



Highlights of [GAO-08-497T](#), a testimony before the Armed Services Committee, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. military forces, and ground forces in particular, have operated at a high pace since the attacks of September 11, 2001, including to support ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Between 2001 and July 2007, approximately 931,000 U.S. Army and Marine Corps servicemembers deployed for overseas military operations, including about 312,000 National Guard or Reserve members.

To support ongoing military operations and related activities, Congress has appropriated billions of dollars since 2001, and through September 2007, the Department of Defense (DOD) has reported obligating about \$492.2 billion to cover these expenses, of which a large portion are related to readiness. In addition, DOD's annual appropriation, now totaling about \$480 billion for fiscal year 2008, includes funds to cover readiness needs.

GAO was asked to testify on (1) the readiness implications of DOD's efforts to support ongoing operations; and (2) GAO's prior recommendations related to these issues, including specific actions that GAO believes would enhance DOD's ability to manage and improve readiness.

This statement is based on reports and testimonies published from fiscal years 2003 through 2008. GAO's work was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

To view the full product click on [GAO-08-497T](#). For more information, contact Sharon L. Pickup, 202-512-9619, pickups@gao.gov.

MILITARY READINESS

Impact of Current Operations and Actions Needed to Rebuild Readiness of U.S. Ground Forces

What GAO Found

While DOD has overcome difficult challenges in maintaining a high pace of operations over the past 6 years and U.S. forces have gained considerable combat experience, our work has shown that extended operations in Iraq and elsewhere have had significant consequences for military readiness, particularly with regard to the Army and Marine Corps. To meet mission requirements specific to Iraq and Afghanistan, the department has taken steps to increase the availability of personnel and equipment for deploying units, and to refocus their training on assigned missions. For example, to maintain force levels in theater, DOD has increased the length of deployments and frequency of mobilizations, but it is unclear whether these adjustments will affect recruiting and retention. The Army and Marine Corps have also transferred equipment from nondeploying units and prepositioned stocks to support deploying units, affecting the availability of items for nondeployed units to meet other demands. In addition, they have refocused training such that units train extensively for counterinsurgency missions, with little time available to train for a fuller range of missions. Finally, DOD has adopted strategies, such as relying more on Navy and Air Force personnel and contractors to perform some tasks formerly handled by Army or Marine Corps personnel. If current operations continue at the present level of intensity, DOD could face difficulty in balancing these commitments with the need to rebuild and maintain readiness.

Over the past several years, GAO has reported on a range of issues related to military readiness and made numerous recommendations to enhance DOD's ability to manage and improve readiness. Given the change in the security environment since September 11, 2001, and demands on U.S. military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, rebuilding readiness will be a long-term and complex effort. However, GAO believes DOD can take measures that will advance progress in both the short and long terms. A common theme is the need for DOD to take a more strategic decision-making approach to ensure programs and investments are based on plans with measurable goals, validated requirements, prioritized resource needs, and performance measures to gauge progress. Overall, GAO recommended that DOD develop a near-term plan for improving the readiness of ground forces that, among other things, establishes specific goals for improving unit readiness, prioritizes actions needed to achieve those goals, and outlines an investment strategy to clearly link resource needs and funding requests. GAO also made recommendations in several specific readiness-related areas, including that DOD develop equipping strategies to target shortages of items required to equip units preparing for deployment, and DOD adjust its training strategies to include a plan to support full-spectrum training. DOD agreed with some recommendations, but has yet to fully implement them. For others, particularly when GAO recommended that DOD develop more robust plans linked to resources, DOD believed its current efforts were sufficient. GAO continues to believe such plans are needed.