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Military Readiness: DOD Assessment and Reporting Requirements

Military readiness plays an important role in congressional decision-making on a wide array of national security issues. To inform its law-making and oversight activities, Congress requires the Department of Defense (DOD) to regularly assess and report on the readiness of the armed services.

Defining Readiness

Although readiness lacks a statutory definition, DOD’s *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* defines it as “the ability of military forces to fight and meet the demands of assigned missions.” Similarly, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3100.01E, *Joint Strategic Planning System*, refers to readiness as the “ability of the Joint Force to meet immediate contingency and warfighting challenges while preparing for future challenges.”

These definitions allow for broad interpretation, but many analysts use the term more narrowly to refer to the capability of a given unit or weapon system to successfully perform the specific functions for which it was designed. Readiness, according to this usage, represents the military’s ability to execute national strategy assuming size, structure, and type of equipment are held constant; it can therefore be understood largely as a function of manning and training level (for personnel) or availability and maintenance condition (for materiel).

This usage, however, does not encompass all the senses in which DOD or Congress uses the term “readiness.” In addition to the expansive definitions cited above, readiness is also used to signify specific dimensions of preparedness (e.g. “operational readiness,” “materiel readiness,” “medical readiness”). For a more extensive conceptual discussion of readiness, see CRS Report R46559, *The Fundamentals of Military Readiness*.

Comprehensive Readiness

To provide a useful picture of U.S. military readiness as a whole, Congress requires the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) to assess and report readiness across the armed services regularly.

Secretary of Defense Responsibilities

Title 10, Section 117 of the *U.S. Code* (U.S.C.) requires the Secretary of Defense to establish and maintain a uniform reporting system that measures “in an objective, accurate, and timely manner” the military’s ability to execute the National Security Strategy, the Defense Planning Guidance, and the National Military Strategy. At a minimum, the system is required to measure unit readiness, training establishment capability, and defense infrastructure capability, as well as any “critical warfighting deficiencies.” It must also measure the extent to which the

military is removing parts from one vehicle, vessel, or aircraft to render a different one operational (sometimes referred to as ‘cannibalization’).

To meet the requirements of 10 U.S.C. §117, DOD uses the Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS). DRRS aggregates readiness information and related reporting submitted by commanders, allowing the analysis of resourcing and training (‘C-levels’) and mission capability (‘Y/Q/N assessment’) of units across the services (see **Table 1**).

Table 1. DRRS Readiness Ratings and Definitions

Resourcing and Training	
Rating	Definition
C-1	The unit possesses the required resources and is trained to undertake the full wartime mission(s) for which it is organized or designed.
C-2	The unit possesses the required resources and is trained to undertake most of the wartime mission(s) for which it is organized or designed.
C-3	The unit possesses the required resources and is trained to undertake many, but not all of the wartime mission(s) for which it is organized or designed.
C-4	The unit requires additional resources or training to undertake its wartime mission(s), but may be directed to undertake portions with on-hand resources.
C-5	The unit is undergoing a Service, Combatant Commander, Agency, or other DOD-directed resource action and is not prepared to undertake the wartime missions for which it is organized or designed.
Mission Capability	
Rating	Definition
Y	Unit can accomplish the full task to established standards and conditions.
Q	Unit can accomplish all or most of the task to standard under most conditions.
N	Unit is unable to accomplish the task to prescribed standard and conditions at this time.

Source: Government Accountability Office, *Military Readiness: Department of Defense Domain Readiness Varied from Fiscal Year 2017 through Fiscal Year 2019*, GAO-21-279, April 2021, pp. 5-6.

Per 10 U.S.C. §482, DOD is also required to communicate its findings to Congress at regular intervals. No later than 30 days after the second and fourth quarter of the calendar year, DOD must submit to Congress the Semi-annual Readiness Report (SRRC), which summarizes:

- any identified readiness deficiencies;
- mitigation strategies, timelines, costs, and legislative remedies to address deficiencies;
- combat readiness ratings and trends for key force elements;
- the readiness of supporting capabilities (e.g., infrastructure, prepositioned materiel);
- the readiness of combat support agencies;
- select incidents causing injury or government property damage;
- the extent of vehicle, vessel, and aircraft ‘cannibalization;’ and
- assignments of military personnel to civilian functions.

The Secretary of Defense is also required by 10 U.S.C. §482 to brief Congress no later than 30 days after the first and third quarter of the calendar year on any changes to readiness elements since the last SRRC submission.

CJCS Responsibilities

Title 10, Section 153 of the *U.S. Code* assigns six primary responsibilities to the CJCS, one of which is to assess “comprehensive joint readiness.” This role, in turn, has five components: 1) evaluating joint force preparedness; 2) assessing risks from readiness shortfalls; 3) advising the Secretary on joint capability deficiencies and strengths; 4) advising the Secretary on requirements for non-DOD support; and 5) developing a uniform system to assess combatant command readiness.

The CJCS accomplishes these assessment responsibilities through the Chairman’s Readiness System (CRS), a framework that provides policy and procedures for assessing and reporting unit, operational, and strategic-level readiness. The CRS’ principal output is the Joint Force Readiness Review (JFFR), a semi-annual assessment of the capabilities of the armed services, combat support agencies, operational contract support, and the combatant commands to execute wartime missions. The JFFR is closely related to other DOD readiness assessment efforts, drawing data from DRRS and directly informing the SRRC.

Per 10 U.S.C. §482, the CJCS must provide the JFFR to Congress no later than 30 days after the first and third quarter of each calendar year. The CJCS must also address the readiness deficiencies identified in the JFFR as part of the Annual Report on Combatant Command Requirements required by 10 U.S.C. §153(c).

Materiel Readiness

In addition to assessing military readiness as a whole, DOD is required to assess the readiness of its weapon systems.

Materiel Readiness Metrics and Objectives

Per 10 U.S.C. §118, DOD component heads must develop and apply metrics and objectives assessing the role of equipment in overall readiness. For all major weapon systems, these metrics and objectives must address: **materiel reliability**, or the probability that a weapon system will perform without failure over a specified interval; **materiel availability**, or the percentage of weapon systems capable of performing an assigned mission; **operational capability**, or the assessed ability of a weapon system and its subsystems to perform its assigned mission; and **operational availability**, or the percentage of time a weapon system is operationally capable. The statute also requires the annual submission of this assessment to Congress.

INSURV Annual Report

The Navy is further required by 10 U.S.C. §8674 to report the “material readiness” of its vessels to Congress annually. This report is informed by ship inspections conducted by the Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV) and must include a summary of overall material readiness, the number and types of ships inspected over the preceding year, and material readiness trends by functional area over the preceding five years.

Considerations for Congress

- **Utility of current reporting information.** The utility of readiness information to Congress depends on the accuracy and relevance of DOD metrics, as well as the clarity of reporting products. Both dimensions have been subject to scrutiny: a 2021 GAO report identified DOD’s lack of metrics for measuring readiness by operational domain as an issue, while a 2019 GAO report found that DOD’s strategic analytic approach tended to create products that were “cumbersome and inflexible.” Especially in view of the considerable length and classified nature of much readiness reporting, Congress may consider whether changes to DOD reporting requirements could improve the quality and utility of the information it receives.
- **Definitional ambiguity.** DOD uses the term “readiness” in different and sometimes inconsistent senses. In its broadest usage, readiness is effectively synonymous with capability, while in narrower applications it is one of several constituent elements of capability (alongside force structure, modernization, etc.). Congress may consider whether statutorily defining readiness would improve its understanding and decision-making regarding the condition of the armed services.
- **DOD fulfillment of reporting requirements.** Given the amount of readiness information DOD is required to collect, analyze, and communicate, Congress may review the extent to which DOD is fulfilling its reporting responsibilities, particularly for newer requirements (e.g., materiel readiness metrics and objectives established by 10 U.S.C. §118).

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