

Report: Obama administration's agenda degrades ongoing military readiness

The Department of Defense (DOD) recognizes that more than a decade of fighting Islamic terrorists, budget cuts by the Obama administration, and manpower reductions have degraded U.S. Armed Forces readiness, and the DOD has efforts under way to manage the impact of deployments on readiness. The service branches have complained repeatedly about their low levels of, which they have attributed to emerging and continued demands on their forces, reduced force structure, and increased frequency and length of deployments, according to a report released on Wednesday by the Government Accountability Office (GAO).

For example, according to the government watchdog, the Air Force experienced a 58 percent reduction in the number of fighter and bomber squadrons from 1991 to 2015 while maintaining a persistent level of demand from the combatant commands for the use of its forces. In addition, the Navy has experienced an 18 percent decrease in its fleet of ships since 1998 and an increase in demand, resulting in the deployment lengths for many ships increasing from 7 months to a less sustainable 9 months. DOD officials have indicated that overall demand has been decreasing since 2013, but the department has reported that the ability to rebuild capability and capacity is hindered by continued demand for some forces.

To mitigate the impact of continued deployments on readiness, the Joint Staff has focused on balancing the distribution of forces for high-priority missions with the need to rebuild the readiness of the force. Efforts include revising major plans

to better reflect what the current and planned force is expected to achieve and improving the management of DOD's process for sourcing global demands by, among other things, balancing the supply of forces with the minimum required to meet global demands. However, it is too soon to tell what impact implementation of these initiatives will have on DOD's readiness recovery efforts because the department is still working to complete implementation.

Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX), Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, today commented on a Government Accountability Office Study into military readiness. The study found that "The military services have reported persistently low readiness levels, which they have attributed to emerging and continued demands on their forces, reduced force structure, and increased frequency and length of deployments." The Study was commissioned by the HASC in the House Report that accompanied the FY16 National Defense Authorization Act.

"This study confirms what Members of our committee have been hearing and seeing. It is now impossible for senior DOD officials or their surrogates to argue that we are not approaching a severe readiness crisis. The rate of deployments has remained consistently high for over a decade, but the military resources available to meet those threats are declining. As it stands, we cannot meet combatant commander requirements, reliably maintain our equipment, or fully train and care for our troops."

"We can begin to turn this situation around, but that requires the Administration to forego political games and work with Congress to do what is right for our troops and for the country's security."

The GAO study found, "DOD still faces low overall readiness rates, however, which the services expect to persist into the next decade."

- Army: Persistently low readiness levels due to “emerging demands, lack of proficiency in core competencies, and end strength reductions.”
- Army: “increasing emergent demands... strain existing capacity, such as the deployment of the 101st Airborne Division in Africa to respond to the Ebola crisis.”
- Army: Undergoing a 12% reduction in size. “Army leadership testified in March 2015 that any end strength reductions below this level would reduce the Army’s capability to support missions identified in defense guidance.”
- Navy: Persistently low readiness level due to “increased lengths of deployments for aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers, and amphibious ships, which has created significant maintenance challenges.”
- Navy: currently has 272 ships, a decrease from 333 ships in 1998—an 18 percent decrease. Even as the number of Navy ships has decreased, the number of ships deployed overseas has remained roughly constant at about 100 ships.”
- Air Force: Decline in readiness due to “continued demands and a reduced force structure. For example, in 1991 the Air Force had 154 fighter and bomber squadrons, and as of December 2015 the Air Force had 64 fighter and bomber squadrons—a 58 percent decrease from 1991 levels.”
- Air Force: readiness levels have also declined because of persistent demand for forces, a decline in equipment availability and in experienced maintenance personnel, and the impact of high deployment rates on units’ ability to conduct needed training.”
- Marine Corps: “attributes its readiness levels to an increased frequency of deployments to support the sustained high demand for the force...”

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