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***Military readiness
in the MENA region***

**Providing an
accurate picture
for planners and
commanders**

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Executive summary



Military commanders and planners in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) often do not have a clear or accurate understanding of the readiness of their forces. They strive to maintain extremely high levels of force readiness, yet those standards are often unrealistic, unattainable, and unsustainable. Leaders often focus only on the availability of equipment such as weapons platforms and systems, which does not provide the overall picture of readiness.

If MENA armed forces are to meet their commitments, they need a more comprehensive approach to military readiness and force generation. This starts with an assessment of the core objectives: the threats that militaries must address, and the country's foreign policy stance, alliance obligations, and non-defence missions (such as humanitarian or disaster relief) that a military supports. With greater detail, commanders and planners must consider each actual mission, including such parameters as mission duration, destination, intensity, and logistics.

With this information militaries can develop a readiness program that goes beyond the current "yes-or-no" determination. Instead, it will allow units to cycle through predictable states of readiness: low, medium, and high. In each state, commanders should factor in all dimensions of readiness: personnel, equipment, training, and sustainability. The best approach will put all of this information into commanders' hands through a dashboard that offers an accurate, current indication of readiness and allows leaders to test scenarios and identify potential ramifications. At a more sophisticated level, it can predict readiness at future points in time by factoring in considerations such as manpower forecasts and equipment overhaul schedules.

In this new system, armed forces will report that they are not ready on the old standard, which at first glance may appear unacceptable. However, setting a predictable readiness cycles means that these new reported levels will be feasible and realistic. This will result in a sustainable approach to readiness that should allow armed forces to respond appropriately to the wide range of threats and challenges which are likely to occur.

No clear picture of readiness

Military commanders and planners in the MENA region are often fixated on the goal of keeping forces at a high state of readiness. Their logic is that higher levels are better. Instead, this approach leads to much higher logistics and sustainment costs, and estimates that are inflated, masking the true readiness level of forces. For military leaders and governments, the more critical risk is that they will make deployment and operational decisions based on a false sense of their militaries' true readiness. In extreme cases, this can lead to prolonged or failed missions, a national loss of face, and needless casualties.

The underlying problem is that many commanders and planners focus primarily on the technical status of equipment such as weapons platforms and systems, rather than the operational status of their forces. In doing so, they often fail to consider other factors, such as personnel, training, equipment maintenance and repair, and logistics.

For example, consider a military that purchases 20 new fighter jets. Commanders and planners might logically assume that all 20 are ready to fly, meaning they are all at high readiness. However, there are other factors to consider. Does the force have enough pilots sufficiently trained and certified to fly the aircraft? Have these pilots conducted training in group formations, and with other branches? Can logistics functions deliver fuel, parts, and other needed materiel to them? When will they require scheduled maintenance? Can the military plan in advance for inevitable unscheduled maintenance?

Of course, it is rare for militaries to receive new equipment in a block like this. More commonly, equipment is at different stages of its service life. This adds another dimension to readiness. Even if equipment is operational today, it may be two months away from its next required overhaul, or it could be weeks from the end of its operational use — meaning that it is not available for a three-month deployment.

The current level of readiness pretends to provide a large available force to commanders.

Personnel readiness has similar complications. Units need to absorb new recruits, rotate troops out for skills training courses, and simply rest and recover after returning from operations, as well as retiring those who have completed their military service. Moreover, practical aspects affect readiness at a force level. For example, it can take up to 30 days to arrange transport shipping from the international maritime market. Even for heavy-lift civilian cargo aircraft, 10 days is typical. Given such a time lag, there is little point in keeping forces on seven days' notice to move; it is not physically possible to transport them within that window.

For commanders and planners in the MENA region, a more comprehensive approach factors in these elements and establishes several levels of readiness, some of which will be lower than at present, but are more accurate, feasible, and sustainable over time. Instead of the current level of readiness that pretends to provide a large available force to commanders, but in practice does not, MENA region militaries will have a keen awareness of their true readiness and capacity to fulfil their missions.

Multiple factors form baseline readiness

In determining the required readiness level of military forces, commanders need to consider four main factors (see Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1

Commanders need to consider four main elements when determining readiness



Source: Strategy&

Threats

A clear analysis of the threats to a country from potential adversaries is perhaps the most important factor that affects the required state of armed forces readiness. Robust intelligence assessments should give an indication of the magnitude and the speed at which the adversary will engage in aggression. Threat considerations should therefore set the parameters of readiness for a worst-case scenario: an attack by foreign forces on home soil.

Alliance commitments

Most alliances, such as NATO or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), have contingency plans demanding that forces of a specified type, size, and capability be ready to respond to an emerging crisis within a particular time frame.

Foreign policy

Foreign policy can also influence readiness states. For example, if a country is committed to supporting the United Nations with peacekeeping forces, or has a policy of using the military to support humanitarian operations in different parts of the world, planners will need to weigh those requirements as part of the overall equation.

Support to the civil authority

Some armed forces have ongoing commitments to support domestic operations that lie outside the defence ministry. Examples include guarding key installations in response to terrorist threats or responding to natural disasters.

Readiness for what?

After analysing the four factors that inform readiness, military commanders should start establishing a baseline of defence planning assumptions. The next step is to consider the specific missions they are preparing for. To gauge readiness, they must ask, “Readiness for what?”

For example, a government may decide it needs to be prepared to:

- mobilize its entire armed forces in response to an emerging threat within 12 months and be prepared to fight a high-intensity conflict for 30 days
- provide a brigade-sized force in support of alliance defensive operations within a period of 30 days and to deploy for a period of six months
- provide a light battalion to deploy regionally within seven days and remain in the operational theatre for 90 days

- provide ships and other assets to support a coalition standing naval force that is on indefinite deployment
- provide an air defence quick-reaction force on a continuous basis

The force readiness cycle

Many sophisticated armed forces have developed a readiness program that is not based on a simple “yes-or-no” determination, but rather on a cycle with progressive levels from “low” to “high.” This takes into consideration the wide range of parameters. In this approach, forces cycle through each phase on a period basis, typically for 12 months in each stage. The advantage of this approach is that it is far more predictable for troops and commanders.

Low readiness

Units at this stage are typically just back from operations; they are not ready or available for major combat operations. They induct new personnel, refurbish equipment, and conduct individual and collective training. Unit collective training is focused on core Mission Essential Task List (METL) objectives, such as offensive and defensive operations. Although these units are not ready or available for major combat operations, they should be able to respond to homeland defence requirements and provide support to civil authorities at all times. Low readiness does not, however, imply low skills, experience, and competence. The unit or formation that is categorised as “low readiness” will have recently either returned from operations, or may have spent a considerable period of time on “high readiness.”

Medium readiness

Units at the next level of readiness conduct specific collective training in line with potential missions in their upcoming deployment window. They are eligible for sourcing if necessary to meet joint requirements. Their collective training focuses on directed Mission Essential Tasks (MET).

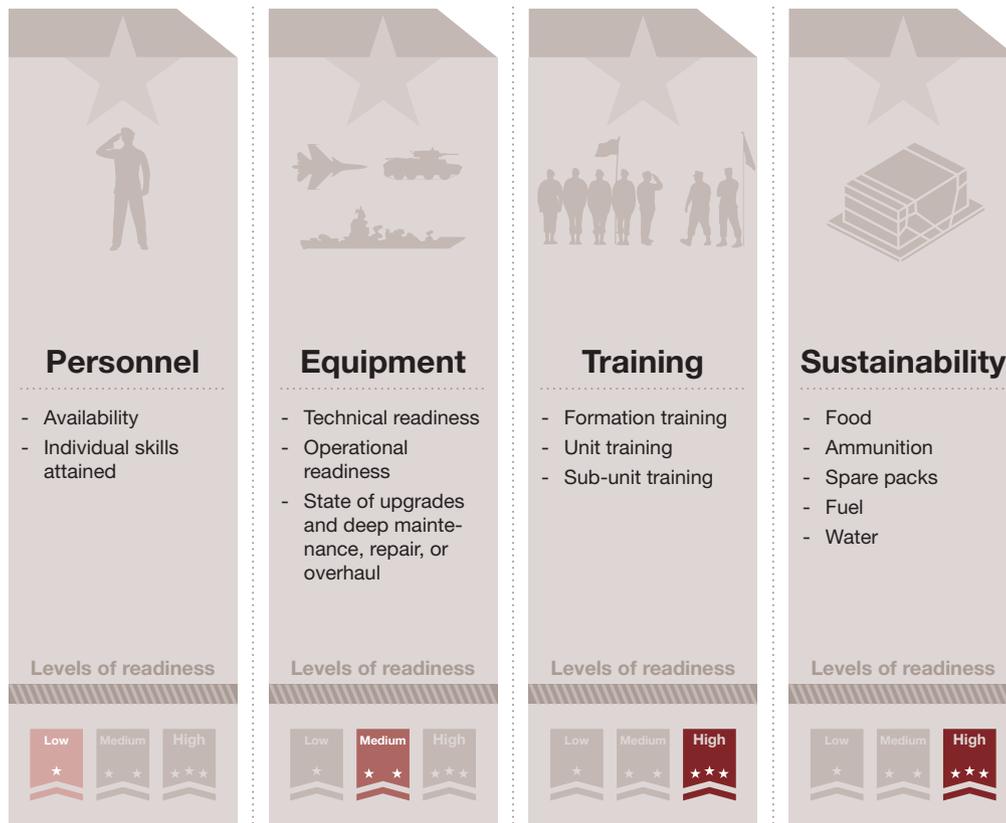
High readiness

Units at high readiness are in their planned deployment windows and are fully trained, equipped, and resourced to meet operational requirements. They are ready to go and succeed in their missions.

The way forward

To generate a true picture of readiness, according to the three-stage program described above, armed forces need to consider four dimensions (see Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2
There are four dimensions of defence readiness



Source: Strategy&

Personnel

The personnel dimension must include the number of service members who are available on a daily basis and whether that group contains the requisite skills for a given mission. It is worthless merely populating a military unit with manpower if it is unable to fulfil its function with appropriately trained individuals.

Equipment

The equipment dimension includes the daily availability of equipment in terms of technical and operational status, along with a deeper view of near-term and long-term requirements for overhaul or refurbishment.

Training

Militaries should assess the training status of units. They should do this through an objective measure of which training the units have completed, along with some type of qualitative indication, whether from outside assessors or an internal inspection regime within the force.

Sustainability

Sustainability is a key component of readiness. Different types of operations require different quantities of logistic support, such as food, ammunition, spare packs, fuel, and water, for both varying scales and durations of operations. A truly sophisticated reporting system should give an indication of whether forces can be sustained from existing sources or other measures — including surge contracts, host nation support agreements, loans from allies, or other external providers.

Key success factors

For the readiness system to be effective, it should include the input of all planners who can reflect the true readiness status of their units. Moreover, it should integrate with HR and logistics systems to pull data automatically and quickly identify potential deficiencies. For example, a unit may be delayed at medium readiness because its land force unit requires a maintenance repair order to be finished. Once the officer in charge identifies this deficiency, he can request to prioritize the maintenance order on the same system

and receive an estimated completion time, so that he can get the unit readiness to “high” as soon as possible.

The system should provide relevant reports to various command levels, such as the chief of staff, heads of forces, formation commanders, unit leaders, and others, to support their decision making. Last, the system should be user-friendly in terms of entering, maintaining, and interpreting data.

Conclusion

There is a clear benefit for MENA region armed forces from assessing and reporting readiness in a realistic, comprehensive, and accurate manner, considering the military's objectives and specific mission parameters, for personnel, equipment, training, and sustainability. Such an approach further assists commanders and planners by grouping forces into a predictable cycle from low to high readiness. The model of readiness gives military planners and decision makers accurate information, allowing them to make informed decisions about the use of forces. Ultimately, the payoff will come through a military that embarks on missions and deployments with the elements required for success.

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