



Highlights of [GAO-03-300](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Readiness, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The attacks on 9/11/2001 show that threats to U.S. security can now come from any number of terrorist groups, at any number of locations, and in wholly unexpected ways. As a result, the Department of Defense (DOD) is shifting to a new defense strategy focused on dealing with uncertainty by acting quickly across a wide range of combat conditions. One key ingredient of the new strategy is the availability of aircraft to carry out their missions. Key measures of availability include the percentage of time an aircraft can perform at least one or all of its assigned missions, termed the “mission capable” (MC) and “full mission capable” (FMC) rates, respectively.

At the Subcommittee’s request, GAO examined whether key DOD aircraft have been able to meet MC and FMC goals in recent years, and DOD’s process for setting aircraft availability goals.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD review the current goals to ensure that they have a valid basis and are appropriate to the new defense strategy, and revise its instructions to ensure that such measures are based on a clearly defined and documented process and objective methodology. DOD concurred or partially concurred with all of GAO’s recommendations and outlined planned actions to address them.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-300.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Neal Curtin at (757) 552-8100 or Curtinn@gao.gov.

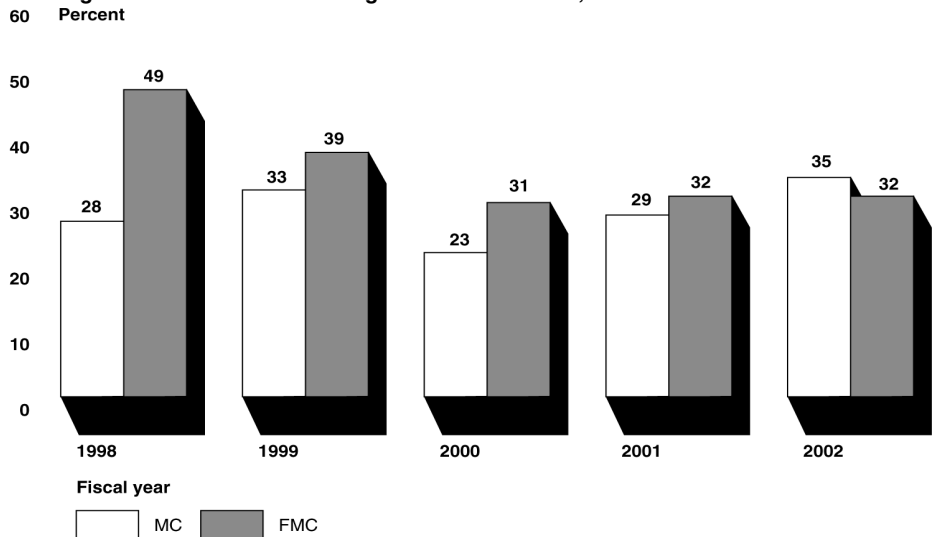
MILITARY READINESS

DOD Needs a Clear and Defined Process for Setting Aircraft Availability Goals in the New Security Environment

What GAO Found

Less than one-half of the 49 key active-duty aircraft models that GAO reviewed met their MC or FMC goals during fiscal years 1998-2002. The levels of mission capability varied by military service and type of aircraft, and the levels at which the goals were set also varied widely, even among the same type of aircraft. However, the MC and FMC goals for each model changed little over time. Since 1998, only 11 of 49 aircraft models (22 percent) experienced a change to their goals. Seven of the changes were to raise the goals to higher levels. Difficulties in meeting the goals are caused by a complex combination of logistical and operational factors.

Percentage of Aircraft Models Meeting MC and FMC Goals, Fiscal Years 1998-2002



Sources: Military services (data), GAO (presentation).

Despite their importance, DOD does not have a clear and defined process for setting aircraft availability goals. The goal-setting process is largely undefined and undocumented, and there is widespread uncertainty among the military services over how the goals were established, who is responsible for setting them, and the continuing adequacy of MC and FMC goals as measures of aircraft availability. Uncertainty and the lack of documentation in setting the goals ultimately obscures basic perceptions of readiness and operational effectiveness, undermines congressional confidence in the basis for DOD’s funding requests, and brings into question the appropriateness of those goals to the new defense strategy. DOD guidance does not define the availability goals that the services must establish or require any objective methodology for setting them. Nor does it require the services to identify one office as the coordinating agent for goal setting or to document the basis for the goals chosen. DOD officials told GAO that the guidance has not been updated since 1990 to reflect the new security environment of increased deployments and other changes since the end of the Cold War.