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The Ethical Dilemma of Sustaining the Force

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ABSTRACT

The United States faces the ethical dilemma of “hiring” the all-volunteer force. Certainly, the Soldiers currently serving are not in solely for the money but what about the new hires. The term mercenary has negative connotations, which no one wants to be associated with, Soldiers, political personnel or the Nation. Mercenaries by definition are “working or acting merely for money and other rewards”. Although money may not be the sole incentive for serving for many, where would the accession and retention strength of the Army be without the monies offered?

The Ethical Dilemma of Sustaining the Force

The Army defines ethics as “standards by which one should act based on values”. Our values and beliefs essentially act as guidelines and motivate our actions. Army ethics combine these as part of our decision making process but it seems they do not apply in our efforts to entice America to become new Soldiers. The DOD holds military members accountable for their conduct and ethics. Violations of these ethical standards include punitive actions, which can result in prosecution under UCMJ. However, in the effort to sustain the force, the US places these provisions of ethics and values in jeopardy. The politicians have no idea how to procure new recruits or sustain current service members other than finding the right price at the right time. The ethical standards Service members must meet do not apply to the policy makers attempting to entice America or the Soldiers that are serving.

Current Trends

Few if any enlist today without some type of financial compensation to include very large bonuses. The Army and the Nation do not want mercenaries or “guns for hire”; the fine line between hiring the nation’s service and enlisting an all-volunteer force is fading fast. The Army faces a nation of a shrinking recruitable force based on unemployment, an ongoing war, obesity and decreased patriotism, with little or no answer of what to do to sustain the force, the option is simple, lots of money.

There may not be any other organization providing the values or ethics the service does, or holds the “employees” accountable to them. Without these values and ethics, where does the Patriotism of America come from? We are the only organization instilling patriotic values and beliefs of serving someone or something other than yourself.

Without Patriotic Americans and no other answer, we pay up front for the loyalty and we teach America we will pay for their service strategically as needed.

Past Trends

It would be unethical for any Soldier serving to accept incentive monies from any other source for service yet the US offers money for shipping to combat, enlisting, and re-enlisting. There is nothing wrong with incentives in any profession, but those professions probably do not fight wars. In 1991 during Desert Storm even, the appearance of accepting financial gratuities, offered by grateful foreigners, met with severe punitive actions. The US did not want the Army to appear as mercenaries by accepting money. Today we offer Soldiers extra money for agreeing to enlist and ship, with the first assignment in a combat zone. Americas decreased patriotism, and shrinking pool of recruitable Soldiers places the US in an ethical dilemma of how to entice new recruits. What will it cost for young men and women to serve and for the retention of the ones who are? One way to gauge American the decreased patriotism and our effort to purchase Soldiers for defense of our nation is to compare pay and incentives. In 1987, twenty years ago, the basic pay for an E-1 was \$608.40 while the additional incentive of a bonus was \$3500.00. Today the basic pay is 1458.98 with additional incentives of \$70.000 for new Soldiers to enlist. By comparison over the last twenty years, our basic pay has risen 139.8% and our “cash payment up front has risen 1900%. Twenty years ago, the need to entice American’s with a check to serve the county was almost non-existent.

The Absence of Ethics

Most would say brave men and women that place their lives on the line are priceless. How do you value ones willingness to serve their country especially in time of war? If it is truly priceless then there would be no appropriation committees, “most who have not volunteered to

serve themselves” determining the right price. The Politicians are willing to approve as little as possible but whatever it takes to sustain the force. The other option they face is political suicide “initiating some sort of compulsory service.” The fear of reprisal from their districts and possible loss of their jobs outweighs the cost of paying for service.

With the options of political suicide or monetary incentives, the Politicians choose money, while they continue to pressure our leaders as to how to “Recruit” our “all-volunteer force cheaper.” Of course, this in itself is an oxymoron if it was an all-volunteer force, we would have no need to offer additional monies for services rendered.

Conversations do take place discussing exactly how much it will take to get today’s youth to sign up and go to war. The intense belief in our values and ethics instilled within the service is all but gone in American youth today from the new “what’s in it for me generation”. Therefore, as propensity decreases, economic and educational opportunities increase there will be strategic meetings to determine what it will take during any given situation.

Paying for Patriotism

Consequently, we will continue advertising and paying for Super Bowl commercials, buying propaganda and publicity items, spending millions in research and development to target the enlistment population, continue to persuade the influencers spending untold millions in an attempt to bolster the Army image or entice enlistments. Despite the fact, few if any would say the Army’s image, trustworthiness, morality, intentions and character is not among the elite in any organization. In fact, just a few years ago the public voted the American Soldier as persons of the year. The Army’s image as one of the best organizations and institutions to work for is beyond reproach for the Nation, yet the need for image enhancement and enticement continues to rise. This need is not from an image problem it is from America’s lack of patriotism and a lack of

desire that no other organization instills into today's youth resulting in purchasing new recruits. These millions and millions of dollars publicized as "promoting the Army's image" borders mercenary hires.

The Army tracks and touts the reason for joining as other than money, if this is the case what is the purpose of the initial procurement incentives? The life of a Soldier is challenging physically, mentally, and inherently dangerous. Few other jobs carry the responsibilities and the dangers. The few organizations that have faintly similar characteristics consider these dangers and add this in their ordinary salary systems commensurate with the inherent dangers of their daily duties. The difference is none of these other agencies must act decisively as the long arm of America's democracy in time of war.

In conclusion, without some type of compulsory service, America's desire and Patriotism will continue to decrease without the benefit of an organization that promotes these values. The US will continue to incentivize Army pay in lieu of sustained amounts, increasing, decreasing, and adjusting the amounts to fit the current needs, as if the selfless-service of a Soldier's daily duties is not worth the same when there is lack of conflict. Instead of teaching America ethics and values and instilling patriotism, we teach free enterprise to those that would sign up. Approximately one percent of America serves in the military and stays for more than the first term; these are the truly ethical men and women of America. As long as the truly ethically one percent of America continues to serve placing their lives on the line maintaining the force at the going rate, the Politicians of the United States will continue to set aside their ethics and values and strategically continue to find the right price at the right time, at the expense of the one percent.

