

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-636](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

For more than a decade, the Army focused its training on supporting operations in the Middle East. The Army is reassessing its training programs to ensure that its forces are able to perform a broader range of operations and has established training priority areas and sought to expand its use of virtual training.

Both the Senate and House Reports accompanying bills for the Fiscal Year 2016 National Defense Authorization Act included provisions for GAO to review the Army's training plans and its use of virtual training. This report (1) describes the Army's efforts to adjust its training requirements and resources to prepare units for a broader range of military operations and (2) evaluates the extent to which the Army has integrated virtual training devices into operational training. GAO analyzed Army training priorities and initiatives; interviewed officials, including those with four brigade combat teams that were selected based on their training plans; reviewed documentation on Army virtual training devices; and selected a non-generalizable sample of nine devices to review in detail. GAO selected devices to review based on factors including total acquisition costs, which were about \$535 million for the selected devices.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Army update its policies for virtual training devices to conduct additional front-end planning; define the process for analyzing the effectiveness of its devices; and better integrate the devices in training strategies. DOD generally concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-16-636](#). For more information, contact Cary B. Russell at (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov.

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ARMY TRAINING

Efforts to Adjust Training Requirements Should Consider the Use of Virtual Training Devices

What GAO Found

In 2010, the Army began modifying its training priorities and goals to support a broader range of military operations and is currently implementing five initiatives intended to further define training requirements and resources. GAO identified nine Army training priorities, such as training in an environment that replicates the complex battlefield that its units would experience during combat. Army-wide goals for some training priority areas have also been established. The Army is making progress against the goals, and the priority areas have been incorporated into unit-level training plans based on the units' assessment of their planned missions and readiness, among other factors. The five ongoing Army initiatives to change training processes may, collectively, better define requirements and resources and enable more objective measurement of training accomplished for the priorities. The results of the five initiatives will not be realized at least until fiscal year 2017.

The Army has taken some steps to improve the integration of virtual training devices into operational training, but gaps in this process remain. Specifically,

- **Front-end analysis:** The Army calculated expected usage rates for some virtual training devices after the devices had been fielded. Determining the mix of live and virtual training should be based on factors such as soldiers' available training time, training tasks and objectives, and expected usage rates to accomplish training tasks and required proficiency. Documenting these factors during the front-end planning process would provide the Army with information to evaluate the amount of virtual training capabilities needed to achieve training tasks and proficiency goals during operational training.
- **Effectiveness analysis:** Army policies assign responsibilities for analyzing the effectiveness of new virtual training devices, but the policies do not define how the effectiveness of the devices should be analyzed or what criteria to use to select devices for analysis. GAO found that for the seven analyses of virtual training devices the Army completed since 2012, the objectives and approaches used differed and the criteria used to select devices for analysis were not defined. A better-defined process for conducting post-fielding training effectiveness analyses would help prioritize limited Army resources in determining the value of its virtual training devices for operational training.
- **Linkage with training strategies:** An Army regulation requires training developers to incorporate virtual training devices into training strategies, but GAO found differences in the extent to which virtual training devices had been incorporated into training strategies. For example, GAO reviewed a sample of training strategies and found they did not describe how training tasks could be accomplished or evaluated when performed with a virtual training device. Army organizations had taken steps to create more detailed training strategies that further incorporated virtual training devices, but these efforts were inconsistent across organizations or were incomplete. Without more fully incorporating virtual devices in its training strategies, the Army risks missing opportunities to increase usage of the devices during training.