

GAO

National Security and International
Affairs Division

April 1996

Military Operations and Capabilities Issue Area Plan

Fiscal Years 1995-97



Foreword

As the investigative arm of Congress and the nation's auditor, the General Accounting Office is charged with following the federal dollar wherever it goes. Reflecting stringent standards of objectivity and independence, GAO's audits, evaluations, and investigations promote a more efficient and cost-effective government; expose waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement in federal programs; help Congress target budget reductions; assess financial information management; and alert Congress to developing trends that may have significant fiscal or budgetary consequences. In fulfilling its responsibilities, GAO performs original research and uses hundreds of databases or creates its own when information is unavailable elsewhere.

To ensure that GAO's resources are directed toward the most important issues facing Congress, each of GAO's 32 issue areas develops a strategic plan that describes the significance of the issues it addresses, its objectives, and the focus of its work. Each issue area relies heavily on input from congressional committees, agency officials, and subject-matter experts in developing its strategic plan.

The Military Operations and Capabilities issue area covers programs of the Department of Defense (DOD), the individual military services, and other supporting defense agencies. GAO's work in this issue area includes assessments of military planning activities; DOD's budgeting for operation and maintenance (O&M); the capability, performance, readiness, and sustainability of military forces and weapons; and initiatives aimed at maintaining a quality force. The principal issues covered are

- the adequacy of DOD's strategic, operational, and contingency plans for military operations and the completeness of its mobilization and deployment plans;
- the accuracy of budget estimates for DOD's operation and maintenance account;
- the capability of military forces and weapon systems to carry out their expected roles in the National Military Strategy and their performance in actual operations;
- the readiness and sustainability of military forces to perform their assigned missions; and
- the effectiveness of DOD's efforts to recruit and retain a quality force.

Foreword

In the pages that follow, we describe our key planned work on these critical defense issues.

Because events may significantly affect even the best of plans, our process allows for updating the plan and provides the flexibility to respond quickly to emerging issues. If you have any questions or suggestions about this plan, please call me at (202) 512-5140.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark E. Gebicke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'M'.

Mark E. Gebicke
Director
Military Operations and Capabilities Issues

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Table I: Key Issues

Issue	Significance
Planning and budgeting: Have DOD and its military services adequately planned for conducting military operations, and have they prepared accurate O&M budgets?	Congress is concerned that DOD has overbudgeted for some items that might be better spent on other priorities. Our identification of potential reductions can interject greater accountability into the budgeting process and permit reallocation of funds where needed. With a smaller military force, sound operational and contingency planning takes on increased importance. Mobilization and deployment plans are crucial if DOD is to respond quickly.
Capabilities and performance: Has DOD fielded the forces and weapon systems that are capable of effectively discharging their assigned missions, and are they performing as expected?	Successful military operations are predicated on the presumption that critical functional force elements and weapons can achieve their mission. Our assessments will identify critical shortfalls that could jeopardize operations as well as excess capabilities that might be eliminated and thereby assist future decisions on force structure, training, and capital investments. Examining performance in exercises and actual operations provides the best indicators of capability.
Readiness and sustainability: Are U.S. military forces ready to effectively carry out their assigned missions, and are supporting systems capable of sustaining them?	Congress wants to avoid a return to a “hollow” force, unprepared to fight the nation’s wars. Readiness problems, however, may in fact reflect poor resource allocation decisions rather than insufficient funding. Better management of defense resources may be the key to improved readiness.
Quality of the force: Do DOD and the military services have effective programs in place to recruit and retain a quality force?	A smaller military must emphasize quality, continuity, and high morale. Sound recruiting efforts, meaningful training, career development opportunities, and effective quality-of-life programs are essential if DOD is to retain a quality force.

Table I: Key Issues

Objectives	Focus of work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify excesses and shortfalls in DOD's O&M budget requests. Target selected budget items for evaluation and potential reduction. Evaluate DOD's efforts to adjust its mobilization and deployment plans to its downsized force. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical review of DOD's annual O&M budget requests to identify potential savings. Reviews of selected DOD programs (especially infrastructure) to identify potential reductions. Reviews of DOD plans for mobilizing and deploying forces and equipment (Civil Reserve Air Fleet, C-141 modernization, infrastructure for the continental United States, and Army/Marine Corps equipment afloat).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alert Congress and DOD to shortfalls and excesses in selected operational capabilities. Evaluate the adequacy of DOD actions taken to properly size forces according to their anticipated missions. Identify performance shortfalls that could undermine success in future operations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviews of selected military functions to determine whether their force structure, modernization, readiness, and means of sustainment are properly matched to their expected role. Reviews of the adequacy of actions taken to correct shortfalls and eliminate excesses in capability. Assessments of the performance of selected functional capabilities in recent operations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify ways to maintain readiness at lower cost. Determine if DOD training efficiently and effectively prepares forces for operations. Assess whether maintenance, supply, and other support systems effectively and efficiently ensure readiness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments of minimum equipment needed by reserve forces to conduct meaningful training. Reviews to determine effectiveness of training and exercises in preparing forces for combat. Reviews of sustainment functions to identify excesses that divert funds from more productive uses and shortages that hamper readiness.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess DOD efforts to provide the necessary incentives to recruit and retain a quality force. Determine if DOD's drawdown is achieving a balanced active, reserve, and civilian workforce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluations of DOD's efforts to retain a quality force, such as improving military housing, decreasing enlisted personnel attrition, and improving quality-of-life programs. Assessments of the force balance achieved through downsizing (privatization efforts and military/civilian and active/reserve force mix).

Table II: Planned Major Work

Issue	Planned major job
Planning and budgeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of DOD's fiscal year 1997 O&M budget request* • Review of DOD's airlift scheduled service operations to identify potential reductions • Review of the Army's plans and priorities for upgrading U.S. infrastructure for mobilizing and deploying forces • Assessment of the feasibility of consolidating DOD's facilities engineering activities
Capabilities and performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviews of selected functional capabilities (e.g., provision of combat medical care, Navy ship defense, combat engineering) • DOD's experience with and plans for joint force packaging • Assessment of the potential for reducing DOD's en route base access and transit refueling facilities • Review of the cost-effectiveness of DOD's modernization and retirement plans for its C-141 airlifter
Readiness and sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipment readiness of first-to-fight contingency forces • Assessment of the services' training to prevent friendly fire incidents • Review of ongoing Army efforts to adjust its forces, doctrine, and tactics to anticipated challenges of the 21st century (Force XXI)
Quality of the force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible alternatives to the military retirement system* • DOD efforts to minimize undesirable attrition* • Review of alternatives for housing military personnel*

* Ongoing assignments

Table III: GAO Contacts

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