

Department of Defense Fact Sheet: Sequestration's Impact to Regaining Readiness

What is Readiness and Why It Matters

The United States military prides itself on always being ready to respond to the orders of the President. The requirements of what goes into “being ready” are determined by the senior leaders of each military service based on global commitments and priorities and are validated by Department of Defense policy makers. These requirements ensure that soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines receive necessary training and well-maintained equipment that enables them to succeed no matter the mission. When readiness suffers, the risks to forces increase.

To manage readiness, the department must balance the supply and demand of deployable forces around the world. The readiness of an individual unit is the result of a series of time-intensive programs that train qualified people and prepare working equipment to be deployed, operate, and ultimately recovered. While individual unit readiness decreases as individuals rotate to other assignments, training qualifications expire, and equipment breaks, the goal for planners is to ensure that there is another unit that can fall in behind and ensure the United States can still respond to a crisis.

After past drawdowns, including after the Vietnam war and the Cold War, rapid downsizing created readiness deficiencies such as backlogged maintenance, personnel gaps, and training reductions that took years to remediate.

For example, it takes three to six months for the United States Air Force to regain lapsed proficiency qualifications. Should training gaps persist for a long period of time, it will take years for each service to return to a high readiness state. In the meantime, those forces will be more vulnerable should they be required to deploy.

How is Readiness Funded?

The Department pays for training and maintenance out of Operation and Maintenance (O&M) accounts. The original terms of sequestration demanded an across-the-board 10% cut of all accounts. But in reality, since so much of the Department's costs, including military pay and benefits, were protected from sequester, O&M and investment accounts received disproportionate reductions. As a result, readiness activities suffered immediate and compounding impacts.

The automatic defense cuts, known as sequestration, went into effect in March, 2013 as required by the Budget Control Act after Congress was unable to reach a balanced approach to reducing the national deficit. These cuts have damaged the Department of Defense's ability to maintain an acceptable level of force readiness, which directly

impacts the morale of the force and threatens the military's ability to respond to emergency contingency operations.

Current Readiness Challenges

For nearly 12 years, the bulk of U.S. forces have been organized, manned, trained, and equipped to respond to the very specific requirements of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The focus on these wars left limited residual capacity and capability to respond to different kinds of threats, particularly those in other parts of the world. As the United States ended the war in Iraq and draws down in Afghanistan, the Department has planned, based on the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance, to re-train the force for full spectrum military operations to meet challenges in the coming decades.

While sequestration has not directly caused all of the existing readiness challenges, it has gravely interfered with the Services' plans to recover a broad range of capabilities required for today and the future. While the Services remain committed to protecting today's readiness for current operations, providing forces for unexpected conflicts is growing more difficult due to sequestration. Should an emergent large-scale event occur during the current fiscal climate, the United States may not have enough *ready* forces to respond. A less ready force takes longer to achieve an objective and is more likely to suffer casualties.

To meet the needs of the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance, the U.S. military is building forces to fulfill two primary demands:

- *Rotational presence*: forces that can routinely operate away from the United States, engage friends, and deter bad actors.
- *Contingency availability*: forces that are prepared to respond to a crisis or counter an adversary that is escalating their activities. The military must be able to surge forces to protect U.S. interests, allies and partners, and the nation.

Today, after 12 years of constant combat operations, the Services are facing serious shortages. The Army and Marine Corps have been drawing on personnel and equipment from non-deployed forces. Larger training ranges are used predominantly for security force assistance and security operations. Ships and aircraft require significant maintenance that has been deferred for too long.

Under sequestration-level funding the military cannot continue to operate at current levels and provide a fully-ready, globally responsive force in the manner that the American people have grown to expect from their military.