

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-225T](#), a statement for the record to the Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support, Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The 2018 National Defense Strategy emphasizes that restoring and retaining readiness is critical to success in the emerging security environment. The Navy and Marine Corps are working to rebuild the readiness of their forces while also growing and modernizing their aging fleets of ships and aircraft. Readiness recovery will take years as the Navy and Marine Corps address their multiple challenges and continue to meet operational demands.

This statement provides information on readiness challenges facing (1) the Navy ship and submarine fleet and (2) Navy and Marine Corps aviation. GAO also discusses its prior recommendations on Navy and Marine Corps readiness and the progress that has been made in addressing them.

This statement is based on previous work published from 2016 to November 2020—on Navy and Marine Corps readiness challenges, including ship maintenance, sailor training, and aircraft sustainment. GAO also analyzed data updated as of November 2020, as appropriate, and drew from its ongoing work focused on Navy and Marine Corps readiness.

What GAO Recommends

GAO made more than 90 recommendations in prior work cited in this statement. The Department of Defense generally concurred with most of GAO's recommendations. Continued attention to these recommendations can assist the Navy and the Marine Corps as they seek to rebuild the readiness of their forces.

View [GAO-21-225T](#). For more information, contact Diana Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or maurerd@gao.gov.

December 2, 2020

NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

Services Continue Efforts to Rebuild Readiness, but Recovery Will Take Years and Sustained Management Attention

What GAO Found

The Navy and Marine Corps continue to face significant readiness challenges that have developed over more than a decade of conflict, budget uncertainty, and reductions in force structure. These challenges prevent the services from reaping the full benefit of their existing forces and attaining the level of readiness called for by the 2018 National Defense Strategy. Both services have made encouraging progress identifying the causes of their readiness decline and have begun efforts to arrest and reverse it (see figure). However, GAO's work shows that addressing these challenges will require years of sustained management attention and resources. Recent events, such as the ongoing pandemic and the fire aboard the USS *Bonhomme Richard* affect both current and future readiness and are likely to compound and delay the services' readiness rebuilding efforts.

Selected Navy and Marine Corps Readiness Challenges



Maintenance

The Navy is frequently unable to complete scheduled ship maintenance on time and incurred over 38,900 days of maintenance delay from fiscal year 2014 through fiscal year 2020. This equates to the loss of 15 ships on average each year. The factors contributing to maintenance delays include insufficient shipyard capacity, shortage of skilled personnel, and deferred maintenance during operational deployments.

Similarly, delays in depot maintenance contribute to limited Navy and Marine Corps aircraft availability, as do shortages of maintainer personnel and diminishing manufacturing sources for parts.



Personnel

The Navy is reassessing and increasing the personnel requirements for its ships, but does not expect to crew its ships to these updated baselines for several more years.



Training

The Navy has installed protections to ensure that ship crews are trained and certified prior to deploying, and is in the process of reforming enlisted sailor training.

However, GAO found that changes made to surface warfare officer training could be further enhanced to ensure its effectiveness.

Source: GAO. | GAO-21-225T

Continued progress implementing GAO's prior recommendations will bolster ongoing Navy and Marine Corps efforts to address these readiness challenges.