U.S. Army (Richard Bumgardner)

M–1A Abrams tanks, Exercise *Ready Crucible*, Germany

The Defense Readiness Reporting System

A New Tool for Force Management

By LAURA J. JUNOR

Ten years ago, the growing U.S. involvement in Bosnia engendered discussions on how the Department of Defense (DOD) measures the ability of the Armed Forces to execute a broad range of missions. Many recognized that readiness reporting systems needed to reflect a continuum of possible operations. Today this question takes on new significance as DOD wrestles with both the enormity and uncertainty of the present operational environment. The sustained demand for forces in Iraq and Afghanistan makes it challenging to find units that are both suitable and available for deployment. It also underscores the importance of understanding residual force capability should another crisis occur.

The new environment requires both a thorough understanding of what military forces can do and the ability to adapt quickly to emerging requirements. The pressure of current operations is forcing unprecedented changes along these lines. In the spring of 2002, the Office of the Secretary of Defense formally announced plans to create the Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS), with the promise that it would promote a real change in how DOD thinks about, plans for, and assesses the ability of the Armed Forces to conduct operations. Today, the system is evolving to meet the need of force providers such as U.S. Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) to identify units that have, or can quickly develop, the capabilities requested by theater commanders. The DRRS is designed to track detailed information on what forces, and even individuals, can do on a near-real-time basis. When complete, DRRS will be a network of applications that provides force managers at all levels the tools

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and information to respond to emerging crises and the ability to assess the risks of conducting such operations.

The DRRS is a major transformation, moving the focus of force managers from reporting unit readiness to managing force capabilities. Specifically, it represents a shift from:

- resources to capabilities—inputs to outputs
- deficiencies to their implications
- units to combined forces
- front-line units to all units contributing to front-line operations.

Force Management Challenge

Today's force managers understand that uncertainty is unavoidable but not unmanageable. The question is not just what forces are ready for, but how well they can adapt to meet current needs. The approach is very different from the rigid structuring of the Cold War era. Consider that some of the capabilities in highest demand today are truck drivers and civil engineers. Not only did these occupational specialties not make force managers' radar screens 4 years ago, but they were often targets for outsourcing. To meet these needs, DOD adopted a flexible approach of adapting units with similar skill sets and tailored their training to meet the theater commander's requirements. The point is not to highlight force planning deficiencies, but to suggest the folly of thinking that planning can be done with perfect foresight.

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In June 2004, the Secretary of Defense tasked JFCOM to provide operational commanders the capabilities they need. This responsibility means the command must have current information on the location, status, and availability of *capability entities*—any combination of personnel and equipment that provides a recognized operational capability, regardless of size or parent organization—throughout the Department. Capability entities can be as large as a carrier strike group or as small as a five-man security detachment. Without a system like DRRS, the command would have to query scores of isolated databases throughout DOD for a comprehensive picture of who can do what.

The need to identify residual capability is as pressing as the need to source existing operations. With so many forces either currently or recently deployed, force managers must know what is left in case another emergency develops. They must understand what those forces can do, the limits of flexibility, and what those factors mean in terms of operational risk.

Defining Capability

The key to managing forces is understanding what capabilities DOD has and how they can be tailored and combined to respond to operational needs. During the Cold War, units tended to be sourced (provided) to operational commanders along fairly rigid ideas of capability. Today, the pressure to sustain operations at high levels and possibly over years requires sourcing flexibility. In some occupational areas, the majority of units and individuals have been deployed at least once, and some are preparing for third tours in theater. To ease the stress, DOD is looking more broadly for units that are capable of relieving forces in theater. As a result, units are often required and trained to conduct missions very different from those they were designed for. Army artillery units trained to relieve Army security forces are an example of sourcing flexibility within a service, while Navy masters-at-arms trained to relieve Army units guarding detainees are a case of flexibility across service lines. This adaptibility means that DOD has larger capability pools from which to draw forces.

The DRRS uses two complementary approaches to identifying capability for JFCOM and other force managers. The first is identifying mission-essential tasks (METs), a concept the Army created two decades ago to manage training and now being used to establish a common language of tasks, conditions, and standards to describe capabilities essential to the completion of almost any stated mission. DRRS uses METs as a vehicle for assessing the capability of all DOD organizations, at all operational levels, to conduct assigned missions.

Under this framework, a capability is the ability of any organization to perform a given task to the standards either prescribed by parent organizations or dictated by operational needs. Monitoring that ability is especially important for organizations conducting missions outside of those they were previously trained and equipped for. Managers can track progress not only in developing new capabilities, but also the potential atrophy of the original capabilities.

The DRRS also allows force managers to trace inventories of individuals in high-demand occupations such as law enforcement and civil engineering or who possess rare skills such as speaking Farsi. This information supports the MET information described above and is therefore helpful in identifying organizations that could reasonably provide needed abilities. For some skills, demand is severe enough to warrant searches for individuals who could be deployed immediately.

Understanding Capability

The detailed information on what individuals and organizations can do—from capability entities up to combatant commanders—resides in the Enhanced Status of Resources and Training System (ESORTS). The goal of any readiness reporting or assessment system is to reveal whether forces can perform their assigned missions. Historically, DOD has inferred that ability from the status of unit resources. That is how the Global Status of Resources and Training System (GSORTS) has been used. But such input-based assessment does not yield direct information on what these forces can actually do. ESORTS provides a more complete readiness assessment

system by directly measuring outputs—the ability to conduct a task or mission to the prescribed standard—along with inputs. The system is designed to come much closer to the goal of understanding "ready for what?"

ESORTS is a secure, Web-based information system describing the status of organizations that contribute to the warfighting system. It is built around explicit measures of performance relative to assigned standards, resources, and force sustainment. The system provides:

■ *An evolution of the traditional input view*. ESORTS contains an empirical description of the quantity and quality of resources for all units in the warfighting system. Units that now report in the Status of Resources and Training System (SORTS) will find that ESORTS metrics look much like the information used to assign the SORTS scores of C1 (highest) through C4 (lowest).

■ *Mission assessments*. ESORTS provides a vehicle for each organization from individual units to combined forces to report on its ability to achieve the performance standards of its mission-essential tasks under the conditions of the assignments. Commanders can compare their unit's actual performance for each measure with the established criteria. With this information and the resource data discussed above, they can assess the organization's ability to accomplish individual tasks and the task list as a whole.

ESORTS is being developed as a combined effort of the services, defense agencies, Joint Staff, and combatant commanders. Its products (metrics describing various aspects of DOD health and capability, both inputs and outputs, objective and evaluative) will be directly reported throughout the Department and used to support contingency sourcing and adaptive planning.

The Inputs: Building on SORTS

ESORTS begins with the same basic information that underlies GSORTS. However, it more explicitly uses and disseminates detailed measures of the quality and quantity of resources such as personnel, training, ordnance, major weapons systems, and supplies. For example, it lists the rank, skills, and certifications for all individuals assigned to each reporting organization. Users can view this information in aggregate, or drill down to the individual level. Similar data are provided for other resource measures.

USS *Shoup* and USS *Shiloh* conducting readiness training with Japanese naval forces in support of U.S. Navy Fleet Response Plan

U.S. Navy (Justin R. Blake)

The system also contains information on whether individuals meet medical, legal, and administrative deployment criteria. It contains records of past theater deployments (and mobilizations in the case of Reserve forces). This information helps ensure departmental compliance with existing rules governing how often military members can be recalled for the same operation.

ESORTS requires information from each level of the operational hierarchy, not just the basic tactical-level units. For example, Navy aircraft squadrons would report as they always have, but the battle group and any joint task force, standing or ad hoc, would give an accounting as well. These higher-level forces will report on the combined readiness and capabilities of their component units and on the command staff that runs that combined unit.

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Support entities and the Defense agencies have not used this type of reporting system in the past; under ESORTS, they will report information relevant to their mission—the support of the warfighter. The capabilities of these support organizations should be reflected in DRRS because they hold important data on assets or services that are available to sustain operations.

One of the goals guiding development of the Defense Readiness Reporting System is to take advantage of modern information technology to reduce the reporting burden of operational units. Because DRRS aims to take full advantage of existing information systems, it will not require a unit to enter data for ESORTS that it has already entered in another system. It will take what it needs from those existing data sources, allowing units to double-check the information and write in comments. This relieves the units and serves as a built-in test for accuracy. The DRRS, like many databases throughout DOD, will be accessible on a secure Web site to facilitate reporting and use of these data.

Output Measurement

The most common way to answer the question of whether an organization is capable of doing something

is to avoid the matter entirely and address the easier question of how many resources the organization has. Answering the first question requires the synthesis of complex, sometimes intangible factors that cannot be replicated by a canned algorithm. That is why task and mission assessments in DRRS are the professional judgments of commanding officers and are not algorithmically derived. If leaders are appointed on the premise that they are qualified to create a fit, capable force, they should be qualified to assess the capability of that force, and those assessments should have value.

In simple terms, to assess a task or mission, commanders must judge whether they can perform a particular task today—*yes* or *no*. The overall assessment for the mission those tasks comprise is also yes or no. These evaluations will enable force managers to quickly address the status of organizations for use in a variety of operational environments and assist them in choosing which units can be deployed quickly or need immediate training or resources for follow-on mission requirements.

Unfortunately, there will be a fair degree of inconsistency in the assessments—an inescapable characteristic of evaluative judgments. Some assessments will be higher or lower than anticipated (based, say, on seemingly comparable units). Having higher echelons base their status on lower echelon reports should improve the integrity of individual assessments. Higher levels would naturally reconcile information from subordinate commands in forming a coherent organizational report.

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Seeming inconsistencies between mission assessments and resource accounting data may reflect important issues, such as resource stress or negative synergies that tend to be difficult to observe and document. The combination of commanders' assessments and resource data in ESORTS will identify specific deficiencies that could be masked if resources were merely monitored in aggregated bundles, such as equipment and personnel.

Crisis Planning and Contingency Sourcing

ESORTS answers the question of whether forces are capable of conducting assigned missions and tasks, but history tells us that no plan is executed without major revision. Current events add the lesson that the ability to adapt forces quickly is the best strategy for managing uncertainty. DOD must ensure that the Armed Forces not only can conduct the operations they regularly plan for, such as those comprising the National Military Strategy, but also that they can respond to severe and unanticipated crises. The Department does not have the option of turning down missions, and that makes preparing for and assessing the risks of tomorrow's force requirements a matter of exploring margins and alternatives.

Currently, the DRRS contains applications that support contingency sourcing. These provide managers a nascent ability to find forces and individuals to meet user-specified requirements. The applications can be used not only to identify forces that are immediately qualified and able to support operations, but also to provide information on forces that are nearly qualified in terms of their current resource status or their possession of similar skills or capabilities. Force providers such as JFCOM are guiding the development of these applications.

Future reporting systems will contain applications that support risk assessments and the adaptive planning process. These applications will provide the means to match available units to plans, monitor unit capabilities, conduct risk analyses, and revise plans—all within days or weeks rather than months or years, the current standard. In other words, these applications will allow force managers to query the forces (and their corresponding capabilities) that have not been consumed by current operations and see how far they go toward meeting the demands of additional operations. Managers will also have the ability to adapt current plans to suit emerging conditions or accommodate a capability deficiency. The common attributes of these applications are that they begin with the current capability profiles furnished through ESORTS and provide the means to evaluate these profiles against alternative demand scenarios in a matter of days. **JFQ**

Airmen refuel F–15s at Eielson Air Force Base, joint/combined training Exercise *Cope Thunder 05–1*

354th Communications Squadron (Joshua Strang)