



July 2011

ARMY AND MARINE CORPS TRAINING

Metrics Needed to Assess Initiatives on Training Management Skills

Highlights of [GAO-11-673](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Over the past decade, Army and Marine Corps forces have deployed repeatedly with limited time between deployments. At their home stations, combat training centers, and other locations, units have focused their limited training time on training for counterinsurgency operations. Prior to deploying, units also conduct a large-scale exercise referred to as a culminating training event. With the drawdown of forces in Iraq, the services have begun to resume training for a fuller range of offensive, defensive, and stability missions. The House report to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011 directed GAO to report on the Army's and Marine Corps' abilities to complete training requirements. GAO assessed the extent to which the services' (1) active component forces are completing training prior to the culminating training event and (2) leaders are positioned to plan and manage training as forces resume training for a fuller range of missions. GAO analyzed training requirements and unit training documentation, and interviewed headquarters and unit personnel during site visits between July 2010 and July 2011.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the services develop results-oriented performance metrics that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of their training management initiatives and support any adjustments that the services may need to make to these initiatives. DOD concurred with this recommendation.

What GAO Found

Deploying Army and Marine Corps units conduct extensive predeployment training—both individual and collective, to include a large-scale culminating training event—at their home stations, combat training centers, and other locations. However, several factors, such as limited training time between deployments, the large number of training requirements, and the current focus on counterinsurgency operation training have been preventing units from completing all desired training prior to the culminating training event. For example, based on GAO's site visits, 7 of 13 units were not able to complete all of the desired individual and collective training (e.g., company-level live fire training) prior to arriving at the combat training centers. Further, officials from all of the units GAO spoke with stated that they planned to delay certain training until they were at the combat training centers since resources—such as theater-specific equipment like mine resistant ambush protected vehicles—were more readily available there. GAO found that some units had to train to improve proficiency levels at the combat training centers prior to beginning the culminating training events, and therefore were not always able to take full advantage of the training opportunities available to them at the combat training centers to conduct complex, higher-level training. Still, according to trainers at the combat training centers, while units arrive with varying levels of proficiency, all forces leave with at least the platoon level proficiency required to execute the counterinsurgency missions required for ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Over the past decade, continuous overseas deployments have reduced training timeframes and resulted in senior leaders assuming training management responsibilities from junior leaders. Specifically, leaders at higher headquarters have taken responsibility for much of the training management function—planning, preparing, and assessing training—while junior leaders have focused primarily on training execution. However, changing conditions, such as increased competition for resources in a constrained fiscal environment, increased time at home station, and a return to training for a fuller range of missions, make it imperative that all leaders possess a strong foundation in training management. The services are developing various initiatives to restore and develop training management skills in their leaders, but neither service has developed results-oriented performance metrics to gauge the effectiveness of their efforts to restore these skills. As GAO has previously reported, establishing metrics can help federal agencies target training investments and assess the contributions that training programs make to improving results. Without a means of measuring the effectiveness of their efforts, the Army and Marine Corps will not have the information they need to assess the extent to which their leaders have the training management skills needed to plan, prepare, and assess required training.

View [GAO-11-673](#) or key components.
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