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Defense Primer: Statutory Military Readiness Reporting

Military readiness (or *readiness*) is a key defense concept upon which Congress has relied to make a wide array of national security decisions (e.g., regarding active and reserve component end strength and major defense acquisition programs). The Department of Defense (DOD) defines readiness as, “The ability of military forces to fight and meet the demands of assigned missions.” To inform its legislative and oversight activities, Congress requires DOD to regularly document, assess, and report on military readiness. DOD is “using a secondary Department of War designation,” under Executive Order 14347 dated September 5, 2025.

Readiness in Statute

The Secretary of Defense, per statute (10 U.S.C. §117), is to measure and report on “the capability of the armed forces to carry out” the National Security Strategy (NSS), the National Defense Strategy (NDS), and the National Military Strategy (NMS). The executive branch prepares these documents periodically, to guide national efforts and manage resources to attain and protect U.S. national security interests. The Secretary is using “Secretary of War” as a “secondary title” under Executive Order 14347 dated September 5, 2025.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), per statute (10 U.S.C. §153), is to evaluate “comprehensive joint readiness” semi-annually. This task, in turn, has five components: (1) evaluating joint force preparedness for significant worldwide contingencies; (2) assessing risks from readiness shortfalls; (3) advising the Secretary on joint capability deficiencies and strengths; (4) advising the Secretary on requirements for non-DOD support; and (5) developing a uniform system to assess joint force readiness.

DOD Readiness Policy and Definitions

DOD readiness policy, generally, focuses on “building capability and proficiency for future crises or conflict, while still meeting existing strategic missions and demands.” In Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 3000.18, *Strategic Readiness*, DOD uses the above definition for readiness and adds, *Strategic Readiness*, “The ability to build, maintain, and balance warfighting capabilities and competitive advantages that ensure the DoD can achieve strategic objectives across threats and time horizons.”

Chairman Of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 3100.01F, *Joint Strategic Planning System*, states, “Consistent with title 10, [Section 153(a)(4) of the] U.S. Code, this instruction takes a broad view of Comprehensive Joint Readiness.... Readiness is the ability of the Joint Force to meet immediate contingency and warfighting challenges while preparing for future challenges.”

DODI 3000.18 and CJCSI 3100.01F distinguish between the military’s ability to “Fight Tonight” and its ability to fight in the future against forecasted and unforecasted threats. DODI 3000.18, as of November 2023, incorporates distinct, yet related, “strategic readiness *dimensions*.”

- *Operational Readiness*—the force’s ability to perform missions for which it was organized and designed.
- *Sustainment*—factors affecting supply and the services necessary for the force to accomplish its mission.
- *Mobilization*—U.S. ability to make available personnel, industry, and materiel for national defense.
- *Modernization*—“factors impacting the timely technological advancement” of weapons and operational concepts.
- *Global Defense Posture*—global positioning of forces, infrastructure, and agreements that support operations.
- *Force Structure*—factors that help identify the numbers of personnel, weapons, and equipment that comprise the force and ensure its effectiveness.
- *Resilience*—retention of the ability to train and deploy forces for operations on short notice and mitigate interruptions of this ability.
- *Human Capital*—“policies, systems, and actions taken to recruit, train, develop, promote, and retain DOD personnel.”
- *Allies and Partners*—“areas where Allies and partner nations and forces act in support of U.S. defense priorities.”
- *Business Systems and Organizational Effectiveness*—“agility of DOD’s processes, procedures, and business systems to efficiently and effectively process information” and act in a changing environment.

Readiness Metrics and Assessments

Title 10, Section 117 of the *U.S. Code* requires the Secretary of Defense to establish and maintain a uniform reporting system to “measure in an objective, accurate, and timely manner” the military’s ability to execute the NSS, the NDS and the NMS. The statute does not prescribe metrics but stipulates the items to be measured. To meet the requirements of 10 U.S.C. §117, DOD uses the Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS). DRRS aggregates readiness information and related reporting submitted by commanders, allowing the analysis of resourcing and

training, and mission capability of units across the services. DRRS includes service-specific systems to accommodate differences in reporting requirements.

To fulfill 10 U.S.C. §153(a)(4), the CJCS, through the Joint Staff, performs two assessments of comprehensive joint readiness: the *Joint Force Readiness Review* (JFRR), “DOD’s principal strategic readiness assessment,” and the *Semi-annual Readiness Report to Congress* (SRRC), which “provides the strategic readiness assessment across the Joint Force and DOD.”

DODI 3000.18 directs the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USDP&R) to “conduct an annual comprehensive assessment of [DOD] readiness to achieve strategic objectives as outlined in the [National Defense Strategy].” This *Strategic Readiness Assessment* (SRA) is to inform the DPG, and therefore, may fulfill the requirement of 10 U.S.C. §117.

Material Readiness Metrics

Title 10, Section 118 of the *U.S. Code* directs DOD component heads to develop and apply metrics and objectives for the role of equipment in overall readiness. For major weapon systems, these metrics and objectives are to address: *materiel availability* (i.e., the percentage of weapon systems capable of performing an assigned mission); *operational availability* (i.e., the percentage of time a weapon system is operable), *operational capability* (i.e., the assessed ability of a weapon system to perform its assigned function); *materiel reliability* (i.e., the probability that a weapon system will perform without failure over a specified interval).

Readiness Reporting

DOD uses assessments derived from data in DRRS to create required readiness reports.

Secretary of Defense Reporting Responsibilities

Title 10, Section 118 of the *U.S. Code*, requires the heads of DOD components to assess and revise their organization’s materiel readiness objectives and submit the revisions to Congress with the President’s Budget submission. Section 118 also requires the Secretary of Defense to submit “an annual report on major weapons systems sustainment for the period covered by the future years defense program [five years].”

Per 10 U.S.C. §482(a), the Secretary is to submit to Congress a report on “the military readiness of the active and reserve components and the Space Force,” no later than 30 days after the second and fourth quarter of the calendar year (i.e., the SRRC). It is to summarize

- readiness deficiencies and contributing factors;
- mitigation strategies, timelines, costs, and legislative remedies to address deficiencies;
- summary of combat readiness ratings and trends for key force elements;
- summary of changes to combat readiness ratings by armed force;
- the readiness of supporting capabilities (e.g., infrastructure, prepositioned materiel);

- the readiness of combat support agencies;
- selected incidents causing injury or government property damage;
- the extent of vehicle, vessel, and aircraft parts exchanges to render one operational, and
- assignments of military personnel to civilian functions.

Section 482 also requires the Secretary of Defense to brief Congress on changes to readiness elements since the last SRRC submission, no later than 30 days after the first and third quarters of the calendar year.

CJCS Reporting Responsibilities

Per 10 U.S.C. §482(d), the CJCS is to provide the JFRR to Congress no later than 30 days after the first and third quarter of each calendar year. The CJCS is also required to address the readiness deficiencies identified in the JFRR as part of the Annual Report on Combatant Command Requirements required by 10 U.S.C. §153(c).

INSURV Annual Report

Per 10 U.S.C. §8674 the Navy is to report the “material readiness” of its vessels to Congress annually. A Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV) is to inspect selected ships and report on overall material readiness, the number and types of ships inspected over the preceding year, and material readiness trends over the preceding five years.

Considerations for Congress

The concept of *military readiness* begs the question, “readiness for what?” The Executive branch publishes an annual threat assessment and publishes the NSS, NDS, and NMS, all of which provide their answers to this question. Congress may demonstrate the extent to which those answers align with congressional views by, among other actions, providing funding, or not, for executive proposals and by directing expenditures to address threats Members may identify or prioritize differently from the Executive.

DOD’s FY2027 Budget Brief includes a concept of “*core readiness*” as “direct funding for a broad variety of Joint Force activities,” to be funded with \$190 billion. Per the budget brief, *core readiness* activities include “aviation training & flying hours, large scale combat operations training, and equipment and maintenance readiness.” CRS has not identified this concept in other DOD issuances or in statute. Congress may evaluate this concept and consider whether it fits into the statutory readiness framework discussed above.

In a March 2026 report, GAO identified 12 “Persistent Military Readiness Challenges.” GAO also found its “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.” Congress may conduct oversight of DOD readiness rebuilding efforts to assess resource needs. Congress may also enact legislation to direct new or amended DOD readiness activities to meet challenges that Congress identifies.

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