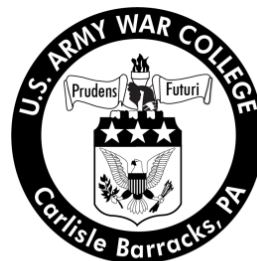


A National Security Issue: Challenges to the All-Volunteer Force

by

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United States Army War College
Class of 2012

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

A NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUE: CHALLENGES TO THE ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE

by

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ABSTRACT

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The All-Volunteer Force enacted in 1973 is heralded as one of the defining strengths of the military forces of the United States of America. A series of seemingly unrelated trends within American culture may place the viability of the All-Volunteer Force, a critical aspect of our military, in jeopardy. Lowered graduation rates, physical fitness deficiencies, an increase of health concerns, and rising rates of felonious misconduct are combining factors that drastically reduce the availability of manpower to meet our force requirements. A lowered propensity for service to nation combined with a shrinking pool of qualified applicants will drive decision makers to choose from three equally non-viable courses of action: lower the required standards for enlistment, divert exorbitant amounts of money to entice enlistment, or abandon the all-volunteer force in favor of mandatory service. This paper will outline the current trends effecting enlistment efforts, examine the pros and cons of available options if steps are not taken to reverse these trends, and provide recommendations on ways to mitigate these trends to ensure the future solvency of our current enlistment process.

A NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUE: CHALLENGES TO THE ALL VOLUNTEER FORCE

The revitalized military that emerged from the Vietnam conflict is under siege from the very society that created it. Without significant investment in reversing trends within society, our nation's military and political leaders will be forced to choose from the lesser of many evils in determining the future of our military.

The intent of this research paper is to examine current challenges in recruiting high-quality individuals into the Armed Forces of the United States and forecast the impact of these challenges on the overall available pool of both able and willing volunteers. Historic background of the creation of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) will be briefly provided as well as the ongoing and fervent commitment to the continuation of the AVF by the nation's recent leaders. As each challenge is described, the associated methods of countering the challenge will be provided; including the negative impacts that those solutions generated to the overall problem. Finally, recommendations for long-term solutions will be provided that may ensure the viability of what has been described by then Secretary of Defense Robert Gates as "the most-professional, the best-educated, the most-capable force this country has ever sent into battle."¹

Background

Today's All-Volunteer Force was created during one of the most contentious times in our military's history. Opposition to the Vietnam War was at all-time high levels. Shifting draft deferment criteria exposed individuals that were previously exempt to mandatory service. Commanders were left with individuals that were pressed into service in support of an already unpopular conflict. Bernard Rostker summarizes the

status of the draft system by stating “[i]n the final account, when the draft ceased to be a means of universal service, it lost its legitimacy and was doomed.”²

Critics of the All-Volunteer Force have been strident in their opposition even before adoption of the concept in 1973 and the opposition continues thirty-nine years later. As recent as 2003, reinstating conscription continues to be considered as evident by the introduction of the Universal National Service Act of 2003 (known as HR163) in the House of Representatives. HR163 proposed:

Requiring that all young persons in the United States, including women, perform a period of military service or a period of civilian service in furtherance of the national defense and homeland security, and for other purposes.³

Although HR163 was not approved and was seen primarily as a political maneuver to highlight disagreement over President Bush’s policies in Iraq it does provide evidence that a return to a conscription-based military remains a possibility.⁴

Arguments against the AVF primarily focused on economic and societal concerns. Those opposed to the AVF argued that establishing and maintaining a volunteer force would be unfeasible when compared to the cost of a conscript force. Another economic-based argument proposed that the military would be unable to attract qualified individuals without lowering standards or offering exorbitant bonuses.

A critical argument against the AVF centers on the issue of maintaining diversity. In his book, *The Case Against A Volunteer Army*, Mr. Harry Marmion clearly describes this argument from his viewpoint:

In point of fact, an all-volunteer army would liberate the middle class from the legal necessity of serving, but commit others to compulsory service by economic circumstance. Is this not, in effect, forcing the poor and the less fortunate into the armed forces? Is this truly democratic?⁵

After more than thirty years since its implementation the All-Volunteer Force has encountered challenges in all of the areas mentioned above. A 2009 RAND Corporation study of the effectiveness of enlistment-related advertising shows the rising costs of recruiting for our All-Volunteer Force. The study shows that the Department of Defense spent a combined \$3.2 billion during fiscal year 2007 in support of recruiting efforts. That amount represents an increase of 9% annually since 1999 and includes a 400% increase in enlistment bonuses and a 150% increase in advertising expenses.⁶

Despite President Truman's Executive Order 9981 issued in 1948 directing the "equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons"⁷ the Armed Forces continue to try and match the racial, ethnic, and gender makeup of the population. A 2011 report from the Military Leadership Diversity Commission summarizes the current situation as "the Armed Forces have not yet succeeded in developing a continuing stream of leaders who are as diverse as the Nation they serve."⁸ Later portions of this paper will illustrate how the traditional problems of an AVF such as rising recruiting costs and diversity management shown above are combining with emerging challenges and place the viability of the All-Volunteer Force in question.

Current Status of the All-Volunteer Force

Viability of the All-Volunteer Force can be measured using three criteria: 1) achievement of annual accessions requirements, 2) recruit quality assessments, and 3) population representation. The Department of Defense (DoD) provides detailed records and analysis in its annual report to the Senate Armed Services Committee that can be used in conjunction with the three criteria above. For the 30-year period of 1980 to 2009, DoD met or exceeded recruiting requirements 90% of the time.⁹ In only three

years during that 30-year period was the Department of Defense unable to meet its accession requirements (1998, 1999, and 2005).¹⁰

The reasons for recruiting mission failures during those three years are critical to understanding challenges for future recruiting efforts. The shortfalls during 1998 and 1999 are largely attributed to an under-resourced recruiting system following nearly a decade of force-level drawdown after Operation Desert Storm, a strong national economy with low unemployment rates, and expanded education opportunities for the military's primary recruiting group of 17-24 year-old males.¹¹ The shortfall in 2005 is attributed to a lowered propensity of parents to recommend military service to their children in light of ongoing combat operations in Iraq.¹²

Recruit quality is primarily measured by two indicators: the number of high school degree graduates (HSDG) and the percentage of individuals taken from the various Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) categories. In 2009 (the latest set of complete data available), 96% of individuals accessed into the U.S. armed services were high school graduates.¹³ Historically, the percentage of graduates accessed remained above 90% since 1983 and reached the lowest recorded level of 60% in 1974.¹⁴ AFQT Categories IA, IIA, and IIIA (often depicted as CAT I-III A) represent those individuals who have scored at or above the 50th percentile and are considered the core group of individuals from which to recruit. Individuals that performed below the 50% percentile are heavily restricted or prevented completely from enlisting. Current DoD enlistment standards require that at least 90% of recruits are high school graduates and that at least 60% of those recruited score in the 50th percentile.¹⁵ In 2009, 73% of recruits were drawn from the CAT I-III A group which ranks well above the 69.5% average for the last

decade.¹⁶ In terms of sheer numbers of recruits and quality of those recruits, Fiscal Year 2009 has been described as “...in what perhaps was the best recruiting year since the inception of the all-volunteer force, with all services, both active and reserve components, exceeding their recruiting goals in both numbers and quality.”¹⁷

Each of the five services (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard) conducts independent recruiting efforts and therefore has dissimilar results in achieving recruiting diversity goals. When examining the five services across each of the racial/ethnic categories (White, Black, Asian, Hispanic, Other) representational parity was achieved only at a 20% effectiveness level. The remaining racial/ethnic categories were either over- or under-represented within the services.¹⁸ Additionally, the services attained only 20% effectiveness in reaching parity with the two fastest growing racial/ethnic groups within the United States - Hispanic (21% growth) and Asian (20% growth).¹⁹ Despite these shortfalls in reaching the goal of ethnic and racial diversity in its recruiting efforts, the Department of Defense is considered to be a “living testimony to progress in the areas of military equal opportunity policies and related recruiting and management policies.”²⁰

Success at a Cost

Efforts to build and maintain the All-Volunteer Force have largely been successful since the beginning of the program in 1973. As shown above, the Department of Defense has met or exceeded its quantity and quality goals 90% of the time since 1973 and continues to work towards achieving its goal of racial and ethnic parity with the American population demographics. This success is being achieved through a steadily rising cost of recruiting willing, high-quality individuals. Figure 1 depicts the rise in per-recruit costs from a period of 2001-2009.²¹

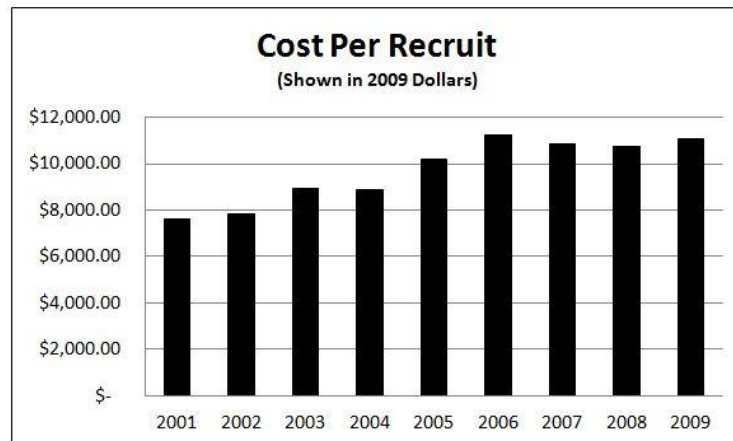


Figure 1: Cost Per Recruit

Analysis of this 9-year time period in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York City shows an increase of 43% in the total cost of recruiting an individual into the armed services. If extrapolated to the year 2018, this cost now rises to an estimated \$15,875 per recruit or a 152% increase since 2001.

Achieving success within any given recruiting year is a function of applying manpower and resources towards the recruiting effort. Not surprisingly, there is a direct correlation between the level of resources dedicated to recruiting and the number and quality of those individuals recruited. After failing to achieve recruiting goals in 2005, the Department of Defense reacted by applying the single largest 2-year resource increase of \$479.3 million between the years of 2001 and 2009.²² It is important to note that the total number of recruits required during that timeframe remained relatively steady and the increased resources were required to reverse the negative trends encountered in 2005. Figure 2 provides a graphical representation of the rising costs of just one of the tools available to entice enlistment.²³ By providing enlistment bonuses, services are able to specifically target higher quality individuals and tailor the terms of their enlistment to meet each service's specific needs at that time.

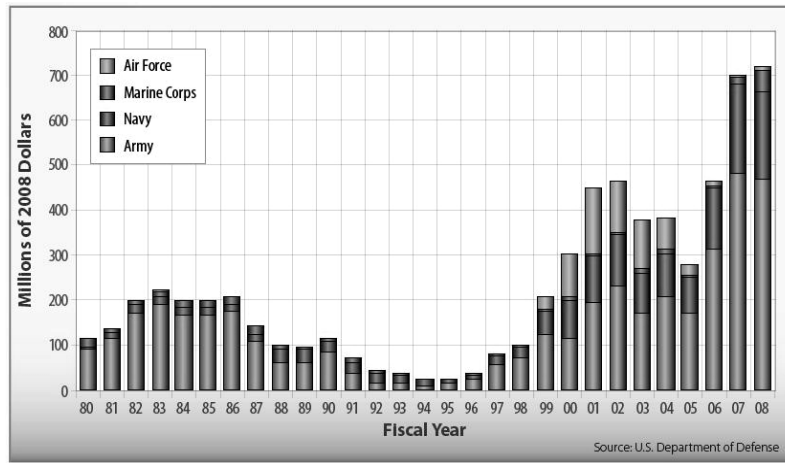


Figure 2: Enlistment Bonus Expenditures

The sharp increase in enlistment bonus expenditures from 2000 to 2002 and 2006 to 2008 in Figure 2 highlight the greatly increased expenditures necessary to counteract external influences such as the propensity to serve in the military or low unemployment rates in the civilian sector. Decisions to drastically reduce resources in Fiscal Year 2004 were driven by two consecutive successful recruiting years in 2002 and 2003. A reduced national unemployment rate (6.3% in 2003 to 5% in 2005), an increase in the number of recruits needed in 2004 and 2005, and animosity towards the war in Iraq caused the Army to fail in its recruiting mission in 2005. United States Army Accessions Command research estimates that an additional \$2.3 billion was required between 2005 and 2008 to achieve Army enlistment requirements after failing to meet them in 2005.²⁴ Although a steady level of resourcing has been shown to be the optimal solution to consistently achieving recruiting success, past performance indicates that the pattern of reducing recruiting resources following successful periods will be repeated.

Projected force reductions due to budget constraints and continuing levels of high unemployment forecasted through Fiscal Year 2013 will aid in recruiting efforts and will likely lead to a drastic reduction in resources being dedicated to recruiting. Although inefficient, an “all or nothing” approach to providing recruiting resources is understandable in a fiscally constrained environment. In the near future, emerging trends in the accessions marketplace will require an exponentially higher level of resourcing in order to overcome these negative trends.

Understanding the Recruiting Marketplace

Successfully recruiting an individual into military service requires an understanding of the underlying “system-of-systems” involved in the overall accessions process. The basic economic theory of supply and demand applies within the human resource acquisition process just as it does in the civilian marketplace. The relationship between the supply (the pool of qualified candidates) and the demand (military service, civilian employment, or continuing education) determines the cost of recruiting and retaining individuals in any organization. A shrinking pool of qualified candidates and increasing competition for those candidates will raise the cost of enticing those to military service. Failure to recognize shifts in the human resource environment increases the costs of recruitment and raises the risk of not meeting manning goals due to the inability to compete in the manpower marketplace. The recognition of the fact that success in recruiting for the All-Volunteer Force is subject to the same rules of marketing in the civilian sector is critical in determining future recruiting resources and methods.

Target Audience for Recruiting

The primary focus of recruiting efforts for military service is the 17-24 year-old demographic group due to the higher manpower requirements and turnover rates in entry level positions of military service. Although each service retains the ability to further refine this target group, the majority of all services' annual accessions requirements historically fall within these norms. Of the estimated 313 million U.S. residents, the 17-24 year-old group represents approximately 10% (~33 million) of the total population.²⁵ It is this select group of individuals that must be informed, approached, convinced, and screened in order to achieve the annual manpower requirements of an all-volunteer force. Without the requirement of mandatory military service, these individuals are faced with a myriad of options to include entering the civilian workforce or continuing their education. It is the transition from a conscription force to an all-volunteer force that placed the military recruiting effort in direct competition with educational institutions and civilian employers. Ultimately, the choice to enter military service is an individual decision that is shaped through cultural, societal, economic, and environmental influences. In order to succeed in a competitive market, the military's recruiting effort must be cognizant of these factors and adapt its processes to account for them. Without a clear understanding of the constantly changing recruiting environment, the United States accessions policy leaders will be at a significant disadvantage in this highly competitive market.

Emerging Environmental Trends – Demand

Analysis of the Department of Defense's annual accessions requirements from 1980 to 2009 reveals that the number of recruits required each year has remained relatively stable despite significant shifts in the total size of the armed forces (Figure 3).²⁶ Routine departures of first time volunteers after their initial term of service requires that the services historically replenish on average 16% of their total manpower each year.²⁷ During periods of force reductions, services strive to retain their most qualified individuals and similarly recruit those from the most qualified candidates. This trend of selecting from this highly competitive group offsets any benefits that might have been gained by having a reduced total recruiting requirement during a drawdown period. Essentially, a reduced requirement for recruits is translated to seeking higher qualified individuals which leads to increased competition resulting in higher overall recruiting costs.

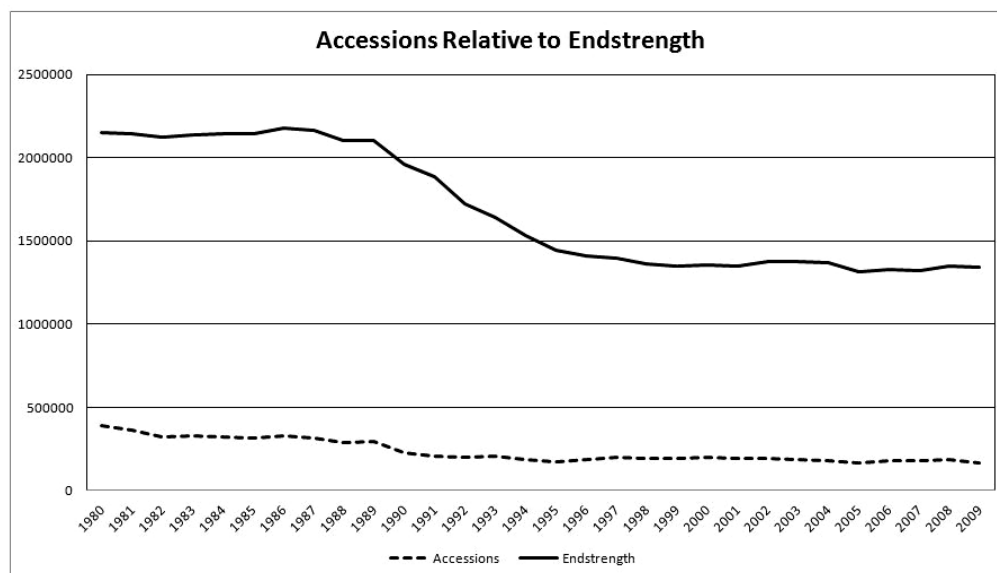


Figure 3: Accessions Relative to Endstrength

Emerging trends in employment statistics indicate that the military will face increasing pressure in competing for qualified individuals. The Bureau of Labor Statistics provides this assessment of the projected employment environment from 2008 to 2018:

In general, occupations in a category with some postsecondary education are expected to experience higher rates of growth than those in an on-the-job training category. Occupations in the associate degree category are projected to grow the fastest, at about 19 percent. In addition, occupations in the master's and first professional degree categories are anticipated to grow by about 18 percent each, and occupations in the bachelor's and doctoral degree categories are expected to grow by about 17 percent each.²⁸

As employment opportunities in positions requiring higher levels of education grow the number of high-school graduates seeking to continue their education will also continue to rise. A Joint Advertising Market Research and Studies (JAMRS) publication shows that post-secondary education enrollment levels for 17-24 year old individuals rose from 35.6% to 41.3% between the years 1999 and 2009 and that 85.5% hope to pursue a post-secondary education.²⁹ The increasing trend towards pursuing a post-secondary education along with a JAMRS study showing that 63% of high-school seniors believe they will be performing professional work by the age of 30 indicates that military recruiting will face increased pressure from competing demands on the available pool of qualified candidates.³⁰

Emerging Environmental Trends - Supply

The average annual recruiting requirement for all services between the years of 2001 to 2009 was 182,145 which represents only .5% of the estimated number from within the target audience of 33 million individuals. With such a limited demand on the target audience it could be assumed that competing for these individuals would require

few resource and success could be reached with little effort. Unfortunately, less than 1 in 4 (23.4%) of individuals from the target audience currently qualify for military service.³¹ The reasons for disqualification fall into three primary categories:

- Medical condition / misconduct / dependent children – 41.6%
- Lack of education credentials / low ASVAB scores – 20.2%
- Overweight / exceeds body-fat standards – 11.4%³²

After applying current eligibility requirements, the pool of candidates is reduced to 7.7 million individuals from the original population of 33 million. Although the reduction from 33 to 7.7 million is significant, it should be noted that marketing resources and a significant portion of recruiter time and effort is dedicated to the total marketplace since disqualification is not determined until after contact with a potential candidate has occurred and the screening process is initiated. Advertising efforts are, and should be, targeted to a wide audience and not just potential candidates in order to provide information and influence those associated with a candidate such as parents and peers. Equally important is the fact that the target audience is a dynamic group in which individuals can enter and depart the target audience as they age and as their personal situation develops over time. Because of this fact, advertising and recruiting efforts must be persistent in order to maintain the target audience's awareness levels of the opportunities within military service.

Ineligibility and Waivers

Eligibility for military service in the United States is determined by United States law, Department of Defense policy, and the policies of the individual armed services. The purpose of the eligibility criteria is to counter-balance the two competing goals of

providing the maximum number of individuals the opportunity to serve in their nation's defense and to promote the effectiveness of the armed forces. Generally, eligibility criteria consist of: age, citizenship, education, aptitude, physical fitness, dependency status, and moral character.³³ The ability to waive certain aspects of the eligibility criteria rests primarily with the secretaries of each of the services and in keeping with the goal of allowing those who wish to serve the opportunity, the Department of Defense provides this guidance:

Judgement as to an applicant's qualifications is reached by virtue of a "whole person" review in which all aspects of an applicant's qualifications are examined. It is possible, in some cases, that waiver consideration may be warranted.³⁴

Although presented as a positive, inclusionary rather than exclusionary policy, the use of waivers by the services has come under significant scrutiny in the past, especially when the services are challenged to meet enlistment goals:

'The data is crystal clear; our armed forces are under incredible strain, and the only way that they can fill their recruiting quotas is by lowering their standards,' said Representative Martin T. Meehan, Democrat of Massachusetts and chairman of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight.³⁵

The evidence that the current eligibility criteria produce a more effective force is clear in that those individuals with a high school diploma have a lower first term attrition rate (23%) versus non-graduates (41%) and those with higher aptitude scores perform at a higher rate throughout the length of their service.³⁶ The performance data on those individuals that received a waiver in order to enter military service is inconclusive and mixed. Those that received a waiver had slightly higher rates of desertion, misconduct, and courts-martial appearances but also tended to reenlist more than their peers, were promoted faster, and had lower rates of dismissal for personality disorders and

unsatisfactory performance.³⁷ Modification of eligibility criteria and the increased use of waivers become problematic when it is used to achieve recruiting goals during challenging recruiting periods. By resorting to these methods the underlying causes of the recruiting problem become “masked” because the target recruiting population has been artificially increased.

Future Challenges

Three societal trends will have a significant impact on the future all-volunteer force: high school dropout rates, rising level of obesity, and a lowered propensity towards military service. Although high-school dropout rates across the United States have dropped from 15.6% in 1980 to an overall level of 9.4% in 2009, significant disparity between ethnic and racial groups continue to exist.³⁸ Hispanic students fail to graduate high school at a rate of 20.8% versus the 9.1% for white students and 11.6% for black students.³⁹ To compound this problem, Hispanics comprise the fastest growing population category within the United States. In stark marketing terms, a recruiter’s fastest growing market segment is becoming increasingly ineligible for consideration as a prospect while the most eligible group continues to decline in relative population. The combination of higher dropout rates and increasing population proportions will significantly hamper the achievement of diversity goals. Recruiters will be forced to seek out qualified individuals from the smaller, non-minority groups to achieve recruiting requirements. The overall net effect will be an all-volunteer force that is less representative of the people that it serves.

It is currently estimated that 3.8 million individuals from the target recruiting group are considered ineligible for military service due to exceeding the body-fat standards.⁴⁰ Body fat standards are maintained separately by each service and vary according to the

unique mission requirements and service culture. Generally, body-fat allowances range from a low of 18% (Men – United States Marine Corps) to a high of 33% (Women – United States Navy).⁴¹ The necessity for weight and body-fat measures is established in Department of Defense Directive 1308.1 by stating:

Maintaining desirable body composition is an integral part of physical fitness, general health, and military appearance. Service members whose duties require muscular and cardio-respiratory endurance may be hampered in performing their duties...⁴²

The issue of rising obesity rates among youth populations has been widely studied and highly publicized as a potential threat to national security. Two documents published by the group “Mission Readiness: Military Leaders for Kids” entitled “Too Fat to Fight” and “Unfit to Fight” present the ongoing challenges caused by childhood obesity and the impact on military recruiting.⁴³ Figure 4 depicts the drastic expansion from 2 to 43 states reporting a 40% or higher level of obese 18-24 year-old individuals from the period of 1997 to 2009.⁴⁴ United States Army Accession Command research shows that in a one year time period (2010 to 2011) an estimated 100,000 additional potential recruits were ineligible for military service due to excessive body-fat.⁴⁵ This one year rise in the number of ineligible individuals represents approximately 56% of the total fiscal year 2009 recruiting mission for all services.

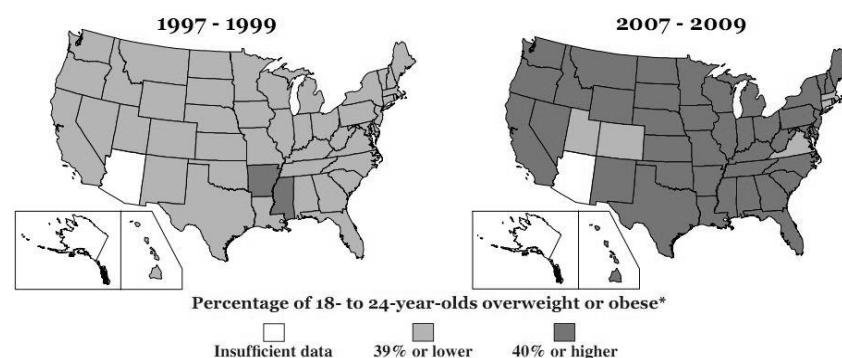


Figure 4: Percentage of 18-24 Year-Olds Overweight or Obese

Propensity, or the willingness, of an individual to volunteer for military service is critical to the success of an all-volunteer force. The process of deciding to enter into military service is a combination of an objective cost-benefit analysis and a subjective, and often multi-faceted, internal assessment made by the individual. Military pay rates, bonuses, and tuition assistance allowances are examples of the factors that an individual may use in comparing the benefits of military service to other opportunities available to them such as civilian employment or pursuing a post-secondary education. The subjective assessment is much more difficult to determine primarily because of the large number of factors involved and due to the personal, internal nature of an individual's predilection towards military service. Cultural, racial, and ethnic norms, input from peers and parents, and popular culture and media all shape an individual's perception of the military. Regardless of the outcome of an individual's cost-benefit analysis, an individual's desire to volunteer for military service ultimately determines whether that person will choose to enlist.

When measuring propensity, individuals are generally placed in one of three categories: will join, would consider joining, and definitely won't join. Recent studies from the Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies (JAMRS) group show that the number of individuals who have never considered military service rose from 30% in 1990 to 42% in 2011.⁴⁶ This data represents a long-term change in opinions and is irrespective of short-term fluctuations that can be attributed to significant events in the recruiting environment. Examples of these events are the terrorist attacks in 2001 which prompted an approximated 5% increase in propensity and the United States' prolonged

involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan which drove an approximated 10% decrease.⁴⁷ In both examples, the trend returned to its original pattern within a one-year time span.

Critics of the decision to abandon conscription argued that an all-volunteer force would cause isolation and alienation of the military from American society and “erode civilian respect for the military and hence dilute its quality.”⁴⁸ Evidence of this separation is highlighted in other JAMRS study data that shows the number of respondents whose father served in the military declined from 37% in 1995 to 16% in 2011.⁴⁹ The overall drop in the veteran population is anticipated to decline an additional 40% from 2010 (22.7 million veterans) to 2035 (14.3 million veterans).⁵⁰ Veterans provide an additional source of information to potential recruits and their parents by providing first-hand knowledge of military service and a disinterested, third-party point of view that may be considered unbiased by a candidate or his surrounding support group.

The importance of propensity will increase as the ratio of willing and qualified individuals continues to decrease due to the factors presented previously. Recruiters will be required to dedicate more time and resources in convincing those individuals that fall into the categories of “would consider” or “definitely won’t” join rather than focusing solely on the relatively easier “will join” population.

Future Recruiting Scenario – Year 2017

An analysis by the U.S. Army Accessions Command of the Army’s recruiting mission failures during fiscal years 1998-1999 and 2004-2005 show economic and organizational trends that can be used to predict similar mission failure scenarios for the future. In both time periods, the national unemployment rates dropped below 6% for at least two one-year time periods proceeding the recruiting mission failure year.⁵¹ This relatively low unemployment rate translates to greater employment opportunities for

individuals in the target recruiting group and increased competition for recruiters. During both mission failure time periods the median family income for individuals 17-25 year-olds was significant higher than the pay afforded to an entry-level Soldier of similar age (36% higher in 2000 and 48% higher in 2005).⁵² An increasing disparity between civilian pay and military pay either through an improving economy or stable military pay rates affects an individual's cost-benefit analysis as they consider military service as an option.

The years proceeding both recruiting mission-failure time periods included significant reduction in recruiter support funding of 13.4% in 1997 and 12.9% in 2003.⁵³ Additionally, overall Army recruiter strength dropped by 3.2% in 1999 and 17.3% in 2004.⁵⁴ These reductions in recruiter population and support translate to lower capacity for recruiters to engage within the community and generate prospect leads.

From the 1998-1999 and 2004-2005 examples, two general cause and effect statements can be made:

- An improving economy, stagnant military pay rates and benefits relative to civilian pay, or both, lowers the value-proposition presented to a potential recruit.
- A reduction in recruiting resources of both support dollars and the number of recruiters causes atrophy of the overall recruiting effort in terms of lead generation, community interaction, and propensity.

By applying these two statements to currently available information it is possible to project that in 2017 military recruiting will likely repeat the two most recent mission failures of 1998-1999 and 2004-2005. Unemployment figures from the Congressional

Budget Office currently indicate an 8.3% unemployment rate for 2012 and forecast a 5.6% and lower rate for the years of 2012 and beyond.⁵⁵ In addition to military pay, retirement benefits and the military's health care system comprise a significant portion of the value-proposition presented to possible recruits. Recent statements by the Secretary of Defense indicate that all aspects of military benefits are being considered as part of deficit reduction measures:

The fiscal reality facing us means that we also have to look at the growth in personnel costs, which are a major driver of budget growth and are, simply put, on an unsustainable course.. This will be an area of extreme challenge, because my highest priority is obviously to maintain the vitality of our all-volunteer force...⁵⁶

Similar to the force reductions encountered in the post Operation Desert Storm time period, both the Army and Marine Corps will see personnel reductions during the 2013 to 2017 time frame.⁵⁷ It is likely that recruiting resources will be likewise reduced due to an overall decrease in the recruiting requirements during the drawdown period. Additionally, because of the relative ease that the recruiting mission is achieved due to the lower requirements, the changes in the recruiting environment will go unnoticed. Lowered levels of propensity and higher disqualification rates will become less important as recruiters are able to fill lower mission requirements from the most willing and highest qualified individuals. In 2017, the result will be a target population that is less propensed towards and less qualified for military service, and a military pay and benefits value-proposition that is unable to compete in a strong civilian employment marketplace.

Recommendations

The challenges of education, diversity, obesity, and competition with entities outside of the military presented in this work are not new and were foreshadowed by

critics of the all-volunteer concept. Today's methods of reacting to these challenges attempt to deny their existence and simply persevere until the problem has passed. Evidence has been shown indicating that the conditions have been set to re-create mission failure in the near future. Recovering from that failure will be more costly; costly not only in terms of funding but in the overall quality of the force as standards are changed to overcome manning shortfalls.

The following represent short and long term recommendations to avoid the next and future recruiting challenges:

Short Term

- Maintain current accessions funding and staffing at, or near, current levels. Today's recruiter force requires significant time to select, train, and integrate into their market area. Advertising campaigns require time to resonate with their target audience and the effects of an advertising campaign often lag behind its introduction. By remaining committed to the recruiting effort, despite short-term reduced requirements, the inflated costs of recovering from short-sighted reductions can be avoided.
- Focus on under-represented groups and geographic areas during the drawdown period. Decreased recruiting pressure during the anticipated drawdown period provides an opportunity to assume risk in certain geographic areas and demographic groups by shifting resources to those areas that have been traditionally poor recruiting segments.
- Reflect the new reality of decreased benefits to candidates in marketing and advertising messages as soon as possible. The benefits of health

care, life insurance, and retirement benefits have been espoused to potential recruits since 1973. Reversing these expectations will require time and if not handled carefully could cause long-term damage to the future propensity of individuals to volunteer.

Long Term

- Re-evaluate aptitude and physical requirements for all services and military occupational specialties. Current standards have changed little since their inception at the beginning of the All-Volunteer Force. As the operational environment and mission requirements evolve the skills, knowledge, and attributes of the members of the military should change accordingly. High technological skills, critical thinking ability, and cultural astuteness are attributes that are highly valued in today's operational environment but are not currently considered in existing accessions procedures. Recent pilot programs such as the Assessment of Recruit Motivation and Strength (ARMS) indicate that current weight and body-fat standards are less than effective as a screening method. During this test program, 8,000 recruits who did not meet body-fat standards were allowed to enlist after displaying indicators of increased levels of motivation and perseverance. After 24 months of service, the ARMS test group continued to perform at or near the level of their peers and only four of the original 8,000 were separated from service under the weight control program.⁵⁸ The reclassification of certain occupational specialties may provide expanded opportunities for a large segment of the American population

that is not currently qualified but do possess needed skills and attributes for the future operating environment.

- Work as part of a larger, “Whole of Nation” solution for combating the challenges of obesity, rising dropout rates, single-parenthood, and misconduct. These problem areas not only affect the military but have a larger detrimental effect on the efficacy of our nation as a whole.

Programs such as the recent Project PASS (Partnership for All Students’ Success) provide an example of partnership opportunities between the military, local and state government, national civilian organizations, and local communities. Project PASS built upon the success of the Junior ROTC program by incorporating a similar curriculum into the middle-school-level in addition to the high-school level. Additionally, Project PASS assembled multiple government and civic sponsored programs into a comprehensive school-day, after-school, and summer program.⁵⁹ The Department of Defense and individual services’ involvement in programs such as Project PASS represent an indirect and long-term approach to solving existential threats to the All-Volunteer Force.

Conclusion

In a recently published document entitled “Chairman’s Strategic Direction to the Joint Force” General Dempsey stated that “The All-Volunteer Joint Force is our Nation’s decisive advantage.”⁶⁰ General Dempsey, the senior uniformed leader within the Department of Defense, entered service in 1974 and has no first-hand knowledge of leading a force comprised solely of conscripts.⁶¹ As time progresses the mission of manning the armed forces with willing and capable volunteers will become more difficult

due to changes in American society and an ever-changing operational environment. Once again, conscription will appear to be the answer to those challenges by dictating service to the qualified regardless of their desire to serve. Only by recognizing the changing nature of our society and the operational environment will the necessary changes be made to ensure the viability of the All-Volunteer Force.

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