

by Aaron Childers

The Russo-Ukraine War has captivated the world's attention as the smaller and less-technologically advanced Ukrainian forces continue to stall the advance of a much larger and better-equipped force. Many issues have plagued the Russians in this "David vs. Goliath" conflict - a lack of a non-commissioned officer corps and a determined Ukrainian military to name a few - but one of the most surprising lessons has been the difference between the anticipated performance of Russian forces and their actual military readiness. For Russian military leaders and their troops, the catastrophic consequences of inaccurate readiness assessments will have long-term impacts on their military and the perception of Russian power throughout the world. The U.S. Army is not immune to such hubris, but strong reporting principles ensure senior military and civilian leaders receive an accurate depiction of U.S. Army readiness. For the Soldiers compiling readiness reports, the process may seem arduous and bureaucratic, but the Russian unpreparedness in this conflict should be a good reminder of the necessity of honest, commander-driven reporting that highlights areas of concern and reports against the most stringent unit requirements.

At the core of readiness reporting is understanding the risk of employing units at a given point in time. In the U.S. Army, each unit reports their readiness through the Monthly Commanders Unit Status Report (CUSR). Readiness reporting is based on the input of four specific measured areas: **personnel** (P), equipment and **supplies** on-hand/available (S), equipment **readiness**/serviceability (R), and unit **training** level proficiency (T). These factors are consolidated into a unit's **core** function and [designed capability rating](#) (C). For example, an Armored Brigade's core function would be its overall readiness to attack and defend against other Armored units when considering PSRT. The calculated C rating is provided to the Joint Force as a summary of how ready a unit is to fight. These inputs are simple, but allow for uniformity across the thousands of Army units that report monthly Active Army, Guard, and Reserve. Furthermore, simple, but precise reporting helps articulate not just how ready a unit may be, but also describes the amount of risk assumed if a unit is employed without being at the highest level of readiness.

**1. In the U.S. Army, the commander at every echelon tells the Army how ready their unit is**, not the other way around. Going back to the Cold War, the Russian system relied on inspections and large maneuvers to [evaluate readiness](#). In short, the Russian Army would give you a score, not seek input from commanders, this system can hide the potential issues that only the lower unit commander knows and tracks. The result is "masked" risk, where a higher unit may seem ready, but problems at the lower level are unseen and untreated. At some echelon, Russian commanders undoubtedly knew there were problems in their formation. However, between multiple levels of corruption, and the drive of more senior

leaders to only portray success, these issues went [unaddressed](#). A commander's input into readiness assessment is critical. Senior leaders in the U.S. Army do not tell a unit what their readiness is - it is the commander of each unit's job to report this assessment.

6:04 a.m. ET, February 20, 2022

## Russia and Belarus troops to continue readiness checks, Belarus defense minister says

From CNN's Nathan Hodge and Fred Pleitgen in Moscow



Russia and Belarus military train during drills in Belarus, on Saturday, Feb. 19. (Alexander Zemlianichenko Jr./AP)

[Before the Invasion of Ukraine, Russian and Belarusian Army officials evaluated unit readiness through large scale maneuvers in nearby Belarus. This type of top-down and scripted evaluation masks the small problems inside units.](#)

Since the [end of World War II](#), U.S. Army Commanders have submitted readiness assessments, both on specific measured areas, which have evolved over the years, and on their unit's overall capability. Inherent to this reporting process is the trust that

Commanders can provide the most accurate assessment of a unit's readiness. This trust and confidence extends throughout military policy, military justice, and into military readiness. The commander is expected to know their unit and understand internal problems. Consequently, it is also each commander's responsibility to try and resolve readiness issues.

This concept seems obvious in traditional combat formations like brigades, which are commanded by a colonel with over 20 years in the military, but *the majority of units that report a CUSR are companies, commanded by a captain with 4-7 years of experience*. The Army is structured in a way that requires many units, especially smaller logistical teams like truck companies and refueling units in the Reserve Component, to be commanded and employed at a lower level. These separate companies are essential for the Army to execute logistical functions in large-scale combat operations. The U.S. reporting system is unique in that these small units, which might be overlooked if you only looked at combat units, receive additional attention to ensure they are ready to fight. For example, Brigade Combat Team readiness is important, but these units make up a very small percentage of the Army's overall reporting units. It is no surprise that the Russian Army is plagued by a lack of logistical capability that these small units in the U.S. Army perform. The U.S. Army Report system offers a platform for these junior leaders, regardless of the size of their unit or its combat function, to express readiness concerns to the highest levels.

**2. Commanders must be comfortable with the truth and report when they need help.** Army Senior leaders are invested in getting units what they need to be at the appropriate level of readiness. Prior to the invasion of Ukraine, Russian leadership was sure of victory, but the perception of their units' readiness was inherently false. The Russian leadership either did not know, or commanders did not want to communicate readiness problems inside their units. As a result of this, the risk of employing unprepared Russian units was not realized until the units had already performed poorly. The trust between higher and lower echelons to solve readiness issues is essential.



**Andrei V Kozyrev**  
@andreivkozyrev



2. Russian military. The Kremlin spent the last 20 years trying to modernize its military. Much of that budget was stolen and spent on mega-yachts in Cyprus. But as a military advisor you cannot report that to the President. So they reported lies to him instead.  
Potemkin military

6:16 PM · Mar 6, 2022 · Twitter Web App

3,025 Retweets   475 Quote Tweets   15.2K Likes



[A tweet from Andrei Kozyrev, The former Minister of Foreign Affairs under Boris Yeltssin](#)

In the U.S. Army system, readiness reporting starts with unit commanders, who have the authority, and responsibility, to highlight the greatest needs of their unit. This parallels concepts that are unique to the American Army. The same service culture that allows a private to “call-out” what went wrong with a commander’s plan during an After Action Review, allows a commander to highlight critical needs to higher echelons.

The value and necessity of this reporting are not only reflected in service culture, but also in the law. Congress, recognizing the uniqueness and centrality of the commander, has mandated monthly reporting to reinforce these very notions. Not every commander realizes this, but upon submission and release by the command, EVERY unit status report is nearly instantaneously visible across the DoD enterprise. The entire basis of CUSR is built upon a commander’s ability to clearly communicate their unit’s needs.

Commanders must understand, communicate, and manage readiness closely. Since 2006, when the Army instituted the program NetUSR, the measured areas (P,S,R, &T) have been fed directly from authoritative systems; prior to this, units input their own data. This

ensured the quality of data and ensured that supporting Army systems were also updated. P, S, and R levels are relatively objective and evaluated through standardized formulas. The T area is still a subjective evaluation, provided by the commander's assessment in a supporting Army system. If P,S, and R are more "science", then evaluating a unit's training proficiency is more an "art." For commanders, each one of the measured areas are important, but in the Army, personnel requires special management from commanders. The Army's most critical weapon system isn't a platform, but the individual people who provide leadership and perform tasks in our formations - that's why it is, and should remain, a core measured area. Articulating what a unit needs allows the Army system, as large as it is, to start solving the problem. When the Army deploys units for emergent situations, like responding to Russian aggression in Ukraine, accurate reporting allows the Army to get units what they need quickly.

**3. You are only as strong as your weakest measured area.** Pictures of the broken-down Russian equipment have flooded social media, showing serious problems in Russian maintenance and training. From pictures of Russian tanks being towed away by Ukrainian tractors, to videos of tires melting apart on highways, there are many facets to the breakdown in Russian Army readiness.



*In a series of [tweets](#), Trent Telenko, a career U.S. Military logistician, analyzes the impact poor maintenance has on Russian Army units.*

The measured areas of U.S. Army readiness (P,S,R,T) offer a common framework to evaluate

readiness, and can provide additional insight with the understanding that these measured areas are often interrelated. Taking the example of the Russian Pantir S-1 Air Defense system mentioned in the Tweet above, whose wheels fell apart on Ukrainian roads, maintenance (R), should have indicated that this vehicle was not ready for combat. Additionally, analysis shows that this type of tire issue results from underuse. If these tires were underused, you can assume that the troops were probably not well-trained on the system (T). There are multiple areas that would have indicated that this vehicle, and presumably its crew, were not ready for combat.

In the U.S. Army system, this maintenance shortcoming would have impacted the overall unit's readiness level. According to [AR 220-1](#), a unit's overall rating cannot exceed the score of the lowest measured area. For example, if a U.S. Army unit has a low (?) equipment readiness level (R), but their personnel, equipment on hand, and training are all high, their overall level would not exceed its poorest rating. This may seem trivial, but it minimizes the chance that key issues will be overlooked because the unit seems healthy. Additionally, because these elements are so closely related, key shortfalls in one area will undoubtedly impact a unit's other levels of readiness. Attempts to overlook serious flaws in readiness are caught, because, as the saying goes, you are only as strong as your weakest link (or in this case, truck tire).

**4. You report against your unit's designed mission.** Although units often perform a variety of missions around the world when deployed, they report against their traditional, core missions that are tied to their organic design. In other words, **U.S. Army units report against how they would perform in a near-peer conflict** with all the equipment they are designed to have. Traditional conflict, or what the Army calls large-scale combat operations, is the most stressful/challenging environment for conventional units. It assumes that there is an enemy who possesses similar capabilities and is willing to fight. For the Russians, who have had successes in Syria and other lower intensity conflicts, Ukraine is proving to be a conflict they were not ready to conduct as a large-scale, conventional conflict. The intent is not to "get an easy A," in unit reporting, but instead, to grade a unit against what it is designed to do.



A now iconic [series of photos](#) show Russian tracked videos being towed away by Ukrainian farmers. The incidents highlight how unready Russian Army units were for conventional, large-scale combat operations.

In the U.S. Army, this has been a point of discussion, especially during the Global War on Terror (GWOT). Some thought it unfair to evaluate units on advising missions in Iraq and Afghanistan against traditional tasks and against the designed equipment table. There was a desire to evaluate units solely based on their likely employment (i.e. advising missions) and not on the traditional tasks they were designed to conduct. As a compromise, the Army allows commanders to report their Assigned mission (A), right before and during their deployment, but key Army leaders had the foresight to still require units to still also report against their core or designed mission (C).

This decision was key, and the right one. The performance of Russian forces in the Russo-Ukrainian war shows the danger of not holding the Army to the standard of large-scale combat operations. This does not mean that there weren't great lessons learned during the Global War on Terror, but the most stressing form of conflict remains traditional, near-peer conflict, and readiness ratings should continue to accurately describe a unit's capabilities against the most stressing form of combat.

## **A Hollow Force**

Some would think poor readiness reporting is a specifically Russian problem and exists only in less professional militaries, but these same problems have routinely impacted the U.S. Army. The U.S. Army has historically never been fully prepared for a major conflict - this was true in the Civil War at Manassas and in World War II at the Battle of Kasserine Pass. Korean War veteran and Former Army Chief of Staff GEN Gordon Sullivan [wrote that Korea](#) “reminds us of the consequences of having an Army that is not ready for the rigors of war.” Again in the 1980’s, GEN Edward Meyer, another former Army Chief of Staff, [self-described the 1980’s military](#) as a “Hollow Army” that had to be rejuvenated. A hollow army is a force that, much like the Russian Army a few weeks ago, looked on the outside like a capable military, but internally had massive problems which would surface if the Army actually faced off against the Soviets. This brutal assessment from Army senior leaders brought massive large-scale efforts to reshape the quality of our Soldiers, modernize the force with key weapons systems, and evaluate the Army in conflict through the new Combat Training Centers. These readiness reporting principles will not ensure that the Army never loses another battle, but they do help articulate the risk the Army assumes when a unit is employed short of its full-strength equipment level, maintenance status, and training.

Readiness reporting is not a perfect process and is continuously being refined, but these principles ensure that the U.S. Army evaluates itself in a way that gives the nation the clearest picture of the Army’s capabilities. Our system places the responsibility of reporting not on an outside entity, but on the unit commanders themselves. The Army needs commanders to report the problems in their units, and trust that the Army will fix those issues. Rules about reporting are strict for a reason. In combat, even a minor shortfall in a measured area can impact an entire operation. The Army has spent two decades fighting insurgencies, but must be prepared to fight a traditional conflict. These principles are the best way to preserve the foundations of reporting and ensure that the U.S. Army does not fall into the same false confidence that is so ruinously coming to light as the Russians fight in Ukraine.

*The views presented are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of DoD or the U.S. Army.*

*LTC Aaron Childers is an infantry officer currently serving as the Deputy Division Chief for Readiness, Army Staff, G-3/5/7. His previous assignments include the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, and the Joint Staff. He is slated for Battalion Command in Summer 2022 in the 10th Mountain Division and is a member of the Military Writers Guild. Connect with him on twitter [@childersaw](#) or via [Linkedin](#).*

## Share this:

- [Email](#)
- [Tweet](#)
- 
- [Print](#)
- [WhatsApp](#)