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Defense Primer: Personnel Tempo (PERSTEMPO)

As a result of the nation’s extended involvement in contingency operations around the globe, some U.S. servicemembers have experienced prolonged, recurrent, and stressful deployments. In addition, preparation for deployments (e.g., training, exercises, temporary duty assignments) can incur extended working hours or frequent travel away from home station. The pace of operations for individuals is commonly referred to as *personnel tempo* (PERSTEMPO) and can affect quality of life, work satisfaction, and overall morale for members and their families.

Congress oversees the Department of Defense’s (DOD’s) PERSTEMPO management, policies and programs. In addition, congressional actions to authorize force size (i.e., end-strength) can affect the number of personnel available for deployment. Appropriated funds for military pay and benefits (including leave and morale programs) may compensate troops for time spent away.

Background and Definitions

During the mid-1990s, though the nation was not engaged in major conflict, a combination of force drawdowns and increased deployments in support of peacetime missions (e.g., peacekeeping and humanitarian operations) put stress on servicemembers, particularly those in high-deploying specialty units. A 1996 Government Accountability Office report (GAO/NSIAD-96-105) found that DOD did not have consistent goals or policies for managing personnel tempo (see **Table 2**).

Recognizing a need to more accurately measure the pace of operations on military personnel, in the National Defense Authorization Act for 2000 (FY2000 NDAA, P.L. 106-65), Congress first added a statutory definitions for *deployment* and *high-deployment* thresholds, and authorized additional compensation for exceeding thresholds (10 U.S.C. §991 and 37 U.S.C. §436). This law also required the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to develop standardized terminology and policies for PERSTEMPO and operating tempo (OPTEMPO), and to track and report on these categories (10 U.S.C. §136(d)).

10 U.S.C. §991, as amended, includes a waiver authority for “national security” reasons. Shortly after the September 11, 2001, attacks, a Deputy Secretary of Defense memorandum invoked this waiver authority to indefinitely suspend high-deployment thresholds. As operations in Afghanistan and Iraq intensified, many raised concerns that individuals within certain military occupational specialties were experiencing both lengthy and frequent deployments. While the PERSTEMPO measures captured deployment duration, they did not adequately capture the down time, or *dwelt time*, servicemembers had between deployments.

In 2007, DOD established *deploy-to-dwell* (D2D) and *mobilization-to-dwell* (M2D) planning objectives for the active and reserve components, respectively. In the FY2012 NDAA (P.L. 112-81), Congress established a statutory definition of *dwelt time* and provided the authority for the SECDEF to modify this definition with congressional notification. DOD has periodically issued policy updates to change this definition and to provide separate definitions for the active and reserve components (see **Table 2** for a timeline of selected events).

Definitions take into account a broad range of activities that keep servicemembers away from home (**Table 1**). Activities not included as deployment events, include, for example, military duties extending beyond normal working hours but conducted at the member’s home duty station, also known as the *permanent duty station*.

Table 1. Statutory Definitions and Thresholds

Term	Definition
PERSTEMPO	The amount of time <i>servicemembers</i> are engaged in their official duties at a location or under circumstances that make it infeasible for a member to spend off-duty time in the housing in which the member resides.
OPTEMPO	The rate at which <i>units</i> are involved in all military activities, including contingency operations, exercises, and training deployments.
Deployed or in a deployment*	Any day on which, pursuant to orders, the member is performing service in a training exercise or operation at a location or under circumstances that make it impossible or infeasible for the member to spend off-duty time in the housing in which the member resides when on garrison duty at the member’s permanent duty station or homeport.
High deployment threshold	One-year: 220 days deployed out of the previous 365 days. Two-year: 400 days deployed out of the previous 730.
Dwelt time*	The time a regular member of the armed forces or unit spends at the permanent duty station or home port after returning from deployment.

Sources: 10 U.S.C. §991 and 10 U.S.C. §136(d).

Notes: Contingency operations are as defined in 10 U.S.C. §101(a)(13)(B). *DOD policy (DODI 1336.07, Table 1) further defines PERSTEMPO events. DOD has also defined *dwelt time* differently in policy documents for certain time periods or purposes.

Table 2. Timeline of Selected PERSTEMPO Actions 1995-2023

Year	Selected Actions
1995	Congress calls for improved DOD management of PERSTEMPO. (P.L. 104-106 §565)
1999	Congress requires enhanced management of deployed personnel through the establishment of PERSTEMPO definitions, policies, thresholds, data collection, and compensation. (P.L. 106-65 §§586 & 923)
2001	On October 8, 2001, DOD invokes national security waiver and indefinitely suspends high-deployment per diem thresholds in response to 9/11 attacks.
2003	Congress amends high-deployment thresholds, authorizes a high-deployment monthly allowance in place of per diem (P.L. 108-136 §541) and increases minimum Family Separation Allowance. (P.L. 108-11 §1316)
2007	DOD establishes D2D and M2D planning objectives. (SECDEF memorandum, "Utilization of the Total Force", Jan. 19, 2007)
2011	Congress establishes <i>dwell</i> definition, and repeals annual PERSTEMPO reporting requirements, but requires PERSTEMPO data collection and recordkeeping. (P.L. 112-81 §522)
2013	DOD issues policy restating D2D goals and thresholds. ("Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel & Readiness) Deployment-to-Dwell, Mobilization-to-Dwell Policy Revision", Nov. 1, 2013)
2019	Congress requires the Secretary concerned establish specific and measurable thresholds to monitor PERSTEMPO for affected members when waivers are revoked. (P.L. 116-92 §507)
2021	DOD issues updated policy lengthening the D2D goals and thresholds. (DTM-21-005, Aug. 16, 2021, with update on Oct. 13, 2022)

Source: CRS derived from multiple sources.

High-PERSTEMPO Compensation

Congress has sought to incentivize better DOD management of PERSTEMPO and to compensate affected troops by authorizing certain allowances. The FY2000 NDAA (P.L. 106-65), as amended, authorized a high-deployment monthly allowance of up to \$1,000 (at the discretion of the Secretary concerned) for each month that an active component servicemember is deployed for (1) 191 or more consecutive days, or (2) 401 or more days out of the preceding 730 days. Reserve component members are eligible for the allowance when (1) under a call to active duty for more than 30 days that is the second (or later) such call for the same contingency operation; or (2) for a period of more than 30 days, if such period begins within one year after the date on which the member was released from previous service of more than 30 days on active duty (37 U.S.C. §436).

Deployed servicemembers may also receive other compensation while deployed (e.g., hostile fire and imminent danger, sea duty pay). These special and incentive pays largely depend on the geographic location of the operation and the nature of servicemember’s assignment.

Beginning with the Uniformed Services Pay Act of 1963 (P.L. 88-132), Congress has authorized a Family Separation Allowance (FSA) to compensate for added expenses that result from family separation. This law entitles uniformed servicemembers who are separated from their families due to certain duty assignments for a period of 30 days or more to an FSA not less than \$250 per month and not more than \$400 per month (37 U.S.C. §427).

PERSTEMPO Tracking and Reporting

The Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) maintains a centralized database of all PERSTEMPO events. The Secretaries of the Military Departments and the Commandant of the Coast Guard are responsible for reporting PERSTEMPO events to DMDC. A 2018 GAO study (GAO-18-253) found DOD did not have complete or reliable PERSTEMPO data, and has recommended better quality control processes. GAO has documented that DOD implemented these recommendations by issuing revised policy guidance.

High-PERSTEMPO Impacts

In general, research has found associations between deployment frequency and duration, and decreased military spouse well-being (e.g., depression and anxiety), increased child problematic behaviors, and negative effects on parent-child and member-spouse relationships. On the other hand, while many members express dissatisfaction with increased deployments, there is not a preponderance of evidence to suggest that has a significant effect on continuation/retention rates. There is some evidence that deployments increase military family savings, potentially reflecting their eligibility for additional compensation.

<p>Relevant Statutes</p> <p>10 U.S.C. §§136 & 991</p> <p>37 U.S.C. §§427 & 436</p> <p>Other Resources</p> <p>Department of Defense Instructions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DODI 1336.07, Management of Personnel Tempo • DODI 1235.12, Accessing the Reserve Components <p>Reports</p> <p>RAND Corporation, <i>Assessment of Deployment- and Mobilization-to-Dwell Policies for Active and Reserve Component Forces</i>, July 20, 2023</p> <p>GAO, <i>Military Readiness: Clear Policy and Reliable Data Would Help DOD Better Manage Service Members’ Time Away from Home</i>, GAO-18-253, April 25, 2018</p>

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