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Defining Readiness: Background and Issues for Congress

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Summary

Many defense observers and government officials, including some Members of Congress, are concerned that the U.S. military faces a *readiness crisis*. The Department of Defense has used *readiness* as a central justification for its FY2017 and FY2018 funding requests. Yet what makes the U.S. military ready is debated.

This report explains how differing uses of the term readiness cloud the debate on whether a readiness crisis exists and, if so, what funding effort would best address it.

CRS has identified two principal uses of the term *readiness*. One, readiness is used in a broad sense to describe whether military forces are able to do what the nation asks of them. In this sense, readiness encompasses almost every aspect of the military. Two, readiness is used more narrowly to mean only one component of what makes military forces able. In this second sense, readiness is parallel to other military considerations, like force structure and modernization, which usually refer to the size of the military and the sophistication of its weaponry. Both uses embody accepted concepts: the broader use capturing the military's ability to accomplish its overall goals and the narrower use capturing the military's ability when its size and type of weaponry are held steady.

These two senses of the term are interdependent. Today, most observers assume the military should be as ready as possible in the narrow sense, but in past eras some favored accepting lower readiness in a narrow sense in order to redirect resources in ways they felt improved the military's readiness in the broad sense (to include funding a larger force or newer equipment).

Use of either sense of readiness affects Congress's evaluation of certain key issues:

- Is there a readiness crisis? Most observers who see a crisis tend to use readiness in a broad sense, asserting the U.S. military is not prepared for the challenges it faces largely because of its size or the sophistication of its weapons. Most observers who do not see a crisis tend to use readiness in a narrow sense, assessing only the state of training and the status of current equipment.
- For what scenarios, contingencies, and threats should the U.S. military be ready? Some senior officials express confidence in the military's readiness for the missions it is executing today—although other observers are not as confident—but express concern over the military's readiness for potential missions in the future.
- How is readiness measured? Because of the two uses of the term, measuring readiness is difficult; despite ongoing efforts, many observers do not find DOD's readiness reporting useful.
- How might DOD's FY2018 budget request improve readiness? DOD's request increases operating accounts more than procurement accounts. If readiness is used in a narrow sense, these funding increases may be the best way to improve the military's readiness. If readiness is used in a broader sense, that funding may not be sufficient, or at least the best way to improve readiness.

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Introduction

In 2013, then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta warned that “budget uncertainty could prompt the most significant military readiness crisis in more than a decade.”¹ Four years later, observers are debating whether a readiness crisis has indeed come to pass, disagreeing on how ready the U.S. military currently is, and debating what steps should be taken to improve military readiness.² Little consensus has emerged, partly because the term readiness is not used in the same way by all observers or participants in the debate.

Recently, DOD has made readiness a central justification for increased funding as necessary to address “immediate and serious readiness challenges.”³ DOD’s funding request for FY2017 favors preparations that improve the military’s capability in future years, like buying new equipment, whereas the FY2018 budget request favors more immediate training and maintenance shortfalls. In both cases, however, the request is justified in terms of improving readiness, contributing to the confusion by using the term readiness in different ways. As these examples show, “readiness” is used both in a narrow sense to discuss the military’s current level of training and the status of its maintenance, and in a broader sense to describe the military’s overall capability, which includes how large the force should be and what kinds of weapons it should have, even if those changes will not take effect for several years.

To help Congress understand the different uses of the term readiness, this report explores these two common uses of the term with examples, attempts to clarify the two uses, and discusses why it is so difficult to define the term. It also provides historical examples of when the two uses of the term readiness received different priorities than they do today.

The report then considers how the different uses of the term readiness inform how Congress might evaluate certain issues: Is there a readiness crisis? What should the U.S. military be ready for? How should readiness be measured? How does the FY2018 budget request affect the U.S. military’s readiness?

While this report discusses how differing uses of the term readiness affect the debate, it does not evaluate the current state of the U.S. military’s readiness or provide a conclusive definition of readiness.

Background

Two Principal Uses

Despite many definitions of readiness, CRS has identified two principal uses of the term.

One, readiness has been used to refer in a broad sense to whether U.S. military forces are able to do what the nation asks of them. In this sense, readiness encompasses almost every aspect of the military. For example, Lieutenant General Joseph Anderson of the U.S. Army testified:

¹ Leon Panetta, Statement on the Attacks on the U.S. Facilities in Benghazi, Libya before the Senate Armed Services Committee, February 7, 2013.

² See “Is There a Readiness Crisis?” section for a discussion of the debate.

³ James Mattis, “Implementation Guidance for Budget Directives in the National Security Presidential Memorandum on Rebuilding the U.S. Armed Forces,” Department of Defense, January 31, 2017.

“*Readiness* is the capability of our forces to conduct a full range of military operations to defeat all enemies, regardless of the threats that they pose. It is generated through manning, training and equipping our units and leader development.”⁴

Similarly, in 2014, retired General Gordon Sullivan used readiness in this broad sense, tying readiness largely to the size of the force:

“More than 100 years ago, the siren song of reductions in defense manpower was luring the unsuspecting onto the shoals of unpreparedness for future conflict...This cycle of *readiness* followed by unpreparedness has repeated itself all too often throughout our history.”⁵

Two, readiness has also been cast more narrowly as only one component of what makes military forces capable. In this sense, readiness is parallel with other aspects of the military, like force structure and modernization (which usually refer, respectively, to the size of the military and the sophistication of its weaponry). For example, General Stephen Wilson of the U.S. Air Force, in testimony, used readiness in the latter sense:

“...current budget levels require the Air Force to continue making difficult tradeoffs between force structure, *readiness*, and modernization.”⁶

Two years earlier, General Norton Schwartz, then-Chief of Staff of the Air Force, also used readiness in its narrow sense, parallel with other components:

“When we speak of operational effectiveness, we are talking about securing the appropriate balance of three separate but very closely related dimensions—*readiness*, modernization, and force structure—that mutually affect each other, and must be carefully integrated together.”⁷

For other uses of the term beyond these, see the **Appendix**.

Attempts to Clarify the Two Uses

Speakers often seek to clarify in which of the two principal uses they are describing readiness by applying a variety of adjectives. Richard Betts in his 1995 book on readiness distinguished them by calling the broader use “structural readiness,” and the narrower conception “operational readiness.”⁸ More recently, General Glenn Walters of the U.S. Marine Corps used “institutional readiness” to invoke the broader use and “unit readiness” to invoke the narrower use:

“Marine Corps institutional *readiness* is built upon five pillars: Unit *Readiness*; Capability and Capacity to Meet Joint Force Requirements; High Quality People; Installation Capability; and Equipment Modernization.”⁹

⁴ Joseph Anderson, oral statement, “House Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness Holds Hearing on the Current State of U.S. Army Readiness,” March 8, 2017. Emphasis added.

⁵ Gordon Sullivan, “Heed the Historical Warnings of Post-War Budget Cuts,” *Defense One*, April 4, 2014. Emphasis added.

⁶ Stephen Wilson, written statement, “House Armed Services Committee Holds Hearing on the State of the Military,” February 8, 2017. Emphasis added.

⁷ Norton Schwartz, “Balancing risk: readiness, force structure, and modernization,” Remarks at the Air Force Association Breakfast, June 11, 2012. Emphasis added.

⁸ Richard Betts, *Military Readiness: Concepts, Choices, and Consequences*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1995), pp. 40 and 42.

⁹ Glenn Walters, written statement, “House Armed Services Committee Holds Hearing on the State of the Military,” February 7, 2017. Emphasis added.

Brad Carson and Morgan Plummer, former DOD officials, distinguished the two uses in the following terms:

“[A]...more limited meaning that might be called ‘*strategic readiness*’: the ability of the military to accomplish the tasks demanded by the national command authority. This is the implicit definition used regularly in congressional testimony and public commentary.

...

“[Another] definition of readiness, still more parsimonious, might be called ‘*force readiness*’: the resource ratings of units, their ability to perform generic combat tasks, and, to a lesser extent, the ability of combatant commands to execute set-piece operational plans.”¹⁰

These attempts to clarify the term “readiness” acknowledge that both uses embody accepted concepts: the broader use capturing the military’s ability to accomplish its overall goals and the narrower use capturing the military’s ability when its size and type of weaponry are held steady. These attempts also highlight that the two concepts are interdependent, as illustrated by DOD’s official definition of readiness.

DOD’s official doctrinal definition of readiness is:

“The ability of military forces to fight and meet the demands of assigned missions.”¹¹

This definition, however, does not resolve the confusing use of the term. If “military forces” is assumed to hold the size and composition of the forces steady, this definition would imply the narrow use of readiness. Since one can posit military forces changing in size and composition to “meet the demands of assigned missions,” however, the definition does not rule out the broader use.

DOD also doctrinally defines “operational readiness” as:

“The capability of a unit/formation, ship, weapon system, or equipment to perform the missions or functions for which it is organized or designed.”

Difficulty Defining Readiness

The two DOD definitions seemingly follow the two principal uses of readiness: the broader and the narrower. But as shown by the examples above, many users do not consistently follow the doctrinal definitions, invoking the word *readiness*, unmodified, for both senses of the term.

The two uses do not lend themselves to strict definition because they are interdependent: greater readiness in the narrow sense, such as better trained personnel, may offset the disadvantages of a smaller or a less technologically sophisticated force, depending on what task the military is executing. Alternatively, the military could be ready in the broader sense because its size and the sophistication of its weapons make up for shortfalls in such areas as training or how often a unit has used its equipment before experiencing combat.

These difficulties extend to what budget lines support “readiness.” No authoritative list exists.¹² If, however, readiness is used in the narrow sense—as one piece of what makes the military able

¹⁰ Brad Carson and Morgan Plummer, “The Chickens are Ready to Eat: The Fatal Ambiguity of ‘Readiness,’” *War on the Rocks*, November 7, 2016. Emphasis added. The authors include a third definition of readiness, which is discussed in the section “Other Uses of the Term Readiness”.

¹¹ Department of Defense, “Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms,” May 2017.

¹² Congressional Budget Office, “Liking the Readiness of the Armed Forces to DOD’s Operation and Maintenance (continued...)”

—it can be contrasted against other pieces, such as buying new equipment. In this sense, the operations and maintenance (O&M) appropriations title, which must be spent sooner than other parts of the budget, can be considered a proxy for narrow readiness funding as opposed to other appropriations such as the procurement appropriations title, which can be spent over multiple years.

O&M as an entire appropriations title, however, may not be the best way to measure readiness in the narrow sense. The full title includes funding for activities often not associated with readiness, even a narrow sense, like funding Junior ROTC for high school students, real estate management, and enterprise communications networks. A potentially better way to capture the narrow concept of readiness is to focus on Budget Activity 1, Operating Forces, which includes only the O&M funding for operational units of the military services.¹³ Tables displayed later in this report will show all three categories.

While these accounts provide rough proxies for readiness in the narrower and broader sense, they are not exclusive to either sense, thus preventing any absolute judgments.

Significance for Congress

Readiness as DOD's Justification for More Resources

How the term readiness is used is important to Congress because DOD has made readiness central in its justifications for increased funding.

The Trump Administration released a National Security Presidential Memorandum on January 27, 2017 directing DOD to conduct a 30-day readiness review and concurrently to develop a FY2017 budget amendment for military readiness and other subjects.¹⁴

Secretary of Defense Mattis then issued a memorandum on January 31, 2017 stating the Administration's priorities in "strengthening the U.S. Armed Forces" would be approached "in a campaign of three phases:"¹⁵

- First, addressing "immediate and serious readiness challenges" in a FY2017 budget amendment request;
- Second, refining and improving the FY2018 budget request to "focus on balancing the program, addressing pressing programmatic shortfalls, while continuing to rebuild readiness;" and
- Third, preparing the FY2019 budget request and five-year defense program throughout calendar year 2017. The FY2019 request is to be informed by the 2018 National Defense Strategy, which DOD was to begin in spring 2017, and "inform our targets for force structure growth."

(...continued)

Spending," April 2011.

¹³ The Air Force may not consider Operating Forces the correct budget activity because it does not include its mobility aircraft, which are in budget activity 2. The request for both budget activities together increased at the same rate as just budget activity 1, 5.3%.

¹⁴ Donald Trump, "Rebuilding the U.S. Armed Forces," National Security Presidential Memorandum, January 27, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/27/presidential-memorandum-rebuilding-us-armed-forces>.

¹⁵ James Mattis, "Implementation Guidance for Budget Directives in the National Security Presidential Memorandum on Rebuilding the U.S. Armed Forces," Department of Defense, January 31, 2017.

The Secretary’s memorandum also emphasized enhancing lethality against high-end competitors and effectiveness against a broad spectrum of potential threats. The third phase did not mention readiness.

FY2017 Budget Amendment

DOD fulfilled phase one of its approach when it released its request for additional FY2017 appropriations on March 16, 2017.¹⁶ The FY2017 budget amendment seems to blur the first two phases of the DOD Secretary’s memorandum by invoking both the broader and narrower uses of “readiness.” It states “[t]he first step in rebuilding the U.S. Armed Forces is increasing readiness,” but goes on to state “[t]his request also begins to address future warfighting readiness by filling programmatic holes that were created by previous budget cuts.” The overview acknowledges this second category does not address immediate challenges, as listed in the memorandum:

“While these investments will not achieve full readiness in FY2017, they are vital to growing and maintaining a higher state of warfighting readiness in the future. These types of investments such as new planes and new ground vehicles, which will not be delivered to the troops this year but that, if not purchased, will create a capability gap in the future.”¹⁷

Despite invoking both uses of the term readiness, the requested funding seemed most concerned about broader readiness, preparing for the future, more than immediate, narrower concerns.

Table 1 shows the percentage change proposed in the budget amendment for O&M and procurement for each military department. Given that the military departments requested larger increases in procurement than O&M, the budget amendment does not seem to give priority to readiness in the narrow sense. Two of the military departments did request greater percentage increases for the more limited budget activity, operating forces, than for the entire O&M title. However, these departments still requested a smaller increase for this activity than for procurement funding.

Table 1. FY2017 Requested Additional Appropriations Increase by Select Accounts
Compared to originally requested base funding

	Army	Navy	Air Force
Operations & Maintenance	+4.9%	+4.7%	+5.3%
Operations & Maintenance, Budget Activity 1: Operating Forces	+5.6%	+6.9%	+5.3%
Procurement	+28.0%	+12.6%	+8.3%
Total	+5.8%	+5.8%	+4.6%

Source: Overview of Request for Additional FY2017 Appropriations, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) and Chief Financial Officer, March 16, 2017, Tables 1 and 3 and O-1 Justification Book.

¹⁶ The overview states it “satisfies the Memorandum’s requirement for the Secretary of Defense to conduct a 30-day readiness review.” Overview of Request for Additional FY2017 Appropriations, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) and Chief Financial Officer, March 16, 2017, p. 1.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 2.

If, on the other hand, readiness is used in the broader sense, the budget amendment may support greater readiness because of its greater investments in procurement funding as well as O&M related to operating forces. By investing in future equipment, the amendment can be understood as preparing the military for future tasks.

In the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017 (H.R. 244, enacted as P.L. 115-31), Congress mostly supported the Trump Administration’s approach, albeit at lower funding levels. The explanatory statement emphasized addressing readiness in the narrow sense:

“The agreement provides additional readiness funds for the Services within the operation and maintenance accounts. This funding shall be used only to improve military readiness, including increased training, depot maintenance, and base operations support.”¹⁸

The funding provided in Title X, “Department of Defense—Additional Appropriations” of Division C, however, follows the same pattern as the requested additional appropriations: greater relative increases for operating forces O&M than overall O&M, but even greater relative increases for procurement. The one exception is Navy procurement, which received a smaller increase than Navy O&M did. Much of that difference stems from the appropriations act already including 11% more Navy procurement funding in its base amount than DOD requested. **Table 2** displays the increases in additional appropriations Congress provided relative to the omnibus’s base funding.

The appropriations act provided \$12.5 billion in additional appropriations compared to DOD’s request for \$24.7 billion.¹⁹ This difference is reflected in the lower overall percentage increases in **Table 2** than **Table 1**. Nevertheless, the pattern of funding increases remains much the same.

Table 2. FY2017 Omnibus Additional Appropriations Increase by Select Accounts
Compared to appropriated base funding

	Army	Navy	Air Force
Operations & Maintenance	+2.6%	+4.4%	+3.1%
Operations & Maintenance, Budget Activity 1: Operating Forces	+3.8%	+5.6%	+5.0%
Procurement	+11.5%	+1.9%	+6.0%
Total	+2.8%	+2.1%	+3.1%

Source: Explanatory statement for H.R. 244, p. 26, as posted on the House Rules Committee website.

Notes: DOD distinguished in its request between additional appropriations for base and Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding. The appropriations act designates all of Title X, Additional Appropriations, as OCO funding. This table assumes all Title X funding save the Counter-ISIL Train and Equip Fund and Counter-ISIL OCO Transfer Fund are for base activities. These accounts are not included in the Army numbers.

¹⁸ Explanatory statement for H.R. 244, p. 26, as posted on the House Rules Committee website.

¹⁹ The \$12.5 billion does not include an additional \$2.2 billion provided for counter-ISIL train and equip and transfer fund. DOD designated its additional request for such funds as Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) not base additional appropriations.

Though both the request and the appropriations emphasize the need to address readiness in the narrow sense, immediately funding by percentage favors concerns about broader readiness by prioritizing equipment that will be fielded further in the future.

Historical Examples of Differing Readiness Priorities

Today, when someone uses readiness in the broad sense they usually also assume it is good to maintain high levels of readiness in the narrow sense. Few in the contemporary debate argue for forces—no matter how large—that are not ready in the narrow sense. In earlier eras, however, observers argued readiness in the narrow sense came at the expense of other, more important goals, which could leave the military less ready in the broader sense. Three eras stand out.

In the first era, the time between World War I and World War II, most observers assumed the size of the military forces needed to fight a war would be many times larger than those the United States would maintain during peacetime. Almost everyone assumed the U.S. military was not and would not be ready in the narrow sense. The Army Chief of Staff, General of the Armies John Pershing, explicitly argued to maintain standing forces at a lower level of readiness in the narrow sense in order to be ready in the broader sense:

“Had the United States in the Spring of 1917 possessed twenty-five or thirty divisions completely organized and equipped, but only sufficiently trained to meet the requirements of the ‘national position in readiness’ above outlined, each of these divisions would have been advanced many months as compared with the entirely new divisions that it was necessary to create.”²⁰

In the second era, the early Cold War, President Eisenhower came to office in 1953 believing the Soviet Union posed a long-term threat that had to be met not just with military strength but economic power. To maintain U.S. economic competitiveness and readiness in the broad sense, he was willing to accept less ready forces in the narrow sense:

“ [Eisenhower] underscored his administration’s recognition ‘that the time has clearly come when the United States must take conclusive account, not only of the external threat posed by the Soviets, but also of the internal threat posed by the long continuance and magnitude of Federal spending.’ ...[Eisenhower] went on, Truman’s quest to build up America’s military strength ‘to a state of readiness on a specified D-day’ had ‘largely overlooked or totally ignored the length of time over which this costly level of preparedness would have to be maintained.’”²¹

In the third era, following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, some observers expected a lengthy respite from international military conflict. As a result, they argued U.S. defense resources should be devoted to developing leap-ahead technologies, which would better ready the U.S. military for future challenges. They argued this future readiness in the broad sense made sacrificing current readiness, in the narrow sense, worthwhile:

²⁰ “Memorandum to the Secretary of War from the Chief of Staff,” July 23, 1922, found in Elbridge Colby, *The Profession of Arms*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1924), p. 177.

²¹ Robert R. Bowie and Richard H. Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 107. Also see Gerald Clarfield, *Security with Solvency: Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Shaping of the American Military Establishment*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), pp. 124-142 and William M. McClenahan, Jr. and William H. Becker, *Eisenhower and the Cold War Economy*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), pp. 38-39.

“The ‘Transformation Approach’ is based on the belief that the United States should accept greater short-term risk by limiting global engagement, canceling procurement of current or next-generation weapons systems, *selectively lowering current readiness* and operational tempo, cutting some force structure, and shrinking the defense infrastructure *in order to accelerate the development and adoption of advanced systems, concepts, and organizations.*”²²

In all three eras, some officials were willing to sacrifice readiness in the narrow sense, usually because of how they prioritized the contingencies for which the military should be ready and at what point in time the force needed to be ready. These past views suggest that broader readiness need not require readiness in the narrow sense, although most observers assume so today.

Issues for Congress

Is There a Readiness Crisis?

Whether observers see a readiness crisis often depends on whether they are using readiness in its broad or narrow sense.²³ For example, in arguing there is a readiness crisis, Gary Schmitt of the American Enterprise Institute explicitly says the narrower use of readiness—in his terms “operational readiness”—is not important compared to the broader use of readiness, “operational capability.”

“Operational ‘readiness’ without operational capability is meaningless—in fact, it is dangerous.”²⁴

In contrast, former DOD Comptroller Robert Hale explicitly called for skepticism about broader readiness concerns even as he acknowledged narrow readiness issues, which he calls “small ‘r’ readiness”:

“We’ve heard strong concerns expressed recently by the service [Vice Chiefs of Staff] on readiness... So I think we got to be a little skeptical...So I mean, a little skepticism, but realize there is a small ‘r’ readiness problem.”²⁵

Carter Ham of the Association of the U.S. Army captures both uses in responding to a *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece:

“That [‘America’s fighting forces remain ready for battle’] is largely true today with respect to the current fight against ISIL and other terrorist organizations, but it may not be true tomorrow.”²⁶

²² Steven Metz, “American Strategy: Issues and Alternatives for the Quadrennial Defense Review,” Strategic Studies Institute, September 2000, p. x. Emphasis added. For other examples, see Andrew Krepinevich, *A Strategy for a Long Peace*, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, January 12, 2001 and Richard L. Kugler and Hans Binnendijk, “Choosing a Strategy,” in *Transforming America’s Military*, ed. Hans Binnendijk, (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2002).

²³ In social science terms, readiness often operates like an “essentially contested concept.” See William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

²⁴ Gary Schmitt, “Contrary to Optimistic Claims, Military Has a Readiness Crisis,” *The Hill*, August 19, 2016.

²⁵ Robert Hale, speaking at “Defense Priorities for the Trump Administration,” Brookings Institution, February 21, 2017.

²⁶ Carter Ham, “The Army’s Coming Readiness Challenge is No Myth,” *Defense One*, August 12, 2016. Quote in brackets is from David Petraeus and Michael O’Hanlon, “The Myth of a U.S. Military ‘Readiness’ Crisis,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 10, 2016.

These different uses also often imply different actions Congress could take. Whether one uses readiness in its broad or narrow sense often signals whether the steps being suggested for Congress are expanding the military and procuring new equipment or prioritizing funding for immediate purposes. Justin Johnson of the Heritage Foundation sees a crisis when he uses the term in its broad sense; therefore, he argues the military should be increased in size and provided new equipment:

“Today’s men and women in uniform put their lives on the line for our country, but they are doing so with less training, worn out equipment, and fewer brothers and sisters in arms to back them up. With threats rising across the globe, all Americans should be concerned about the troubling state of the U.S. military.”²⁷

In contrast, Todd Harrison of the Center for Strategic and International Studies refers to readiness only in its narrow sense; he therefore argues expanding the military is the wrong step to take:

“This is not evidence of a readiness crisis as much as it is evidence of a force structure crisis. The readiness shortfalls cited by the Services are due to insufficient funding to support the number of brigades, flying squadrons, and ships in the force today... But the solution some are proposing is to increase the size of the military, which will just exacerbate existing problems rather than resolve them.”²⁸

The two uses, however, are not the only reasons observers disagree over whether there is a readiness crisis. In the article that prompted most of the commentary above, former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and General David Petraeus and Michael O’Hanlon of the Brookings Institution dismissed concerns of a readiness crisis altogether while still arguing for expanding the military’s size and procuring certain types of equipment.²⁹

Ready for What?

Another issue for Congress is what the U.S. military should be ready for. The two identified uses of readiness complicate the debate. The Army Chief of Staff, General Mark Milley, illustrated this difficulty in testimony:

“On the high military risk, to be clear, we have sufficient capacity, and capability and readiness to fight counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. My high military risk refers specifically to what I see as emerging threats and potential for great power conflict...”³⁰

Here, General Milley uses *readiness* in the narrow sense, as a component—along with capacity, usually describing the size of the force, and capability, usually describing the sophistication of the force’s weapons—of whether the military can succeed at counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. In doing so, he implies the U.S. Army is ready in the broad sense to fight counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. However, he goes on to say the U.S. Army is at high military risk of not being ready for great power conflict. In the passage, therefore, General Milley assesses the U.S. Army as ready in the narrow sense even as he expresses concern it is not ready in the broad sense.

²⁷ Justin Johnson, “The Military’s Real Readiness Crisis; Petraeus & O’Hanlon Are Wrong,” *Breaking Defense*, August 17, 2016.

²⁸ Todd Harrison, “Trump’s Bigger Military Won’t Necessarily Make the US Stronger or Safer,” *Defense One*, March 16, 2017.

²⁹ David Petraeus and Michael O’Hanlon, “The Myth of a U.S. Military ‘Readiness’ Crisis,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 10, 2016.

³⁰ Mark Milley, Senate Armed Services Committee Holds Hearing on Army Posture, April 7, 2016.

Whether the military is ready in the broad sense depends on what the military should be ready for, and cannot be answered by describing readiness in the narrow sense.

For more information on the range of missions the U.S. military may need to be prepared for, see CRS Report R44023, *The 2015 National Security Strategy: Authorities, Changes, Issues for Congress*, coordinated by Nathan J. Lucas and CRS Report R43838, *A Shift in the International Security Environment: Potential Implications for Defense—Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

Measuring Readiness

A recurring issue for Congress is how to measure readiness given the two identified uses of the term. Measuring readiness may become even more pressing given a report that DOD is newly classifying information regarding the military's readiness, which could cause some observers to discount DOD's assessments.³¹

Since 1996, Congress has required the Secretary of Defense to submit a quarterly report regarding the readiness of the active and reserve components.³² These reports were built on internal DOD readiness reporting dating back to 1957.³³ In 1999, Congress also required DOD to establish a "comprehensive readiness reporting system."³⁴

DOD answered this congressional direction by instituting a new readiness reporting system in 2002, the Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS). DRRS is based on the older readiness reporting system, Status of Resources and Training System (SORTS). SORTS reported four resource areas: personnel, equipment, supplies, and training. The SORTS data showed how actual resource levels compared to targeted resource levels, with the lowest creating the C-rating, or the overall unit assessment. However, a commander can change the C-rating to ensure the report reflects his or her judgment of the unit's readiness regardless of the quantitative measures.³⁵ DRRS keeps the underlying SORTS data, though it uses a finer scale for the quantitative metrics, and then asks commanders to supply a subjective mission assessment of how well their unit can execute the following missions:³⁶

- core, the missions for which the unit was designed; and
- assigned, the mission the unit is tasked if assigned to an existing war plan; or the mission the unit is conducting in real-world operations if a certain percentage of the unit is deployed.

³¹ Maggie Ybarra, "How the U.S. Military is Trying to Mask Its Readiness Crisis," *The National Interest*, May 18, 2017.

³² 10 USC §482.

³³ John Brinkerhoff and Lawrence Morton, "Origin and Evolution of Readiness Reporting," in John Tillson et al., *Independent Review of DOD's Readiness Reporting System*, Institute for Defense Analyses, November 2000, p. G-17.

³⁴ 10 USC §117.

³⁵ For more discussion on how the resource areas create the C-levels, see the "Readiness" section in CRS Report R43808, *Army Active Component (AC)/Reserve Component (RC) Force Mix: Considerations and Options for Congress*, by Andrew Feickert and Lawrence Kapp.

³⁶ Unlike the other services, the Navy added a fifth resource area to those of SORTs, ordnance. Congressional Budget Office, R. Derek Trunkey, "Implications of the Department of Defense Readiness Reporting System," May 2013 Working Paper.

The unit's mission assessment and its C-ratings should correlate. The commander can still change the C-rating to ensure they do.³⁷

This readiness reporting system combines the two uses of the term readiness at the unit level. As a summary of what is on hand, the quantitative metrics correspond to the narrow sense of readiness. The C-rating and mission assessment correspond to the broader sense of readiness. DRRS allows commanders to adjust the implications of the quantitative metrics to match their broader assessment. These unit assessments are then rolled-up through the military hierarchy to create overviews of larger units' readiness.

By entwining the two senses of readiness, DRRS limits the accuracy in measuring either. Because commanders can overrule the quantitative measures of readiness in a narrow sense, the reporting becomes subjective and influenced by senior leaders. By using the same ratings regardless of which mission the commander is assessing, the reporting can distort how many units are ready in the broader sense. For example, the Army directs its Brigade Combat Teams to be rated as less ready when trained and deployed to an operational mission that is not the same as its "core" mission.³⁸ That means the reporting system can label a unit as "not ready" even when it is operationally deployed conducting a mission directed by the president. Whether the unit should be rated against the mission it is conducting or the mission it was designed for becomes a question of what the U.S. military should be ready to do.

DOD's readiness reporting system has neither clarified the use of the term readiness nor resolved the recurring debate on whether there is a readiness crisis, as described in 2013 by the Government Accountability Office (GAO):

"Furthermore, unless DOD provides guidance to the services on the amount and types of information to be included in the quarterly reports, including requirements to provide contextual information such as criteria or benchmarks for distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable levels in the data reported, DOD is likely to continue to be limited in its ability to provide Congress with complete, consistent, and useful information."³⁹

In response, Congress has regularly directed changes to the readiness reporting system and the quarterly reports. Congress has amended the required content of the quarterly report seven times, including in three of the last four National Defense Authorization Acts. Two of these provisions required greater detail on what data the reports will provide, while another changed the report's frequency from monthly to quarterly and another required an independent study of the report.⁴⁰ Three other provisions expanded what topics the report would cover, including the National Guard's ability to support civil authorities, prepositioned stocks, Cyber Command, major exercises and cannibalization rates.⁴¹ The FY2017 provision, however, eliminated the requirement for reporting on prepositioned stocks and the National Guard's ability to support civil authorities. Congress has also directed modifying the reporting system another two times,

³⁷ For example, see Commandant of the Marine Corps, "Marine Corps Readiness Reporting Standard Operating Procedures," July 30, 2010, p. 7-2.

³⁸ Army Strategic Readiness Assessment Procedures, Department of the Army Pamphlet 525-30, June 9, 2015, p. 36.

³⁹ "Opportunities Exist to Improve Completeness and Usefulness of Quarterly Reports to Congress," Government Accountability Office, GAO-13-678, July 2013, p. 17.

⁴⁰ P.L. 105-85 sec. 322 and P.L. 113-66 sec. 331.

⁴¹ P.L. 108-136 sec. 1031; P.L. 110-181 sec. 351; P.L. 113-291 sec. 321; P.L. 114-328 sec. 331; and P.L. 106-65 sec. 361.

mandating the system measure the rates at which equipment was cannibalized and whether DOD’s contracting system could support wartime missions.⁴²

These continuing flaws have meant Congress is unable to use the readiness reporting system to evaluate the U.S. military in the broader sense of readiness. For example, in 2016, GAO found that neither the formal DRRS nor other reports could measure the military services’ progress in recent years to recover readiness after the drawdown of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan:

“The Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the combatant commands, and the military services assess and report, through various means and using various criteria, the readiness of forces to execute their tasks and missions. Some key reporting mechanisms include the Defense Readiness Reporting System, the Joint Forces Readiness Review, and the Quarterly Readiness Report to Congress. These processes provide snapshots of how ready the force is at a given point in time... Specifically, while most of the services continue to monitor overall operational readiness through the Defense Readiness Reporting System, they have not fully developed metrics to measure progress toward achieving their readiness recovery goals.”⁴³

The difficulties experienced by GAO prevent Congress from finding commonly agreed standards to discuss readiness.

FY2018 DOD Budget Request

Another issue for Congress is evaluating how DOD’s FY2018 budget request may affect readiness and how Congress might respond to the request.

DOD released its FY2018 budget request on May 23, 2017. It reiterated the Defense Secretary’s three phase plan: addressing immediate challenges to readiness in the FY2017 budget amendment; continuing focus on readiness and filling programmatic holes in the FY2018 budget request; and implementing a new National Defense Strategy in the FY2019 budget request.⁴⁴

Table 3. FY2018 DOD Budget Request Increase by Select Accounts
Compared to FY2017 Final Appropriations

	Army	Navy	Air Force
Operations & Maintenance	+14.6%	+17.3%	+4.8%
Operations & Maintenance, Budget Activity I: Operating Forces	+21.9%	+21.8%	+22.2%
Procurement	+4.3%	+0.3%	+4.3%

Source: DOD Budget Overview Table A-10 and CBO and CRS compilation of H.R. 244.

Notes: Figures do not include rescissions from H.R. 244, Title VIII save for \$336 million rescinded from the Army’s O&M accounts.

In contrast to the FY2017 budget amendment and final FY2017 appropriations, the FY2018 budget request seems to favor funding for narrow over broad readiness. The budget requests

⁴² P.L. 106-398 sec. 371 and P.L. 112-239 sec. 845.

⁴³ Government Accountability Office, *DOD’s Readiness Rebuilding Efforts May Be at Risk without a Comprehensive Plan*, GAO-16-841, September 2016, p. 24.

⁴⁴ See “Readiness as DOD’s Justification for More Resources” section for more information.

double-digit percentage increases for O&M accounts for the Departments of Army and Navy, as shown in **Table 3**. The budget requests even greater relative increases for O&M Budget Activity 1, which funds the operating forces. The request provides smaller percentage increases for procurement accounts. The greater increases for the daily operations accounts than the procurement accounts are seen to characterize the budget request as focused on narrow readiness.

Some observers, however, have suggested that the budget fails to fulfill the Administration's promise to rebuild the armed services, essentially invoking readiness in the broader sense.⁴⁵ The Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator John McCain, called the defense budget request "inadequate to the challenges we face."⁴⁶ In response to such concerns, DOD's acting comptroller emphasized the FY2018 budget request was not designed to enlarge the military:

"You will not see a growth in force structure...You will not see a growth in the shipbuilding plan. You will not see a robust modernization program."⁴⁷

As with the FY2017 budgets, assessing whether the FY2018 budget request improves readiness depends on whether one is using readiness in the broader or narrower sense.

Conclusion

The Trump Administration has made readiness a central justification for its request for increased defense spending. At the same time, readiness is used in differing ways that cloud the debate on how ready the military is and what steps would make it more ready. Clarifying how readiness is used in particular cases may assist Congress to determine what steps and what level of spending are needed to maintain readiness or redress any identified shortfalls.

⁴⁵ Anthony Capaccio, "Trump's Pentagon Budget Delays big Defense Buildup He Promised," Bloomberg news, May 23, 2017, and Dan Lamothe, "Critics Say Trump's Proposed Military Buildup Isn't Happening. Wait Until 2019, the Pentagon Says," The Washington Post, May 23, 2017.

⁴⁶ Statement by SASC Chairman John McCain on President Trump's Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Request.

⁴⁷ Marcus Weisgerber, "Trump's Military Buildup Won't Begin Until 2019," DefenseOne, May 23, 2017.

Appendix. Other Uses of the Term Readiness

The term readiness is frequently used for more particular cases than the two principal uses described in the section “Two Principal Uses.” Common examples include:

- medical readiness: “a healthy and fit fighting force that is medically prepared to provide the Military Departments with the maximum ability to accomplish their deployment missions throughout the spectrum of military operations;”⁴⁸
- dental readiness: whether servicemembers have dental issues, particularly issues that might affect whether the servicemember can deploy;⁴⁹
- family readiness: “support to the individual Service Member and their family to successfully balance life, career and mission events;”⁵⁰
- financial readiness: focused on servicemembers’ personal finances, including indebtedness, consumer advocacy and protection, money management, credit, financial planning, insurance and consumer issues;⁵¹
- physical readiness: usually called physical fitness;⁵²
- equipment readiness: how maintenance and parts availability affect equipment’s operating status;⁵³
- logistics readiness: whether units and bases have supplies and equipment on-hand or can access them in a timely manner;⁵⁴ and
- contingency contracting readiness: evaluating whether officers approved to sign contracts are prepared to deploy in support of military operations.⁵⁵

These uses of the term differ from the two principal uses largely because they are not mission-specific (arguably excepting medical readiness). Servicemembers are fit or not regardless of what tasks they are performing. Servicemembers’ families are making sound financial choices or not regardless of the servicemember’s role in the military. Equipment has its needed parts or not regardless of the unit’s mission.

Readiness in these senses may help determine whether the force is ready both in the narrow or broader sense of the two principal uses of readiness. A military is not likely to win a war, if most of its servicemembers are sick or most of its equipment is missing parts. Only in extreme cases

⁴⁸ Department of Defense, “Individual Medical Readiness,” DODI 6025.19, June 9, 2014. For more information, see CRS In Focus IF10530, *Defense Primer: Military Health System*, by Don J. Jansen.

⁴⁹ Douglas Stutz, “Medical and Dental Readiness Critical for All,” Navy News Service, April 17, 2012, http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=66542.

⁵⁰ “Family Readiness Program,” Fort Knox website, <http://www.knox.army.mil/fk/frsa.aspx>.

⁵¹ U.S. Army MWR Community Support Financial Readiness Program, <https://www.armymwr.com/programs-and-services/personal-assistance/financial-readiness/>.

⁵² Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Instruction 6110.1J, “Physical Readiness Program Guides,” <http://www.navyfitness.org/fitness/cfl-information/physical-readiness-program>.

⁵³ Eric Peltz, Patricia Boren, Marc Robbins, and Melvin Wolff, *Diagnosing the Army's Equipment Readiness: The Equipment Downtime Analyzer*, RAND Corporation, 2002.

⁵⁴ Rick Pressnell, “Common Picture Captures Logistics Readiness,” The Redstone Rocket, February 4, 2015, http://www.theredstonerocket.com/tech_today/article_cee14f3e-ac7f-11e4-82f1-4bf1e43c10b2.html.

⁵⁵ Air Force Financial Acquisition Regulation Supplement, Appendix CC, Air Force Contingency Contracting Readiness Program, November 7, 2012, http://farsite.hill.af.mil/archive/AFFARS/2013-0327/apdx_cc.htm.

will being ready in one of these areas offset disadvantages in other areas. Healthier servicemembers will not likely compensate for missing parts for equipment. In contrast, better training in the narrow sense of readiness may compensate for less effective weapons (thus affecting the broader sense of readiness). Used in these even-narrower senses, the term readiness invokes operational need without identifying the specific operation for which it is intended.

Medical Readiness

Medical readiness can be an exception. When used as above, medical readiness is an example of an even-narrower use of readiness. Medical readiness, often called individual medical readiness, equals whether servicemembers are cleared as healthy or not regardless of what they are deploying to do.⁵⁶

Medical readiness is also sometimes used to describe whether the military medical force is able to support tasks the military is asked to accomplish, as in the below statement:

Our medical forces must stay ready through their roles in patient-centered, full tempo healthcare services that ensure competence, currency, satisfaction of practice, while fostering innovation. We can't separate care from home—care at home from readiness, as what we do and how we practice at home every day translates into the care we provide when we deploy.⁵⁷

Used this way—describing the readiness of the medical forces themselves—medical readiness is still a sub-component of the narrow sense of readiness, but one that is interdependent with other components of the broader sense of readiness.

If the military is operating where injured personnel have access to peacetime medical infrastructure, medical readiness may not affect the military's broader readiness. If the military is operating with no access to peacetime medical infrastructure and suffering casualties, medical readiness may be the most important factor in the force's broader readiness.

The interdependence is further complicated by the military medical establishment's dual mission to provide care for military beneficiaries and to provide medical care to military servicemembers during wartime or contingency operations.⁵⁸ By being more ready to provide medical care in war, the military medical establishment may be less ready to provide beneficiary care and vice versa.

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⁵⁶ Marygail Brauner, Timothy Jackson, and Elizabeth Gayton, *Medical Readiness of the Reserve Component*, RAND, 2012.

⁵⁷ Lieutenant General Thomas Travis, testimony before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense on President Obama's Fiscal 2016 Budget Request for the Defense Health Program, March 25, 2015.

⁵⁸ For more on how the dual missions confuses readiness, see John E. Whitley et al., *Essential Medical Capabilities and Medical Readiness*, Institute for Defense Analyses, NS P-5305, July 2016 and Susan Hosek and Gary Cecchine, "Reorganizing the Military Health System: Should There Be a Joint Command?", RAND, 2001, pp. 43-55.