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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 servicemembers have experienced prolonged, frequent, and/or stressful deployments. In addition, preparation for deployments (e.g., training, exercises, temporary duty assignments) can lead to 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 (GAO) report found that DOD did not have consistent goals or policies for managing personnel tempo.

Recognizing a need to more accurately measure the pace of operations on military personnel, in 1999, Congress first added a statutory definition for *deployment*, established *high-deployment* thresholds (then defined as 182 days or more out of the preceding 365 days), and required Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) approval to exceed those thresholds. The law, known as the FY2000 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA; P.L. 106-65), also required the Under Secretary of Defense (USD) for Personnel and Readiness (P&R) to develop standardized terminology and policies for operating tempo for units (OPTEMPO) and personnel (PERSTEMPO) and required DOD to track and report on these categories.

Shortly after the September 11, 2001, attacks, the SECDEF suspended statutory high-deployment thresholds under the waiver authority in law. However, under department policy (DOD Instruction 1336.5), the Services continued to track deployment days. 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 *dwelling time*, members had between deployments. In 2007, DOD established *deploy-to-dwell* planning objectives, and in the

FY2012 (NDAA; P.L. 112-81), Congress established a statutory definition of *dwelling time* (see **Table 2** for a timeline of selected events).

Current 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 *permanent duty station*.

Table 1. Statutory Definitions and Thresholds

Term	Definition
PERSTEMPO	The amount of time servicemembers 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 units 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.
Current high deployment thresholds*	One-year: 220 days deployed out of the previous 365 days. Two-year: 400 days deployed out of the previous 730.
Dwelling 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, or the amount of time a reservist remains at the member’s permanent duty station after completing a deployment of 30 days or more in length

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). *High-deployment thresholds have been waived since 2001 under the SECDEF authority in 10 U.S.C. §991(d). According to a November 1, 2013, USD (P&R) policy memo, involuntary extension of a deployment beyond 365 days requires SECDEF approval.

High-PERSTEMPO Compensation

Congress has sought to incentivize better DOD management of PERSTEMPO and to compensate affected troops in part by authorizing a high-tempo allowance. The FY2000 NDAA first authorized a high-deployment per diem of \$100 for members, starting on day 251 of deployment out of the preceding 365 days. In the FY2004 NDAA, Congress replaced the per diem with a monthly allowance of up to \$1,000 (at the discretion of the Secretary concerned) for each month that a member of the active component is deployed and has been deployed

- for 191 or more consecutive days, or
- out of the preceding 730 days, for a total of 401 or more days.

Reserve component members become 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 1 year after the date on which the member was released from previous service on active duty for a period of more than 30 days (37 U.S.C. §436(a)).

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

Beginning with the Uniformed Services Pay Act of 1963, Congress has authorized a Family Separation Allowance (FSA) to compensate members with dependents for added expenses that result from family separation. In 2003, in response to the growing number of deployments in support of contingency operations, Congress increased FSA from \$100 per month to \$250 for members separated from their families due to certain duty assignments for a period of 30 days or more (37 U.S.C. §427(a)).

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 found DOD does not have complete or reliable PERSTEMPO data, and has recommended better quality control processes, particularly for the Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps.

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, the evidence does not 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.

Table 2. Timeline of Selected PERSTEMPO Actions 1995-2020

Year	Action
1995	Congress calls for improved DOD management of PERSTEMPO. (P.L. 104-106 §565)
1996	GAO finds that DOD does not have consistent policies and goals for measuring and managing PERSTEMPO. (GAO/NSAID-96-105, 1996)
1999	Congress defines <i>deployment</i> and <i>high-deployment</i> threshold, requires DOD to develop standard definitions and policies for OPTEMPO and PERSTEMPO, and adds a high-deployment per diem allowance. (P.L. 106-65 §§586 & 923)
2001	DOD invokes national security waiver and suspends high-deployment per diem, thresholds, and deployment tracking requirements after 9/11 attacks.
2003	Congress amends high-deployment thresholds, authorizes a high-deployment <i>monthly</i> allowance in place of diem (P.L. 108-136 §541), and authorizes increased Family Separation Allowance. (P.L. 108-11 §1316).
2005	DOD requires SECDEF to approval deployment extensions beyond 365 days. (USD (P&R) memorandum, March 30, 2005)
2007	DOD first establishes dwell planning objectives. (SECDEF memorandum, May, 3, 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 memorandum restating dwell goals and thresholds. (USD (P&R) memorandum, November 1, 2013)
2018	GAO finds that DOD does not have complete and reliable data to monitor PERSTEMPO (GAO-18-253, April 2018).
2019	Congress requires when waivers are invoked, the Secretary concerned must establish specific and measurable thresholds to monitor PERSTEMPO for affected members (P.L. 116-92 §507).

Source: CRS from multiple sources.

<p>Relevant Statute</p> <p>10 U.S.C. §§991 & 136; 37 U.S.C. §§427 & §436.</p>
<p>Other Resources</p> <p>Department of Defense Instructions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DODI 1335.07, Reporting of Personnel Tempo (PERSTEMPO) Events • DODI 1235.12, Accessing the Reserve Components

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