



Highlights of [GAO-08-264](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The Navy initiated its Fleet Response Plan (FRP) in March 2003 as a critical enabler to help meet the new demands of the twenty-first century security environment. FRP represents a major change in the way the Navy manages its forces, and is intended to more rapidly prepare and then sustain readiness in ships and squadrons. To achieve the desired capabilities under FRP, the Navy has altered its training, maintenance, and manning practices. The Navy expects this new readiness approach will enable its forces to provide presence and engagement in forward areas, as well as surge a greater number of ships on short notice. The Navy intends to achieve this goal without increasing its operations and maintenance budget of about \$40 billion for each of the next 5 years. However, GAO previously reported that the Navy had not fully incorporated a sound management approach to guide and assess implementation of FRP. As a result, GAO was asked to examine the extent to which the Navy has (1) made progress in implementing a sound management approach for FRP and (2) evaluated the long-term risks and tradeoffs of FRP-related changes.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Navy take actions to fully develop implementation goals, performance measures, and links to resources for FRP and to assess the risks to its ability to meet these goals under changing conditions. The Navy generally concurred with the recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-264](#). For more information, contact Janet St. Laurent at (202) 512-4402 or stlaurentj@gao.gov.

MILITARY READINESS

Navy Is Making Progress Implementing Its Fleet Response Plan, but Has Not Fully Developed Goals, Measures, and Resource Needs

What GAO Found

The Navy has taken several positive steps toward implementing a sound management approach for FRP, but has not developed implementation goals, fully developed performance measures, or comprehensively assessed and identified the resources required to achieve FRP goals. GAO's prior work has shown that key elements of a sound management approach include: defining clear missions and desired outcomes, establishing implementation goals, measuring performance, and aligning activities with resources. The Navy has made progress in implementing FRP since GAO's prior reports. For example, it has established a goal of having three carrier strike groups deployed, three ready to deploy within 30 days of being ordered to do so, and one more within 90 days (referred to as 3+3+1). The Navy also has established a framework to set implementation goals for all forces, established some performance measures that are linked to the FRP phases, and begun efforts to identify needed resources. However, the Navy has not yet established a specific implementation goal for expeditionary strike groups and other forces. In addition, the Navy has not fully developed performance measures to enable it to assess whether carrier strike groups have achieved adequate readiness levels to deploy in support of the 3+3+1 goal. Moreover, the Navy has not fully identified the resources required to achieve FRP goals. Until the Navy's management approach fully incorporates the key elements, the Navy may not be able to measure how well FRP is achieving its goals or develop budget requests based on the resources needed to achieve expected readiness levels.

The Navy has not fully considered the long-term risks and tradeoffs associated with the changes made as FRP has been implemented, such as carrier operational and maintenance cycles and force structure. The Navy has extended the intervals between carrier dry-dock maintenance periods from 6 years to 8 years and begun a test program that will extend some carrier dry-dock intervals to as much as 12 years, and it has lengthened operational cycles for carriers and their airwings to 32 months. GAO previously advocated that the Department of Defense adopt a risk management approach to aid in its decision making that includes assessing the risks of various courses of action. However, the Navy has not fully considered the long-term risks and tradeoffs of these recent changes because it has not performed a comprehensive assessment of how the changes, taken as a whole, might affect its ability to meet FRP goals and perform its missions. In addition, while the Navy has developed force structure plans that include two upcoming periods when the number of available aircraft carriers temporarily drops from 11 to 10, the plans included optimistic assumptions about the length of the gaps and the availability of existing carriers and did not fully analyze how the Navy would continue to meet FRP goals with fewer carriers. Until the Navy develops plans that use realistic assumptions and accurately identify the levels of risk the Navy is willing to accept during these gap periods, senior Navy leadership may not have the information it needs to make informed tradeoff decisions.