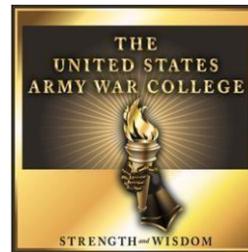


# Bridging the Gap in Strategic Leader Development

by

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United States Army War College  
Class of 2015

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**REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE**

Form Approved--OMB No. 0704-0188

The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 01-04-2015		<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT		<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b>	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> Bridging the Gap in Strategic Leader Development				<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Lieutenant Colonel Nelson G. Kraft United States Army				<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Colonel Jeffrey W. French Department of Command, Leadership, and Management				<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Avenue, Carlisle, PA 17013				<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>	
				<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b>	
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Distribution A: Approved for Public Release. Distribution is Unlimited.					
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> Word Count: 7487					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> The 2013 Army Leader Development Strategy (ALDS), coupled with recommendations from the 2013 Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) Leader Development Task Force Final Report, provide an excellent road map to develop leaders for the future. However, there is a challenge in the development of strategic leaders that neither the ALDS, nor the CSA's task force take into account; the time it will take to develop a strategic leader before the ALDS and CSA's task force's recommendations are fully implemented. In essence, a gap of time exists where strategic leaders remain underdeveloped. Bridging this gap is crucial for the Army in order to have strategic leaders in the near term. Additionally, a distinction between senior and strategic leaders and their development is needed to bridge this gap and improve leader development for the Army leadership that will face the challenges of the twenty-first century. This paper offers a strategy to fill the near-term gap in the Army's development plan for strategic leaders serving at the ranks of Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel and recommends a way ahead to improve the development of officers in the same ranks that have not been earmarked for service as strategic leaders.					
<b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Organizational, Institutional, Self-Development, Professional Military Education					
<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 36	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
<b>a. REPORT</b> UU	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b> UU	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b> UU			<b>19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (w/ area code)</b>



USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**Bridging the Gap in Strategic Leader Development**

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## **Abstract**

Title: Bridging the Gap in Strategic Leader Development

Report Date: 01 April 2015

Page Count: 36

Word Count: 7487

Key Terms: Organizational, Institutional, Self-Development, Professional Military Education

Classification: Unclassified

The 2013 Army Leader Development Strategy (ALDS), coupled with recommendations from the 2013 Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) Leader Development Task Force Final Report, provide an excellent road map to develop leaders for the future. However, there is a challenge in the development of strategic leaders that neither the ALDS, nor the CSA's task force take into account; the time it will take to develop a strategic leader before the ALDS and CSA's task force's recommendations are fully implemented. In essence, a gap of time exists where strategic leaders remain underdeveloped. Bridging this gap is crucial for the Army in order to have strategic leaders in the near term. Additionally, a distinction between senior and strategic leaders and their development is needed to bridge this gap and improve leader development for the Army leadership that will face the challenges of the twenty-first century. This paper offers a strategy to fill the near-term gap in the Army's development plan for strategic leaders serving at the ranks of Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel and recommends a way ahead to improve the development of officers in the same ranks that have not been earmarked for service as strategic leaders.



## **Bridging the Gap in Strategic Leader Development**

The United States (U.S.) Army is in dire need of exceptional leadership to deal with another period of post-war turbulence. After fourteen years of war in Afghanistan, extraordinary challenges threaten the Army institutionally, operationally, and as a profession. Institutionally, some Army civilian jobs are being cut, requiring military personnel to fill those requirements, and spend less time training troops. Operationally, some Army units are not being funded for training, leaving them unprepared for future missions. As a profession, pay and benefits are being studied at the highest political levels for future cuts. These examples, coupled with massive cuts to the Army's end strength are just a few of the well-known challenges that threaten the Army's future and highlight the need for exceptional leadership.

The exceptional leadership needed now and well into the twenty-first century must come from the Army's strategic and senior leaders. Only they are in a position to truly make a difference both up to the Army's civilian leadership and down to the leaders and troops at the tactical levels through thoughtful communication. Providing strategic thinking and advice to the Army's military and civilian leadership, these strategic leaders have the opportunity to provide candid and uncensored feedback on the impact their decisions are having on the force. Not necessarily to change minds; after all, constitutionally elected congressional leaders determine the size of the Army, the pay and benefits it should receive, and when it should be employed. Strategic leaders owe the military and civilian leadership and congressional lawmakers, the whole truth and nothing but the truth when they are asked to provide their professional military opinion. Lastly, from a strategic leader standpoint, as the Army Vision: Force 2025 White Paper states, ". . . Although the demand for forces in Afghanistan continues to decrease, the

requirement for strategic landpower capable of worldwide deployment endures.”<sup>1</sup> That strategic landpower can only be successfully led by fully developed strategic leaders.

Critical to the success or failure of strategic and senior leaders is how well they are developed and prepared to meet these challenges. Leader development has been and always will be a vital contributing element to the U.S. Army’s immediate effectiveness and long-term health. History also shows the importance of leader development. Some military writers claim that leader development is what enabled a relatively small and untrained Army to grow and be trained to lead the civilized world to victory against the Nazis and Japanese in World War II (WWII).<sup>2</sup> The Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA), General Ray Odierno, understands this very well and also understands that the past fourteen years of war have taken its toll on the Army’s leader development efforts. Against this backdrop, General Odierno has made leader development his top priority for the Army, as highlighted by the 2013 Army Leader Development Strategy (ALDS), which masterfully charts a course for the Army’s leader development efforts. Further illustrating the CSA’s commitment to bringing leader development back on course, he commissioned a task force to evaluate the Army’s leader development plan and its implementation across the force. Based on these evaluations, the task force made recommendations to the CSA on making additions, deletions and refinements to improve the Army’s leader development efforts.

The 2013 ALDS, coupled with recommendations from the 2013 Chief of Staff of the Army Leader Development Task Force Final Report (CSA’s task force), provide an excellent road map to develop leaders for the future. However, there is a challenge in the development of strategic leaders that neither the ALDS, nor the CSA’s task force

take into account; the time it will take to develop a strategic leader once the ALDS and CSA's task force's recommendations are fully implemented. In essence, a gap of time will exist where strategic leaders are underdeveloped. Filling this gap will be crucial for the Army in order to have strategic leaders for the near future. Additionally, a distinction and separation between senior and strategic leaders and their development is needed to not only assist in bridging this gap, but also in improving the Army's strategic leader development to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This study will examine the nature and characteristics of the short-term gap in the Army's plan to develop strategic leaders, its implications, and finally offer recommended changes to strategic leader development (to include a delineation of strategic versus senior leadership). Collectively, these efforts will assist in bridging the gap and producing better prepared, more effective strategic leaders for the Army.

Before one can determine how to bridge the gap, one must fully understand its nature. The gap in strategic leader development means different things to different audiences. Understanding and considering these differences is important to any effort to bridge the gap. To a U.S. lawmaker or the civilian Army leadership, a gap in strategic leader development would likely focus on two and three-star Generals; while a two or three-star General would consider the gap to be with Colonels and one-star Generals. This common idea that strategic leader development automatically pertains to General Officer (GO) development is best illustrated by the start of GO strategic leader development courses in 2001.<sup>3</sup> Although each of these audiences would be correct in where they believe the gap in strategic leader development exists, for the purpose of

this paper, this gap is the time period in an officer's career between the rank of Captain (CPT) and Colonel (COL).

A typical Army officer's career timeline provides the best explanation of this gap. This period of time, or this gap, begins with Captain (CPT) Brown who just received his first command Officer Evaluation Report (OER) and ends when he is a COL serving on a joint staff in one of the many joint headquarters in the U.S. Armed Forces. According to the ALDS, during this period of time between CPT and COL, strategic leader development begins.

Strategic leader development requires assessment and identification of strategic level potential at various points across a career, focused opportunities for strategic leader development, mentorship and apprenticeship, and preparation specific to strategic responsibilities or positions.<sup>4</sup>

It is at this point, that future strategic leaders must be identified as young company grade officers; and this is the moment at which the gap often times begins. If the Brigade or Battalion Commander has not read the ALDS or been mentored by the Division's leadership to keep a keen eye open toward identifying strategic leader potential, the chances are very high that a CPT with tremendous strategic leader potential could be overlooked. Then, the responsibility to identify young officers with strategic leader potential falls on an officer with possibly one or two years more time in service at Human Resources Command (HRC), where jobs that need to be filled often take priority over finding jobs that better meet the long term needs of the Army, or the potential of an incredibly gifted junior officer.

Once CPT Brown is identified as having strategic leader potential, the Army must afford him opportunities to develop strategic competence. These opportunities include advanced education, training, and most importantly, assignments and/or experiences

that require strategic thought and expose him to strategic level responsibilities.<sup>5</sup> During these opportunities, the officer's strategic leader potential is confirmed or denied. If confirmed, and after his Key Developmental assignment as a Major (MAJ), the officer will likely be given more opportunities to broaden and develop for eventual service as a strategic leader.

One tool the CSA's task force recommended to ensure officers with strategic leader potential have the opportunity for these strategically broadening and developmental experiences and assignments was the

Leader Assignment and Development Panel (LADP). The LADP is intended to bring about culture change in the valuing of strategic leader development . . . consisting of a group of colonels or senior civilians . . . that would determine which assignment would best prepare an identified officer for strategic leadership.<sup>6</sup>

Once an officer is identified as having strategic leader potential, the ALDS with the recommendations from CSA's task force, provide a sound azimuth for the future Army strategic leader to follow. At this point I would contend, the officer and Army must make a decision on what type of strategic leader Brown is best suited to be.

If Brown has leadership potential at the strategic level, he must command and be the best among his peers at the battalion and brigade levels in order to become a general officer. If Brown does not have strategic command potential, but does possess potential to be a strategic leader on a staff, he will have an option to leave the Operations career field and pursue a more specialized functional career field. In recent years, the functional career fields of Foreign Area Officer and Strategic Planner have fared very well as strategic staff officers. Regardless of the direction Brown goes, the Army has accounted for his success as a strategic leader and developed an applicable route. This professional route has "revamped programs of instruction for pre-command

courses, grown billets for strategic planner Ph.D. programs and assigned three and four-star mentors for U.S. Army War College fellows.”<sup>7</sup>

In the opinion of many, to include the author of this paper, the CSA and his team have implemented a strategic leader development strategy that has the potential to develop some of the best strategic leaders the Army has ever seen. Unfortunately, very few have read the strategy and for those that have, very few have truly done their part to implement it. If the 2013 ALDS was well known and rigorously implemented across the Army, it would take roughly 16 years from the date of its publishing to produce the strategic leader it sets out to develop.

Using simple math, CPT Brown completes his first year of company/battery or troop command at his sixth of year of service, where he receives his first command OER and professional decision-makers, whether it be his battalion/brigade commander or HRC assignment officer, determine that he has strategic leader potential. CPT Brown completes command at seven years in service, and is selected for a three year strategic broadening assignment. At his tenth or eleventh year of service, he is selected for promotion to MAJ, spends a year at the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) to complete his Intermediate Level Education, followed by a year at the School of Advanced Military Studies and then off to a division to serve as a planner, followed by Battalion and Brigade-S3, and then back to another strategic broadening assignment. Upon completion of that assignment, Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Brown takes command of a battalion or squadron at roughly eighteen years of service, does another broadening job, and attends the Senior Service College (SSC), and most likely, if he is already earmarked as a strategic leader, he will be slated for a fellowship in lieu of a

SSC. Upon completion of his fellowship, he is at twenty two years of service and taking command of a brigade. In the end, a gap of sixteen to twenty years exists.

Can the Army afford to have a twenty year gap where three-quarters of its future strategic leaders did not go through the prescribed strategic leader development model?

Can enough leaders be created through traditional assignments that

Can effectively temper sound tactical judgment with strategic and institutional awareness in a [Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Multinational] JIIM environment, informed by critical thinking skills and the ability to develop innovative solutions applicable to difficult or unfamiliar situations? <sup>8</sup>

A closer look at the actual numbers of officers affected might provide answers to these questions.

A current snapshot of active duty COLs, excluding specialty branches, reveals a population of 2719 officers. Of that population, 1817 are SSC graduates, 246 are currently enrolled in SSC, and 62 were selected for Distance Learning SSC or have approved deferments. The remainder of the population, 594 COLs, were either not selected for SSC, or were selected and did not graduate.<sup>9</sup> Using only the 246 COLs currently enrolled in SSC, one year after the 2013 ALDS was published, as estimated earlier, perhaps a quarter of the population was afforded strategic broadening type opportunities, as laid out in the ALDS; that is 62 COLs. The remainder is 184 COLs who quite possibly only received “strategic leader development” as a student at a SSC. One hundred eighty-four COLs compounded by twenty years equates to 3680 COLs. On its own, that is a rather large population of minimally developed COLs for strategic leader assignments; which does not include the population of COLs that did not even receive SSC strategic leader development.

So to restate the question, can the Army afford to wait twenty years until the ALDS produces the strategic leaders it needs to lead the Army through the today's post-war turbulence and tomorrow's challenges? Of course, the answer is no. However, implementing anything in the Army inside of a twenty year period is extremely challenging; some might even say impossible. Like anything else in life, big challenges can only be solved by engaging smaller parts of the challenge, a little bit at a time. The first step in bridging this twenty year gap is to break down the affected COLs into functionally relevant and manageable populations.

A strategic leader is typically defined by what they should be able to do or the skills that they should possess. The ALDS proposes a little of both when it states that, "Officers at the strategic level lead and inspire change, are high level thinkers, accomplished warfighters, and geopolitical experts."<sup>10</sup> Although this definition is simple, but also purposefully broad, the CSA's task force saw much utility in expanding it to include specific skills. The skills identified are not new; in fact, General Odierno's task force was revisiting skills identified in 2001 by the U.S. Army War College (USAWC), at the direction of then CSA General Eric Shinseki. These skills, "Required for a post-September 11<sup>th</sup> environment . . . included: personal identity as a strategic leader; mental agility, cross-cultural savvy; interpersonal maturity; world-class warrior; and professional astuteness."<sup>11</sup> Current students at the USAWC would likely agree with the aforementioned definition, but would likely offer an increased emphasis on strategic thinking. The former USAWC Commandant and current Provost would almost certainly agree with this call for increased emphasis on strategic thinking. In an article the two wrote last year on *Strengthening PME at the Senior Level*, they stated on more than

one account that the strategic leaders developed at the USAWC will be valued most for their ability to critically think at the highest levels.<sup>12</sup> In addition to discussing these military points for the benefit of developing Army strategic leaders, much can also be learned from strategic leader development in the civilian or business sector.

In his 2013 book, *The Pursuit of Sustainable Leadership: Becoming a Successful Strategic Leader through Principles, Perspectives, and Professional Development*, David Rainey provides splendid insights on strategic leadership in civilian businesses. Although many of the skills or characteristics Rainey proposes for strategic leaders are inherent for all leaders, especially in terms of the forthcoming discussion on senior leaders, he makes three key points that the Army should seriously consider: “being a strategic leader of an organization doesn’t automatically mean that the person engages in strategic leadership; strategic leadership involves orchestrating change and achieving success; and strategic leaders are facilitators in establishing strategic direction.”<sup>13</sup> While there are many “documented” definitions for and descriptions of a strategic leader, the same cannot be said for a senior leader. However, there are plenty of informal definitions to start a dialogue on the subject.

The definition of a senior leader in the U.S. Army depends on who is asked. If you ask a Command Sergeant Major or a LTC/COL that have not attended a SSC, they would probably respond that senior leaders are the generals, 1- through 4-star. On the other hand, LTC/COL that is attending or has attended a SSC, would likely say that they (LTC and above) are the senior leaders of the Army. When this question was posed to the Director of the Basic Strategic Art Program in the Center for Strategic Leadership and Development at the USAWC, he responded that “a senior leader is anybody that’s

an O-6 (the grade for the rank of COL) or above since SLDO (acronym for the Senior Leader Development Office) manages all O-6s and above.”<sup>14</sup> Even though this is a logical answer, it may not be enough to convince all that senior leaders are only COLs and above.

For the purpose of the argument of this paper, a senior leader is a LTC and COL. To be more specific, a senior leader is a LTC and COL that is unlikely to serve in a strategic position. This LTC and COL population of senior leaders includes those that were not selected to attend a SSC. It also includes some LTCs and COLs that attend and graduate SSCs, and have been deemed by human resource officers they are not in need of strategic assignments. To put it bluntly, the LTC and/or COL was not selected to command a type of organization that typically leads to promotion to Brigadier General (BG); therefore, in most circumstances, these officers are not given the opportunity to serve in strategic positions. There are certainly exceptions to this argument, but for many, this is the reality. While some may accept these justifications, many will need further convincing, especially when it comes to categorizing LTCs as senior leaders.

The first reason LTCs should be considered senior leaders is the SSC argument. If both LTCs and COLs are considered, selected and attend SSCs, and COLs are automatically considered senior leaders, how can a LTC not be a senior leader? It is simple, there is no difference between the two, and therefore, their categorization should be the same. The second reason LTCs should be considered senior leaders is the refinement argument. In order to bridge the twenty year gap in developing strategic leaders, the population to be developed needs to be refined. There is not enough time or resources available to develop all LTCs to be strategic leaders, especially when most

will not serve in strategic leader positions. The third and final argument links back to the previous reason. Just because a certain population of LTCs will never serve in a strategic position, does not mean that they no longer need development. The Army has a moral and professional obligation to continue to develop all members of its profession. This argument also applies to COLs that will never serve in a strategic position. The Army needs strategic leaders to think strategically and do strategic things. The Army also needs senior leaders to maintain their focus at the operational and tactical levels, and in doing so, continue their development so that the troopers at those levels are getting nothing but the best leadership possible.

In making the recommendation to categorize LTCs and COLs as either strategic or senior leaders, their differences and similarities will be examined. In doing so, the relevant requirements for leader development change will become evident. Some historical examples clearly illustrate the difference between the strategic and senior leader.

Former Secretary of State and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell is a prime example. Although not completely void of “muddy boots” assignments, it does not take a long examination of Powell’s biography to realize that he was being specifically groomed for assignments as a strategic leader. “He was denied the opportunity to do things that would have prepared him better for the military side of soldiering. On the other hand it prepared him well for the role as integrator of strategic issues and political issues as a result of having seen it all at the very highest level.”<sup>15</sup> For those naysayers that believe Powell’s lack of experience below the strategic level degraded his performance, former Secretary of State and CSA George C. Marshall

would disagree. After serving countless years at the tactical level and finding himself in charge of the U.S. war efforts in WWII, Marshall stated that he would have to put his “training in rapping-out orders and making snap decisions” behind him and learn the skill of philosophy and artfulness.<sup>16</sup> Summarizing this first difference, strategic leaders are given multiple opportunities during a career to see firsthand, what it means to be a strategic leader. On the other end, senior leaders are given opportunities that are still important, but not strategic. Their assignment and broadening opportunities are more for development at the operational and tactical levels. Closely linked to these differences in assignment opportunities is the manner in which strategic and senior leaders are developed.

Before the CSA’s 2013 ALDS, strategic leaders were primarily developed in three ways. First, as previously discussed, these officers were given assignments at the strategic level. This was development by watching others, what to do and what not to do. Second, these future strategic leaders were given opportunities for advanced schooling. Aside from instructors at the United States Military Academy and officers that choose night school during a post company command assignment or while attending the Army’s CGSC, “Only those officers identified in the top 5 to 10% of their year group at the CPT level, are typically afforded the opportunity to attend advanced civil schooling.”<sup>17</sup> Lastly, these future strategic leaders were sent somewhere other than the USAWC for their SSC. There are always exceptions to these arguments, but in reviewing the resumes of today’s strategic leaders in the Army, most either attended the Naval War College or a Fellowship program. Senior leader development differs significantly.

As opposed to the future strategic leader assignments in Washington or 3 and 4 star headquarters, future senior leaders are given assignment opportunities that are focused on developing an exceptional leader at the tactical level. Examples include instructor billets, Combat Training Center observer/controllers, and assignment officers at HRC. Future senior leaders are typically only afforded the opportunity for advanced schooling if they pay for it themselves and pursue it after duty hours. Lastly, they are often slated to attend the USAWC for SSC. Just as the leader development between strategic and senior leaders differs dramatically, so does their focus and impacts.

Strategic leadership is exerted when the decisions and actions of leaders have strategic implications for their organization. It might also be described in this way: Strategic leadership is broad in scope; the impact of strategic leadership is felt over long periods of time; strategic leadership often involves significant organizational change.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, strategic leaders think critically, consider politically, and act diplomatically. Not to say that a senior leader could not think, consider and act in the same ways, but their focus and impacts are directed and felt much differently. While strategic leaders focus up and out, senior leaders focus more down and in. Where strategic leader impacts are felt the across the entire enterprise over a long period of time, the impacts of senior leaders are typically felt inside the organization and over a shorter duration of time.

Whereas the discussion of these differences could go on endlessly, the similarities between strategic and senior leaders are more limited. There are two overarching and substantial similarities between strategic and senior leaders. First, both require successful development and performance at the tactical level. Second, both types of leaders require a significant commitment to the profession, which includes serving beyond the minimum twenty year requirement for retirement.

In order to earn an assignment as a strategic or senior leader, an officer must excel in tactical level positions. Typically, excelling in a tactical level position requires solid leader development. Leader development for the tactical level begins at an officer's commissioning source and continues at various professional military education stops, such as the Basic Officer Leader Course and the Captains Career Course. In addition to this institutional development, officers also receive development in their operational assignments, which often also includes some self-development.

The level of excellence required to be deemed a potential future strategic leader gradually increases with time, rank and position. Using the model of an Infantry officer, a platoon leader and company executive officer, both Lieutenant positions, require an understanding of doctrine at the company and battalion level, and the ability to accomplish tasks. The stakes increase when an officer is promoted to CPT, where he must rank at least in the upper fiftieth percentile in his company command and subsequent assignments as a CPT in order to have an opportunity for selection to attend intermediate level education. At the rank of MAJ, the requirement for displayed excellence is even more pressing. Ranking in the top of twenty-fifth percentile, with single digit enumeration on evaluation reports appears to be the minimum requirement to have a chance for selection to command at the battalion level. As an example, if there are seventeen MAJs in a brigade, only those rated by their senior rater as in the top four of seventeen really have a legitimate chance for selection to command a battalion. Service as a battalion commander is the minimum position requirement for service as a strategic and senior leader.

Additionally, commitment to the Army profession is an absolute requirement to serve as strategic and senior leaders. Strategic and senior leader positions embody a requirement for selfless service, a constant effort to care for those in their organizations, and a sense of duty towards mission accomplishment. In this day and age, it would be virtually impossible for an officer to serve in a strategic or senior leader position without this commitment; supervisors and subordinates would not stand for it and would quickly call for their removal. Last, just by the nature of service obligations and the availability of strategic and senior leader positions, these positions typically do not become available for an officer until their twentieth year of service and beyond, another similarity for both strategic and senior leaders.

By keeping the twenty year gap in strategic leader development in mind, and the belief that a separation between strategic and senior leader development would aid in bridging that gap, the differences and similarities of these two categories of leaders naturally drive some relevant requirements for change. There are basically three requirements for change; each will be briefly discussed.

The first requirement is that strategic leader development must be the primary focus. In proposing the separation or delineation of strategic and senior leader development, an inclination to equally improve both could arise. Although both are in need of improvement, strategic leader development is of greater need and importance for two reasons. First, most improvements in strategic leader development remain largely deferred in an officer's career. Second, based on the smaller number of strategic leaders in the Army, the consequences of their failed development could possibly be far greater.

The second requirement is that strategic leader development changes must occur throughout an officer's tenure at the tactical level, both institutionally and operationally. The primary period where the gap exists is between junior CPT and senior LTC, during the heart of an officer's tours at the tactical level. Additionally, since an officer must succeed at that level in order to have an opportunity to become a strategic leader, changes would be more easily enforceable.

The final requirement is that there must be individual and institutional accountability throughout this process of strategic leader development. There must be ramifications for officers that are responsible for strategic leader development of subordinates and fail to do so. Additionally, there must be ramifications for officers directed to conduct strategic leader self-development and fail to do so. Although following rules and directives without the required fear of ramifications is a clear characteristic of a profession, some officers require more oversight.

Before diving into the heart of recommendations to bridge the gap, it is worthwhile to consider other points of view on the topic of strategic leader development. The first stop in considering others' thoughts is the civilian sector, specifically the U.S. civilian business approach to leader development. In turning to David Rainey's work once again, he provides some excellent insights into what the civilian sector has discovered with leader development in general, and strategic leader development in particular. First, not all leader competencies can be equally developed in a given population at the same time. Every person possesses inherent talents and weaknesses and only at that given person's pace and ability can they improve in any leader competency. Second, as leaders mature, they become increasingly more difficult to

develop. Each leader's job performance, interaction with others, and life experiences shape how a leader performs. If success is achieved in leading one way, it can be hard to convince a leader to consider other ways of leading. Lastly, benefits in leader development, especially at the strategic level, may not manifest themselves in a leader's performance for some time after the development activity occurs. In this case, it is often a specific event or condition in a leader's environment that triggers a developmental lesson learned to be put into action.<sup>19</sup>

Another important consideration is that any change in strategic leader development must encompass the developing of a better foundation, earlier in an officer's career. Scott Nestler eloquently makes this point in his article titled *Developing Strategic Leaders for the Army*, where he states, "The bottom line is that we can't expect officer to suddenly be strategic leaders when they are selected for promotion to colonel if the wide foundation was never established in their careers."<sup>20</sup> So, the final consideration for change in strategic leader development is determining when development is going to be best received by an officer. Officer education and development is often promoted as down or rest time from key operational positions, and as such, comes much later in an officer's career. In order to get an officer's complete attention and energy, and for education and development not to be considered an afterthought or down time, key developmental/educational actions must occur during an officer's assignment to operational positions. Strategic leader development is so complex and so important, it cannot be relegated to short periods of down time in an officer's career. If the recommendation to categorize LTCs and COLs into strategic and

senior leaders is acted upon, senior leader development has its own set of expectations.

Although there are likely many considerations in developing an effective senior leader development model for LTCs and COLs, this study will focus on a few that are critical to the overall effort. First, the developmental actions recommended must produce a bench for strategic leaders. When the Army identifies officers as future strategic leaders, there is a possibility that they got it wrong. In those cases, a bench of senior leaders that are developed in the basics of strategic leadership principles must be available to step up.<sup>21</sup> While this model should build a bench of strategic leaders, its primary function should be the continued development of leaders that focus on leading organizations at the tactical level.<sup>22</sup> In doing so, these senior leaders center their attention inside of the organization, and at closer range; while strategic leaders are developed to focus across the organization and at a further or strategic range. Lastly, this senior leader development model must provide a forum where these senior leaders can discuss their environments, organizations, and the actions/events that are contributing to their development.<sup>23</sup> Learning from each other's successes and failures will surely produce a more adaptable leader that has learned from his peers.

Having considered the nature of the gap, the proposed differences and similarities of strategic versus senior leaders, the calls for change and potential expectations of change, it is now time to offer some recommendations. This author recognizes that the time to effect change is limited, as are the resources. "The more strongly and consistently an organization communicates to organizational leaders that their development as leaders is an organizational priority, the more positive is the

organizational climate for leader development.”<sup>24</sup> These recommendations will not follow the Army’s twenty-first century norms of implementation, like a “reading list of history books”<sup>25</sup> or an internet-based video followed by tests. The goals of these recommendations are to be quickly implementable, easily accountable and sustainable, cheap and effective.

Before implementing these recommendations, a baseline to determine potential future strategic leaders must be established. An officer will have the opportunity to elect which type of leader he would like to attempt to develop towards, but ultimately, his chain of command will decide. These recommendations fall into the three earlier discussed domains of leader development: operational, institutional, and self-development. The first set of three recommendations are interchangeable between the first two domains, meaning, they could be implemented, sustained, and accounted for in both the operational and institutional Army.

The first recommendation is incentivizing leader development.<sup>26</sup> The objective of incentivizing leader development is to reward those that are pursuing leader development above and beyond that of their peers. Incentivizing leader development would greatly jump-start the bridging of the gap in strategic and senior leader development by first highlighting those officers that are truly interested in improving our Army, and second, by naturally raising the performance bar of excellence. The incentives would vary and could be rewarded to both the officer being developed and/or the leader doing the development, depending on the nature of developmental effort. As an example, if a brigade had a CPT or MAJ publish an essay on the theory of war, not only would the published officer receive a sentence on his OER highlighting his efforts

toward strategic leader development, each of the commanders in the published officer's chain of command would also receive a similar sentence on their OER. This same example could be applied to the officer that displays exceptional senior leader development, perhaps developing a tactical decision-making exercise and sharing it across his brigade. Again, the officer and his leadership would be commended in their OER, or receive a commendation or something to that effect. Some might say a downside to incentives is the overly competitive environment it may breed. Additionally, over time, these incentives can lead to everyone working for reward, thus making it a norm, not worthy of incentives. Although competitive environments can be challenging, and the need for incentives may change over time, the short-term benefits certainly outweigh the longer-term concerns.

The second recommendation is retired officer mentoring.<sup>27</sup> The objective of retired officer mentoring is to leverage the experience of those that have lived strategic or senior leadership and desire to give back to the force. In this initiative, outreach to military associations would be instrumental. The positive exposure these associations would gain with this recommendation could likely be enough to entice them to spearhead this initiative on their own. Former strategic leaders would mentor inspiring strategic leaders at all ranks; and the same would be done by former senior leaders with those that do not aspire to be or were not earmarked for future strategic leadership. Even if this mentoring consisted of only an ongoing email conversation or a thirty minute phone call once a month, the development could be amazing. The potential with this recommendation is one or both parties losing interest over time. Again, this solution is only for the short term--twenty years. If the officer loses interest, it is likely that he has

topped out at his development, rank and position in the Army anyway. If the retiree loses interest, another will fill his spot.

The third recommendation is developmental conferences facilitated by strategic and senior leaders.<sup>28</sup> The objective of these conferences is to allow an authority on a strategic or senior leader topic the venue to share thoughts and ideas with those that aspire to be better at their leader trade. These conferences could be monthly or quarterly and led by qualified officers. A qualified officer to lead a strategic leader development conference would have either served at the strategic level or graduated from a SSC. A qualified senior leader would have had to at least command a battalion. Topics would vary based on current events for future strategic leaders and future training events or assessments for future senior leaders. A potential challenge with this recommendation is time. In both operational and institutional domains, time available is a premium. Dedicating time to this recommendation could be a challenge, but making it optional would assist in determining which officers are serious about leader development, both the leaders and the led.

There are four remaining recommendations. Just as the first two could fit in both the operational and institutional Army, the next two would fit into both the institutional and self-development domains. The next recommendation is opening up the online USAWC Distance Learning (DL) material to interested officers for their own study and self-development. The objective of this initiative is simple; to make the foundation of strategic thought available for those that want to develop themselves strategically. There would be no evaluated portion or instructor involvement with this option. Overhead cost would be twofold. First, a member of the DL faculty would have to accept

or allow applicants viewing or read only rights to the DL material. Second, the digital online capacity would likely need to be increased to allow for more students to be on the DL site at any given time. If this program was implemented, the officers exposed to it might miss out on a key ingredient in the making of a strategic leader--synthesis of strategic theories, processes, and concepts. Only through instructor involvement and engagement does this synthesis usually occur. However, where synthesis is important, it can come through other means at a later date, whether it is one of the other recommendations in this paper or attendance at a SSC.

The next recommendation is adding focus to existing Army.com sites. Platoonleader.army.mil and companycommand.army.mil are excellent internet sites for junior officers to explore and share ideas to become a better leader. However, the return on investment could be much greater if platoonleader.army.mil added topics for senior leader development and companycommand.army.mil added topics for strategic leader development. Very similar to the previous recommendation, the objective of this recommendation is to make tools available for strategic and senior leader development. Additionally, use of these sites would likely lead to online dialogue and the potential for synthesis across many topics.

Admittedly, there are two considerations with this idea. First, this addition might distract from junior leader development. Second, management of the changes would likely require resourcing. To defend against the first, additional and more complex topics might inspire junior leaders to expand their foundation in leader development. Also, informal mentoring between senior and strategic leaders with junior leaders may take shape, enhancing the development of all that participate. As for the resourcing

implication, gradual additions over time could certainly be resourced as part of normal upgrades and maintenance of the sites.

The final two recommendations are purely self-developmental. The examples provided for each are geared towards strategic leader development. However, with a simple change in focus, these ideas could easily be implemented for senior leader development as well. The next recommendation is the encouragement of officer outreach at the strategic level and/or the civilian sector. The primary objective of this outreach recommendation is to broaden participating officers; to introduce new or non-military thoughts on strategy. A secondary objective is to provide a venue for strategic communications from the Army to the civilian sector. A significant part of strategic leader development is broadening. For the CPT that is not selected for the Joint or Congressional internship, or the MAJ that did not get the 3-star aide position, they could “expand their sphere of interaction” by engaging with their city council, the rotary club, local businesses or even establishing dialogue with “leaders in other services.”<sup>29</sup> Through this outreach, an understanding of key strategic concepts such as civil-military relations or Joint capabilities could be introduced.

The final recommendation is the encouragement of peer forums or groups<sup>30</sup> dedicated to strategic thoughts and ideas. The objective of these forums is to facilitate the gathering of strategically inquisitive minds to share ideas and beliefs, and ultimately improve each other’s strategic outlook, thus developing a more open-minded strategic leader. This is a simple concept that could be implemented post-wide, facilitated by the Commanding General’s aide or at the brigade level, facilitated by that company commander or brigade sustainment officer that is openly searching for more

development. These groups could meet online or in person, monthly or quarterly, and discuss challenges facing the Army, the country, or whatever peaks their strategic interest.

There are two potential challenges in implanting these final two recommendations. The requisite strategic leader involvement to provide the initial encouragement and the possibility that attendees could lose interest and not participate. Again, as with each of these seven recommendations, strategic and/or senior leader involvement or outwardly expressed interest is vital to their successful implementation. If strategic or senior leader leaders do not understand the importance of developing the future leaders that will run the Army, perhaps the principal leader developer for the Army, namely the CSA, would need to provide some additional encouragement of his own. Additionally, for those officers that do not take an interest in their development for later use, they likely will not make the cut to advance to that level any way. These recommendations are to bridge a twenty year gap; they are not meant to be enduring. However, based on their success or failure, some might prove valuable as enduring programs.

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper was to examine an already substantial leader development strategy and make it better. In the course of this examination, a gap of time was identified where the Army was not meeting its full potential in strategic leader development. Although the USAWC is making huge strides in strategic leader development, "Ten months at a senior service college does not make a strategic leader."<sup>31</sup> It takes many years of development to make a strategic leader and the ALDS accounts for those years. Unfortunately, the ALDS is not a popular read for most that

are serving. For those that do read it, they are often overcome by events in applying significant energy towards its implementation. Additionally, with the publication of the ALDS, time does not stand still. The CPT that was identified yesterday in his first year of command as having the potential to serve as strategic leader one day, will undoubtedly be developed for that service. His strategic leader development will be complete in about twenty years, when he completes his SSC fellowship at The Institute for Peace. However, the CPT serving at another post, on the other side of the country, possessing the same potential, was not identified; nor was the MAJ serving as the division planner, or the LTC that is waiting to take command. There is significant strategic leader potential not being identified and provided the tools to develop on its own. This paper argues for the development of those individuals now and to bridge the twenty year gap, until the ALDS can take full effect.

To support this argument, the nature of the gap was fully analyzed and defined. Mathematically, the gap was rounded up to twenty years and involves roughly 3500 COLs. To narrow the focus of this study, officers in the rank of LTC and COL were categorized as either strategic or senior leaders. Strategic leaders are those that were developed for such duty their entire career, graduated a SSC or equivalent, and will undoubtedly serve in some capacity at the strategic level. Senior leaders are those that commanded a battalion, may or may not have attended a SSC and/or been promoted to COL, and will likely not serve in any capacity at the strategic level.

Next, the two categories of leaders and their current developmental models were compared, contrasted, and three relevant requirements for change were identified; which included a focus on future strategic leaders and then senior leader, a focus on

strategic leader development while serving at the tactical level, and some degree of accountability for any change implemented. These requirements for change surprisingly nested well with the current calls for change in and expectations for strategic leader development.

Lastly, seven recommendations for change that would assist in bridging the gap for strategic leader development were proposed. Each of the seven recommendations ranged across and typically involved more than one of the three domains of leader development. Although each recommendation comes with its own unique implication, based on the benefits achieved at a very low investment, the risk of these implications is certainly worth taking.

The early years of the twenty-first century have already proved to be very challenging for the U.S. Army. With these challenges and the required strategic leadership to meet them head-on, now is not the time to assume risk in leader development. Knowing of a gap in strategic leader development and doing nothing to bridge it will leave the Army unprepared for the future, and threatens losing the faith of its troopers and their families.

#### Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> Michael J. Colarusso, and David S. Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management: Fostering Institutional Adaptability* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, 2014), 2-4.

<sup>3</sup> David H. Huntoon, Jr., 2013 Chief of Staff of the Army Leader Development Task Force Final Report (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, June 14, 2013), iii.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond T. Odierno, *Army Leader Development Strategy 2013* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2013), 18.

- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., 18.
- <sup>6</sup> Huntoon, 2013 Chief of Staff of the Army Leader Development Task Force Final Report, 43.
- <sup>7</sup> Odierno, Army Leader Development Strategy 2013, 8.
- <sup>8</sup> Raymond T. Odierno, Army Strategic Planning Guidance 2014 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2014), 19.
- <sup>9</sup> John S. Spencer, Leader Development Division, Colonels Management, Office of the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, email message to author, January 23, 2015.
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- <sup>21</sup> Colarusso, *Senior Officer Talent Management: Fostering Institutional Adaptability*, 134.
- <sup>22</sup> Hughes, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 14-15.
- <sup>23</sup> George Reed, "The Pen and the Sword, Faculty Management Challenges in the Mixed Cultural Environment of a War College," *Joint Force Quarterly* no. 72 (January 2014): 15.

<sup>24</sup> David V. Day, Stephen J. Zaccaro, and Stanley M. Halpin, *Leader Development for Transforming Organizations: Growing Leaders for Tomorrow* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 372.

<sup>25</sup> Nestler, *Developing Strategic Leaders for the Army*, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Huntoon, 2013 Chief of Staff of the Army Leader Development Task Force Final Report, 50.

<sup>27</sup> Mark A McGuire, "Senior Officers and Strategic Leader Development," *Joint Force Quarterly* 29 (2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2002): 96.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen J. Gerras, and Leonard Wong "*Changing Minds in the Army: Why It is so Difficult and What to Do about It*," (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, 2013), 27; McGuire, "Senior Officers and Strategic Leader Development," 96.

<sup>30</sup> Odierno, *Army Leader Development Strategy 2013*, 13.

<sup>31</sup> Colarusso, *Senior Officer Talent Management*, 118.