

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-864](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

For more than a decade, the Air Force focused its training on supporting operations in the Middle East. The Air Force has established goals for its combat aircrews to conduct training for the full range of core missions. Both the Senate and House Reports accompanying bills for the FY 2016 National Defense Authorization Act included a provision for GAO to review the Air Force's training plans.

This report discusses the extent to which the Air Force has (1) determined requirements to train combat aircrews for the full range of core missions, (2) met annual training requirements for combat fighter squadrons across the full range of core missions and evaluated the effectiveness of this training, and (3) established virtual training plans that include desirable characteristics of a comprehensive strategy. GAO reviewed Air Force training requirements and plans and interviewed officials with a non-generalizable sample of units based on the units' range of core missions.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Air Force (1) reassess assumptions for annual training requirements, (2) establish and collect data on desired learning objectives and training support elements for its training expectations, and (3) develop a risk-based investment strategy for its virtual training plans. DOD concurred with the third recommendation and did not concur with the first and second recommendations, stating that existing initiatives and policies address these issues. GAO believes the recommendations remain valid for the reasons discussed in this report.

View [GAO-16-864](#). For more information, contact Cary Russell at (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov.

September 2016

AIR FORCE TRAINING

Further Analysis and Planning Needed to Improve Effectiveness

What GAO Found

The Air Force establishes combat aircrew training requirements for the full range of core missions based on an annual process, but these requirements may not reflect current and emerging training needs, because the Air Force has not comprehensively reassessed the assumptions underlying them. Specifically, assumptions about the total annual live-fly sortie requirements by aircraft, the criteria for designating aircrews as experienced or inexperienced, and the mix between live and simulator training have remained the same since 2012. For example, Air Combat Command has set the same minimum number of live-fly sortie requirements across aircraft platforms, but has not conducted the analysis needed to determine if requirements should differ based on the number of core missions for each platform. Reassessing the assumptions underlying annual training requirements would better position the Air Force to meet its stated goals for its forces to achieve a range of missions for current and emerging threats.

Combat fighter squadrons were generally able to complete mission training requirements for ongoing contingency operations, such as close air support to ground forces, but were unable to meet annual training requirements across the full range of core missions. Further, the Air Force does not systematically evaluate the effectiveness of training that has been completed against established expectations. Selected unit commanders that GAO interviewed cited four common factors that limited their ability to complete training, such as high deployment rates, and other factors that affected the training that aircrews were able to accomplish. However, Air Force processes used to record and monitor annual training do not include a systematic evaluation of training effectiveness against expectations. Specifically, Air Combat Command has not established the desired learning objectives or training support elements needed to accomplish training expectations and does not collect data to assess effectiveness. A more consistent basis for monitoring results is critical in tracking the Air Force's progress in training units for the full range of core missions.

Air Force plans for virtual training do not include all desirable characteristics of a comprehensive strategy, such as a risk-based investment strategy or a time line for addressing training needs. A strategy that included these elements would help ensure that the Air Force's plans addressed its capability needs.

This is a public version of a sensitive report GAO issued in August 2016. It omits sensitive information and data on some of the Air Force's training priorities, completion of annual training requirements for active-duty fighter squadrons, and aircraft maintenance generation capabilities.