November 2004

FORCE STRUCTURE

Navy Needs to Fully Evaluate Options and Provide Standard Guidance for Implementing Surface Ship Rotational Crewing

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Highlights

Highlights of GAO-05-10, a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The Navy has traditionally maintained overseas presence by deploying ships for 6 months. Rotating crews aboard ships that remain deployed for longer periods is an alternative the Navy could pursue to increase the utilization of ships. Senior Navy officials have also cited crew rotations as a way to reduce part of the Navy's plans for a larger force structure and reportedly free billions of dollars for other priorities. On its own initiative, GAO examined the Navy's efforts to evaluate and implement several rotational crewing options and the impacts of ship maintenance on extended rotational crewing deployments.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Navy to systematically evaluate the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of rotational crewing alternatives; specify standard policies and procedures to ensure consistent management and accountability for ships during crew rotations; collect, record, and disseminate lessons learned; and conduct a study of the maintenance process that includes all ships involved in rotating crews. The Department of Defense concurred with the recommendations and cited actions it will take to implement the recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-10.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Janet St. Laurent at (202) 512-4402 or stlaurentj@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The Navy has initiated change by demonstrating that rotating crews aboard surface ships on extended deployments may be a feasible alternative to traditional 6-month ship deployments. To effectively institutionalize and implement change, best practices show that a comprehensive analytical framework provides useful information to decision makers. However, the Navy has not established such an analytical framework—consisting of formal measurable goals, objectives, and metrics—that could be used to assess the feasibility of various rotational crewing options and determine their impact on operational requirements, ship condition, and crew morale. Further, the Navy has not systematically collected or developed accurate cost data to perform complete cost-effective analyses. Absent such information, the Navy may not know the full impact of rotating crews on surface ships, the extent to which the various options should be implemented, or whether it is getting maximum return on investment.

Because rotating crews on surface ships is evolving as an alternative, the Navy has not provided effective guidance when implementing the practice and has not systematically leveraged lessons learned. Effective guidance and sharing of lessons learned are key tools used to institutionalize change and facilitate efficient operations. While the Navy has well-established crew rotation policies and procedures for ballistic missile submarines that include appropriately documenting a ship's condition and turnover procedures for accountability, it has not provided comparable guidance to surface ships. As a result, the Navy unnecessarily risks repeating mistakes that could decrease warfighting effectiveness and crew morale.

Furthermore, the impact of ship maintenance on the implementation of rotational crewing has not been fully assessed. Effective maintenance strategies help ensure ships can perform their missions without adverse impacts on crew morale. It is a challenge to ensure the mission capability of ships that are deployed for longer periods because most maintenance and repair is usually completed between 6-month deployments. While rotating crews has enabled the Navy to keep ships deployed for up to 24 months, the service has not fully examined all issues related to the best maintenance strategies that could affect a ship's condition and crew's morale. Absent effective strategies, the Navy risks degrading long-term ship condition and discouraging crew support for rotational crewing.