

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-809T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Since January 2017, the Navy has suffered four significant mishaps at sea that resulted in serious damage to its ships and the loss of 17 sailors. Three of these incidents involved ships homeported in Japan. In response to these incidents, the Chief of Naval Operations ordered an operational pause for all fleets worldwide, and the Vice Chief of Naval Operations directed a comprehensive review of surface fleet operations, stating that these tragic incidents are not limited occurrences but part of a disturbing trend in mishaps involving U.S. ships.

This statement provides information on the effects of homeporting ships overseas, reducing crew size on ships, and not completing maintenance on time on the readiness of the Navy and summarizes GAO recommendations to address the Navy's maintenance, training, and other challenges.

In preparing this statement, GAO relied on work it has published since 2015 related to the readiness of ships homeported overseas, sailor training and workload issues, maintenance challenges, and other issues. GAO updated this information, as appropriate, based on Navy data.

What GAO Recommends

GAO made 14 recommendations in prior work cited in this statement. The Department of Defense generally concurred with all of them but has implemented only 1. Continued attention is needed to ensure that these recommendations are addressed, such as the Navy assessing the risks associated with overseas basing and reassessing sailor workload and factors used in its manpower requirements process.

View [GAO-17-809T](#). For more information, contact John Pendleton at (202) 512-3489 or pendletonj@gao.gov.

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NAVY READINESS

Actions Needed to Address Persistent Maintenance, Training, and Other Challenges Affecting the Fleet

What GAO Found

GAO's prior work shows that the Navy has increased deployment lengths, shortened training periods, and reduced or deferred maintenance to meet high operational demands, which has resulted in declining ship conditions and a worsening trend in overall readiness. The Navy has stated that high demand for presence has put pressure on a fleet that is stretched thin across the globe. Some of the concerns that GAO has highlighted include:

- **Degraded readiness of ships homeported overseas:** Since 2006, the Navy has doubled the number of ships based overseas. Overseas basing provides additional forward presence and rapid crisis response, but GAO found in May 2015 that there were no dedicated training periods built into the operational schedules of the cruisers and destroyers based in Japan. As a result, the crews of these ships did not have all of their needed training and certifications. Based on updated data, GAO found that, as of June 2017, 37 percent of the warfare certifications for cruiser and destroyer crews based in Japan—including certifications for seamanship—had expired. This represents more than a fivefold increase in the percentage of expired warfare certifications for these ships since GAO's May 2015 report. The Navy has made plans to revise operational schedules to provide dedicated training time for overseas-based ships, but this schedule has not yet been implemented.
- **Crew size reductions contribute to sailor overwork and safety risks:** GAO found in May 2017 that reductions to crew sizes the Navy made in the early 2000s were not analytically supported and may now be creating safety risks. The Navy has reversed some of those changes but continues to use a workweek standard that does not reflect the actual time sailors spend working and does not account for in-port workload—both of which have contributed to some sailors working over 100 hours a week.
- **Inability to complete maintenance on time:** Navy recovery from persistently low readiness levels is premised on adherence to maintenance schedules. However, in May 2016, GAO found that the Navy was having difficulty completing maintenance on time. Based on updated data, GAO found that, in fiscal years 2011 through 2016, maintenance overruns on 107 of 169 surface ships (63 percent) resulted in 6,603 lost operational days (i.e., the ships were not available for training and operations).

Looking to the future, the Navy wants to grow its fleet by as much as 30 percent but continues to face challenges with manning, training, and maintaining its existing fleet. These readiness problems need to be addressed and will require the Navy to implement GAO's recommendations—particularly in the areas of assessing the risks associated with overseas basing, reassessing sailor workload and the factors used to size ship crews, managing investments to modernize and improve the efficiency of the naval shipyards, and applying sound planning and sustained management attention to its readiness rebuilding efforts. In addition, continued congressional oversight will be needed to ensure that the Navy demonstrates progress in addressing its maintenance, training, and other challenges.