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Readiness Reporting for an Adaptive Army

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Summary

Background

Unit readiness is a central concern of the U.S. Army. To ensure that units are indeed ready, the Army has developed a readiness reporting system that assesses units' personnel, training, and equipment. Although Army readiness relates to more than just equipment and staffing, the system is largely built around the Modified Table of Organization and Equipment (MTOE), which details the equipment, personnel, and capabilities units should have. The MTOE provides the basic denominator against which readiness is assessed. Over the decade that the Army has been fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, Army units have taken on missions that differ from those for which they and their MTOEs were designed, requiring them to take on new equipment and task organizations. Many units have also altered their training regimens to prepare for their assigned missions. MTOEs do not deal directly with training, but they reflect a vision of what units should be capable of doing. New equipment and different training mean that units may have different capabilities and may, in fact, be ready for different missions than originally intended.

Purpose

This study examines the Army's readiness reporting system in light of the changes experienced by Army units in the past decade.¹ The Army has developed an impressive capacity to provide units with new capabilities to meet emerging requirements; these changes are matched by parallel changes in task organization, training, and skills as units move through the ARFORGEN process in preparation for deployment.

The current readiness reporting system generally captures the changes, but it has some important limitations. These are related to the fundamental challenge of reporting readiness for a different Army than the one for which the readiness reporting system was originally intended, which boils down to a tension between preparing Army units for assigned missions that are sometimes different from their designed missions.

Findings

Our analysis of MTOEs, the readiness reporting system, and current demands on units leads to the following three findings.

- The reporting system does not communicate the extent of units' "drift" from their design and appears to exacerbate a lack of appreciation within the Army for just how much units may have changed with respect to readiness and capabilities.
- The audience for readiness reporting may have an inaccurate understanding of what Army units are ready to do and capable of doing, in part because of overuse of the term "full-spectrum operations (FSO)," in part because the readiness system does not require greater precision, and in part because there may be a lack of appreciation within the Army for the distance separating particular bands of the capabilities spectrum.
- The reporting system is not adapted optimally for ARFORGEN.

¹ This study was finished in September 2012 and is now being released per client approval.

Our assessment leads us to conclude that the Army has two options with respect to how it responds to the difference between designed and assigned missions. One, it could choose to revert to the pre-2003 force design and approach and, in effect, treat the past decade as a “one-off” that does not challenge the Army’s basic design. Two, it could accept the fact that its units can only cope with a portion of the conflict spectrum and that shifting to another portion is a significant undertaking.

The Army’s present interest in regional alignment and hybrid warfare suggests that it is leaning toward this second option, which would require the Army to identify both where the force is today and where it needs to be so that it is optimally positioned to minimize risk. To that end, the Army requires a more precise understanding of where the force is, which in turn requires addressing the limitations of the readiness reporting system.

Recommendations

Our overarching recommendation is that the Army take stock of where it is today with respect to its capabilities and its likely demands and determine where it needs to be and what it would take to get there. To achieve this end, the Army would have to do the following:

- Modify the readiness reporting system and AR 220-1 so as to bring clarity and fixity to the “denominator,” i.e., the standards against which readiness is compared, particularly with regard to the meaning of FSO and the precise skills, capabilities, and training curricula required for such operations.
- Bring greater precision to the “numerator,” i.e., the actual state of a unit with respect to inventory, manning, organization, and skills, which in this case requires capturing the various adaptations experienced by a unit as it goes through ARFORGEN, whether to its equipment inventory as it substitutes rapidly acquired items for MTOE-authorized equipment, to its task organization—which has ramifications for manning and military occupational skill qualification—or to its training curricula.

More specific recommendations include the following:

- Translate FSO into a clear and specific set of mission essential task lists (METLs).
- Break FSO down further for reporting purposes, such that units—instead of training for a vague “FSO” capability—certify their ability to execute specific components of FSO.
- Grow the A-Level—the rating that refers to preparedness for the assigned mission—so that it tells a more complete story of what a given unit is training for, its progress toward becoming prepared, and any difficulties it might be having.
- Look beyond the MTOE for the sake of both readiness reporting and readiness in general.
- Preserve and enhance mechanisms to evaluate the MTOE.
- Be more systematic and uniform in provided guidance on preparing for possible future missions (aligned or assigned).
- Develop a robust, systematic set of processes and organizations for ACD, and maintain those capabilities during times of relative peace.
- Pay attention to ARFORGEN sequencing: readiness reporting should track units’ progress as measured against an understanding of how units should be doing rather than against the expected end state.

The changes recommended here are not urgent in the sense that the system is broken and needs immediate repair. Rather, they speak to hidden risk and the fundamental need to take stock of the force after more than a decade of conflict, as the Army transitions from responding to immediate operational requirements to a force geared to meet broader strategic objectives.