

DOD Should Take Further Actions to Address Challenges Across the Air, Sea, Ground, and Space Domains

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What GAO Found

To maintain its reputation as the dominant military force worldwide, the Department of Defense (DOD) must balance efforts to improve the readiness of its forces with meeting ongoing demands, modernizing its capabilities, and addressing priorities identified in the 2026 *National Defense Strategy*. GAO's body of work has shown that U.S. military readiness has been degraded over the last 2 decades due to a variety of challenges, including maintaining existing systems while acquiring new capabilities. Implementing GAO's open recommendations—such as those shown in the figure below—will help DOD address these challenges and enhance readiness.

Selected Open GAO Recommendations to Address Persistent Military Readiness Challenges

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|-----------------------|---|--|---|--|
| Cross-cutting domains |  | Shortages of Sufficiently Trained Personnel Ensure guidelines reflect conditions on ships affecting the needed personnel and training. |  | Non-Combat Accident Prevention Analyze data to identify high-risk training activities. |
| |  | Service Member Quality of Life Establish oversight of barracks housing to address challenges with poor military barracks condition. |  | Readiness in the Pacific Assess capabilities and risks associated with weapon systems maintenance and repair in the Indo-Pacific. |
| Air domain |  | F-35 Sustainment Determine the desired mix of government and contractor roles. |  | Intellectual Property and Data Rights Update guidance to aid the ability for programs in sustainment to obtain intellectual property or data rights. |
| Sea domain |  | Amphibious Ships Reach agreement on a specific number of amphibious warfare ships the Navy and Marine Corps require to be available at any given time. |  | Private Ship Repair and Ship Building Create a ship industrial base strategy. |
| Ground domain |  | Plans to Field New Equipment Complete planning elements before fielding new equipment. |  | Moving Forces and Equipment Develop mitigation plan to meet current and near-term requirements. |
| Space domain |  | Force Personnel Shortfalls Analyze number of needed personnel to maintain readiness. |  | Space Operations Identify and plan for appropriate personnel levels within Space Force to optimize readiness and sustainability. |

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information; GAO (art). | GAO-26-108888

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD's efforts to improve military readiness require the department to make difficult decisions on how best to address ongoing operational demands, adapt to shifting priorities, and prepare for future challenges. DOD has taken steps to address persistent readiness challenges, but significant work remains to make a range of needed improvements that GAO has identified.

This statement provides information on readiness challenges across the air, sea, ground, and space warfighting domains.

This statement is primarily based on published GAO reports since 2022 that have examined aspects of military readiness, operations, and sustainment in the air, sea, ground, and space domains. This statement also includes information on related work ongoing during fiscal year 2026. To perform all this work, GAO analyzed Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Space Force readiness, maintenance, personnel, and training information and interviewed cognizant officials.

What GAO Recommends

Across the reports summarized in this statement, GAO has made nearly 200 recommendations, with which DOD generally agreed, to help improve readiness across and in each of the domains. DOD needs to take additional actions to implement more than 150 of these recommendations, as discussed in this statement.