

Why GAO Did This Study

Forward presence supports the Navy's goals of ensuring sea control, projecting U.S. power, and providing maritime security. To meet these goals and combatant commanders' growing demand for forward presence, the Navy has doubled the number of ships assigned to overseas homeports since 2006, to a total of 40 by the end of 2015, and plans to increase this number further in the future.

House Report 113-446 included a provision that GAO analyze the Navy's decision-making process for determining when to homeport ships overseas and identify the relative costs and benefits of various approaches. This report addresses (1) the operational benefits, costs, and readiness effects associated with assigning ships to U.S. or overseas homeports and (2) the extent to which the Navy has identified and mitigated risks from homeporting ships overseas. GAO analyzed Navy policies and 5 to 10 years of historical cost, operational tempo, and readiness data and interviewed fleet officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Navy develop and implement a sustainable operational schedule for all ships homeported overseas and conduct a comprehensive assessment of the risks associated with overseas homeporting. The Department of Defense concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-15-329](#). For more information, contact John Pendleton at (202) 512-3489 or pendletonj@gao.gov.

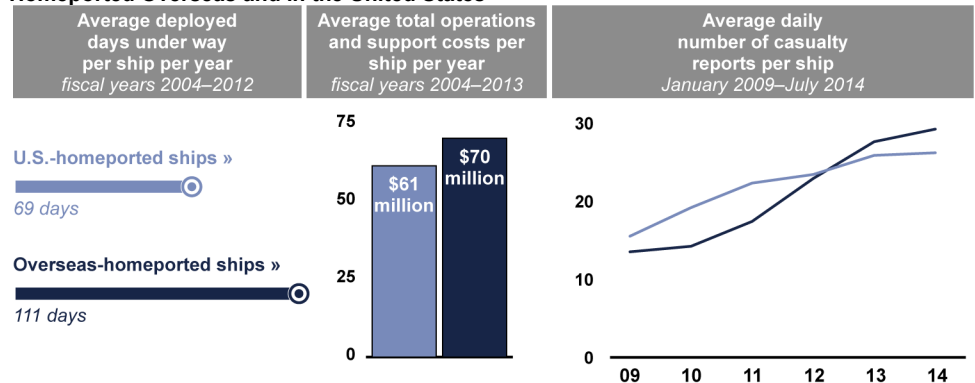
NAVY FORCE STRUCTURE

Sustainable Plan and Comprehensive Assessment Needed to Mitigate Long-Term Risks to Ships Assigned to Overseas Homeports

What GAO Found

Homeporting ships overseas considerably increases the forward presence—U.S. naval forces in overseas operating areas—that the Navy's existing fleet provides and has other near-term benefits such as rapid crisis response, but incurs higher operations and support costs when compared to U.S.-homeported ships. GAO found that casualty reports—incidents of degraded or out-of-service equipment—have doubled over the past 5 years and that the material condition of overseas-homeported ships has decreased slightly faster than that of U.S.-homeported ships (see figure below). In addition, the Navy has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on overseas infrastructure and base operating costs since 2009, while moving large numbers of sailors, dependents, and ship repair work overseas. GAO also found that the high pace of operations the Navy uses for overseas-homeported ships limits dedicated training and maintenance periods, which has resulted in difficulty keeping crews fully trained and ships maintained.

Selected Operational Time, Costs, and Material Readiness Comparisons between Ships Homeported Overseas and in the United States



Source: GAO analysis of Navy data. | GAO-15-329

The Navy has not identified or mitigated the risks its increasing reliance on overseas homeporting poses to its force over the long term. GAO found that some ships homeported overseas have had consistently deferred maintenance that has resulted in long-term degraded material condition and increased maintenance costs, and could shorten a ship's service life. The Navy began implementing a revised operational schedule in 2014 for U.S.-based ships that lengthens time between deployments, citing the need for a sustainable schedule. However, the Navy has not determined how—or whether—it will apply a more sustainable schedule to all ships homeported overseas. Although the Navy's decision process for moving individual ships overseas identifies actions and resources needed, it does not assess risks that such moves pose to costs, readiness, or expected service lives of ships that the Navy can expect based on its historical experience operating ships from overseas homeports. Without a sustainable operational schedule and a comprehensive risk assessment on overseas homeporting, the Navy lacks information needed to make informed homeporting decisions and it will be difficult for the Navy to identify and mitigate the risks its homeporting decisions pose to its budget, readiness, and ship service lives over the long term.