at collocated operating bases.

AIR FORCE SHOULD ASK NATO  
TO FOCUS ON FUNDING KEY NEEDS

Minimum Essential Facilities at virtually all collocated operating bases are eligible for NATO infrastructure funding, and the Air Force has sought and received such funding. However, the Air Force has also asked for U.S. military construction funds to prefinance some construction--that is, build the facilities first with U.S. money, then attempt to receive reimbursement from NATO later. U.S. funding is sought because the Air Force sees an urgent need for facilities and NATO funds are limited by many competing priorities. The Congress has denied the Air Force's prefinancing requests since 1980.

GAO believes the collocated operating bases program should be closely coordinated with NATO and should rely on NATO funding. The program supports a commitment by the United States to provide significant numbers of aircraft to the defense of NATO, and it is in NATO's interest to provide adequate support facilities.

The program has not been well-coordinated in the past. For example:

--Until 1981, the Air Force did not explain to NATO its strategy of constructing Minimum Essential Facilities at collocated operating bases.

--The Air Force has used a different funding approach with the Congress than with NATO. The Air Force has asked NATO to fund all eligible facilities at a base, while asking for U.S. prefinancing of only certain critical facilities. As a result, NATO continues to fund items, such as liquid oxygen storage, that are eligible for NATO funding but are not in the Air Force category of critically needed facilities.

The Air Force has begun focusing on building key collocated operating base facilities in priority order but has not closely coordinated this strategy with NATO. GAO believes the priorities, funding levels, and completion time frames for the program should be discussed and agreed upon with NATO and the United States should seek a firm NATO commitment to the program.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Air Force to

- develop a methodology to more accurately assess the operational status of each collocated operating base and
- develop a data system to collect the up-to-date information on existing capabilities and construction needs.

GAO also recommends that the Secretaries of Defense and State seek NATO's commitment for a minimum level of annual funding and a time frame for achieving the program's most important objectives.