

Why GAO Did This Study

In 1999, Congress required DOD to monitor the time that individual service members spend away from home and set a threshold to limit excessive time away. At the time, the threshold was no more than 220 days served away from home in a 365-day period. In the interest of national security, in 2001 DOD exercised a provision in the law and waived the requirement to limit time away for service members. Recently, DOD leaders have stated that the continued high pace of military operations have limited their ability to rebuild readiness.

Senate Report 114-255 includes a provision for GAO to review the root causes of degraded readiness, including reviewing DOD's management of perstempo. This report assesses the extent to which DOD, the services, and SOCOM have (1) policies with specific and measurable thresholds on perstempo and (2) reliable data to monitor perstempo.

GAO analyzed DOD, service, and SOCOM perstempo policies and analyzed DOD-wide perstempo data for fiscal years 2012-2016.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD (1) clarify its policy to include specific and measurable department-wide perstempo thresholds for use while statutory thresholds are waived or ensure service-level policies are established and followed, and (2) take steps to emphasize the collection of complete and reliable perstempo data. DOD concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-18-253](#). For more information, contact John H. Pendleton at (202) 512-3489 or pendletonj@gao.gov.

MILITARY READINESS

Clear Policy and Reliable Data Would Help DOD Better Manage Service Members' Time Away from Home

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD), military service, and U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) policies vary in identifying specific and measurable thresholds on the total time individual service members can be away from home, known as personnel tempo or "perstempo." DOD's policy issued in 2013 states that service members should not be deployed for longer than they are at home. However, the policy does not set thresholds for perstempo, which includes time away from home for exercises and training in addition to deployment. Service members are sometimes away from home for long periods for training, exercises, or other activities. For example, Air Force officials told GAO that F-16 pilots participate in multiple exercises every year that require them to spend significant time away from home. The Navy and SOCOM set specific and measurable perstempo thresholds in policy in 2014 and 2016, respectively. However, the other services either are not enforcing or have not established specific and measurable perstempo thresholds in their policies. DOD has maintained the waiver of statutory perstempo thresholds since 2001, and officials have cited the effect of the high pace of operations and training on service members; however, DOD has not taken action to focus attention on the management of perstempo thresholds within the services and department-wide. Unless DOD ensures that perstempo thresholds are established and followed while statutory thresholds are waived, DOD will be unable to judge whether service members are spending too much total time away from home and, if so, whether this has resulted in any associated effects on military readiness.

DOD does not have reliable data to monitor perstempo because the data are incomplete. Based on available DOD-wide data, GAO estimated that for fiscal year 2016 at least 51,000 service personnel spent more than 7 months away from home. However, that number is conservative because the analysis is limited by incomplete data. Specifically:

- DOD analysis shows that perstempo records are missing for at least 145,000 personnel who deployed in fiscal years 2014-2016.
- For fiscal years 2012-2016, 30 percent of DOD's perstempo records were missing information that identifies service members' occupations, 14 percent were missing information that identifies the purpose of the perstempo events, and 8 percent were missing information that identifies the category of perstempo events.
- The Navy identified about 13,000 personnel who spent more than 220 days away from home in fiscal year 2016 but were not accounted for in the DOD-wide data, and DOD officials could not explain why they were missing.

Without taking steps to emphasize the collection of complete and reliable perstempo data, DOD will be limited in its ability to assess the amount of time service members are serving away from home for all perstempo events and in its ability to use that information to assist in gauging the stress on the force.