

Strategy Research Project

An Enduring Officer Drawdown Framework

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An Enduring Officer Drawdown Framework

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Abstract

The U.S. Army is reducing its force to the lowest end-strength since before World War II. Officers will experience directed and involuntary drawdown measures in order to meet targets required for proper Year Group management. Potential costs of involuntary separation include: damage to officer trust, commitment, and general esprit de corps; adverse effects on accessions and the retention of quality officers; and public and Congressional opposition. To the Army's detriment, and despite their regular occurrence and import, there exists no strategic framework for the comprehensive planning and execution of force reductions or expansions. The Army would benefit from the efficiency and effectiveness provided by an effective, strategic and comprehensive officer drawdown framework that heeds lessons learned, uses a Year Group construct to pinpoint excess inventory, develops and employs tailored force shaping measures to meet drawdown requirements, and provides for continuous monitoring and assessment of force reduction measures to keep the drawdown trajectory on path toward desired end states.

An Enduring Officer Drawdown Framework

Resolved, that the commanding officer be and he is hereby directed to discharge troops now in the service of the United States, except twenty-five privates, to guard the stores at Fort Pitt, and fifty-five to guard the stores at West Point and other magazines, with a proportionate number of officers; no officer to remain in service above the rank of captain.

—Continental Congress¹

Fourteen years of sustained wartime operations, particularly in Afghanistan and Iraq, have exhausted the American public, challenged our nation's leaders, and inflated our national debt.² Mounting fiscal and public pressure, combined with the reduction of combat operational requirements, prompted the Department of Defense (DOD) to announce in January of 2012, "Plans for a large-scale drawdown of U.S. military forces."³ In 2013, a confluence of rising national debt (presently exceeding \$19 trillion) and congressional gridlock triggered automatic DOD budget cuts resulting from provisions of the Budget Control Act of 2011.⁴ The effects of this sequestration further challenged the Army to do more with less. Although some debate remains, current plans call for a total reduction in force of approximately 120,000 soldiers--taking the Army from approximately 570,000 soldiers to an end-strength target of 450,000 by the end of fiscal year 2018.⁵ Historically, this constitutes the lowest Army end-strength since before World War II.⁶

The current reduction is the latest in a distinctly visible, post-conflict pattern of reductions over the past 70 years: stretching from the close of World War II to the end of the Cold War. In periods of drawdown the majority of enlisted reductions is achieved via natural attrition and reduced accessions; however, the approaches to officer corps reduction differs. Officers are likely to experience more directed and involuntary drawdown measures if the Army is to meet targeted end-strength levels required to

properly manage officer year group (YG) cohort populations. Involuntary officer separations can be both emotional and onerous with potential to undermine officer trust, commitment, and general esprit de corps. Because of this, adverse effects on accessions and the retention of quality officers could result. Additionally, fallout from involuntary officer separation could conceivably shake public opinion and raise Congressional opposition.

Despite the regular, albeit relatively infrequent, occurrence of Army drawdowns and expansions, there exists no strategic framework for the comprehensive planning and execution of force reductions. The Army appears to muddle through various manning approaches driven by a combination of political, ad hoc, and senior leader-dependent sentiments. Unfortunately the consequences of a poorly devised or ineffectively implemented drawdown strategy can be profound and long lasting.⁷ Therefore, it is essential that each component of a comprehensive strategy be carefully constructed and scrutinized for potential consequences: a time and resource-consuming task when oft-repeated. It would be helpful, and decrease the potential for mistakes, if planners had an effective framework from which to base current and future drawdown methods.

This paper will examine lessons learned from previous US Army drawdown efforts, assess various force reduction instruments, and propose a comprehensive, flexible, and reversible officer corps drawdown framework for current and future drawdown or expansion efforts. The creation of a strategic and comprehensive officer drawdown framework would heed lessons learned from previous efforts, use a Year Group (YG) construct to pin-point excess inventory, develop and employ tailored force

shaping measures to meet drawdown requirements, and provide for continuous monitoring and assessment of force reduction measures. A comprehensive drawdown plan would ensure the sustainability of a competitive flow of talented officers, following a sound developmental career path, prepared to meet current and future operational requirements.

Lessons Learned from Previous Drawdowns

Before detailing the elements of a contemporary drawdown plan, it is beneficial to examine Army drawdown history for insights and for avoidance of past mistakes. Army force reductions are nothing new. Since World War II alone, the Army conducted five post-conflict force reductions including the on-going drawdown efforts. A notable difference between then and now was the mandatory service (the draft) versus the current All-Volunteer Force (AVF). Today's drawdown is only the second implemented since the AVF began on July 1, 1973.⁸ The first AVF drawdown began in the late 1980s during the post-Cold-War period and continued throughout the 1990s as the Army's end-strength decreased from 780,000 to 480,000.⁹ There are distinct differences between today's drawdown and that of the 1980s-1990s--the most obvious being that today's drawdown follows the sustained combat operations of two costly and protracted wars. For present-day and future strategic benefit, the objective is to assemble lessons learned from the 1980s-1990s AVF drawdown and then incorporate them into an effective and comprehensive drawdown framework to be referenced for current and future use. Three significant lessons learned from the 1980s-1990s force reduction include:

- Control drawdown pace and quality of the officer corps with judicious leveraging of involuntary separations.

- Maintain sufficient accessions to preclude bubbles and troughs and enable future expansion.
- Recognize and consider the sociological impact of force reduction on soldiers, their families, and our nation at large.

The 1990s drawdown incorporated extensive use of voluntary separation measures including incentivized programs such as Voluntary Separation Incentive (VSI) and Special Separation Benefit (SSB).¹⁰ In 1992, when Army downsizing was well under way, “About 8,500 commissioned officers had signed up willingly for one of several voluntary separation/retirement programs; including SSB and VSI.”¹¹ If the Army’s sole focus had been rapid force reduction then the voluntary programs could have been considered quite successful. However, the Army’s first priority was and is to optimize combat capability in order to fight and win our nation’s wars; including the retention of high quality officers at optimal strength.¹²

In 1992 the popularity of voluntary separations surprised the Army and left the “Army feeling some pain from rapid reduction, specifically in readiness areas.”¹³ The situation proved to be an example of how the imprudent management of voluntary options can backfire and, in some cases, act as an incentive for high quality officers to leave the force in pursuance of other careers. Generally, using involuntary separation measures result in the opposite consequences. Unlike in 1992, today’s Army can control both the quantity and the quality of those discharged by using a centralized board process to involuntarily separate officers. The rapid and substantial shrinkage of the 1992 officer corps, and the associated degradation of readiness, was not entirely due to unanticipated voluntary separations. In a parallel effort to avoid involuntary separations while downsizing, the Army also lowered the accession mission.¹⁴

Accession reduction is a tempting drawdown tool that avoids the adverse consequence of accelerating the separation of serving soldiers. Accession reduction essentially bypasses the emotional and other un-pleasantries of involuntary separation while simultaneously meeting force reduction objectives. During the 1990s drawdown the Army reduced officer accessions to a number below the necessary level required for efficient management of a force approximately 480,000 strong. The necessary accessions level was 4,300 new officers per year; yet with the exception of 1995, the Army accessed below 4,000 every year.¹⁵ Moreover, in five of those years, the Army assessed at or below 3,700.¹⁶ The consequence of under-accessing for any cohort year group is the inability to meet and sustain manning authorizations. Worse yet, under-accessing further inhibits the Army's capacity to expand rapidly if national security requirements call for a larger-standing Army. Unfortunately the Army found itself in this undesirable position in the early years following the September 11, 2001 attacks. Unprepared and unable to grow swiftly, by 2007 the Army experienced a resultant shortage of nearly 3,000 officers.¹⁷ The majority of shortfalls affected senior Captains and Majors with experience ranging between 11 and 17 years; precisely those year groups under-assessed in the early 90s.¹⁸

Compounding personnel management challenges are the effects of mandatory force reductions on Army morale and esprit de corps. During the 1990s force reduction then Army Chief of Staff, General Reimer said, "How do you tell someone who joined the Army because they wanted to be part of all this that suddenly we don't need them anymore?"¹⁹ It is difficult to measure the emotional impact of force reduction. Evidence suggests it affects both those separating from the force and those remaining. Statistical

research conducted by Lenny Wong and Jeffrey McNally, subsequently published in 1994, found “a weakening of the psychological contract with the army...a significant decrease in organizational commitment” for those who remained.²⁰ The likelihood that a well-planned and implemented drawdown may still represent a breach of faith to many officers is important to consider. This breach of faith stems from the perception that the Army did not live up to its side of an “informal contract” with the officer, which in turn can breed its own share of public criticism and outrage.²¹ With today’s technological and multi-media information capabilities perceptions spread quickly, whether accurate or not. The timing of the 1990s drawdown benefitted from a strong US economy, resources to provide monetary separation incentives, and the absence of a prolonged preceding war. Conversely, amid a struggling economy, current drawdown efforts promise to be much more contentious and disruptive with fewer available resources and with many of those subject to separation also veterans of multiple overseas combat tours.²² These reasons also emphasize why the Army must carefully frame the drawdown process and develop a comprehensive, flexible, and mindful approach to meeting future force requirements.

Year Group Construct/Cohort

As implied previously, the Army manages the officer corps inventory via Year Group accessions and promotions. It is through this construct that the Army is best able to efficiently identify and shape inventory to meet drawdown requirements. Codified in Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3, the Army uses the Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS) as an “evolutionary system that balances the needs of the Army with the aspirations and developmental requirements of the entire officer corps.”²³ Various factors influence OPMS. One factor with significant impact on the flow

and inventory of officers is The Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) of 1980. The Defense Officer Personnel Management Act’s “management objective is to provide consistent career and promotion opportunities...retain high-caliber officers, and promote them at a point in service conducive to effective performance.”²⁴ Following the guidance set out in DOPMA and DoD Instructions 1320.13 Commissioned Officer Promotion Reports, the Army maintains an officer career timeline, as shown below in Figure 1.

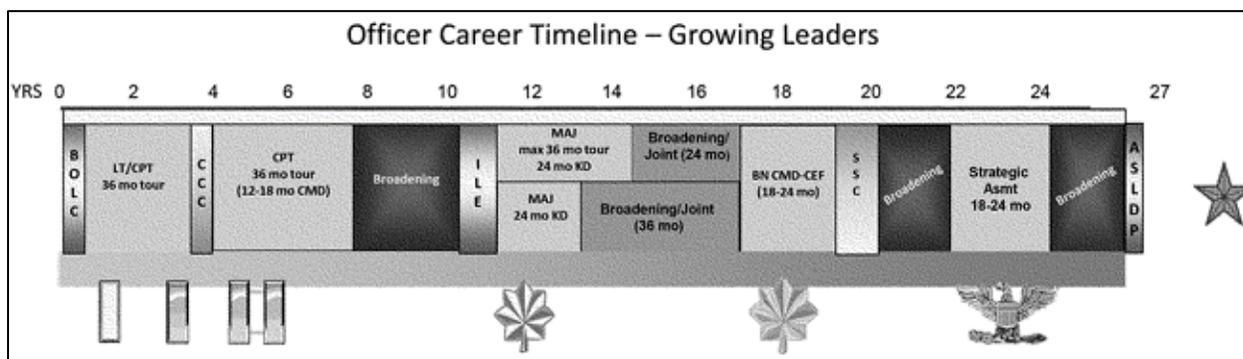


Figure 1. Officer Career Timeline²⁵

According to the construct, the officer cohort year group moves through the system over time and, based upon performance, officers are selected for schooling, promotion, and a range of assignments. The timeline spans a 30-year life cycle, beginning with Second Lieutenants and ending with Colonel. Enlisted soldiers have similar career guidelines.

The officer career timeline, when juxtaposed against officer inventory movement through the 30-year life cycle, helps identify force shaping targets that can guide by year group the number of officers to be retained or discharged. The following chart, often referred to as the “picket fence,” displays the officer inventory by YG and rank.

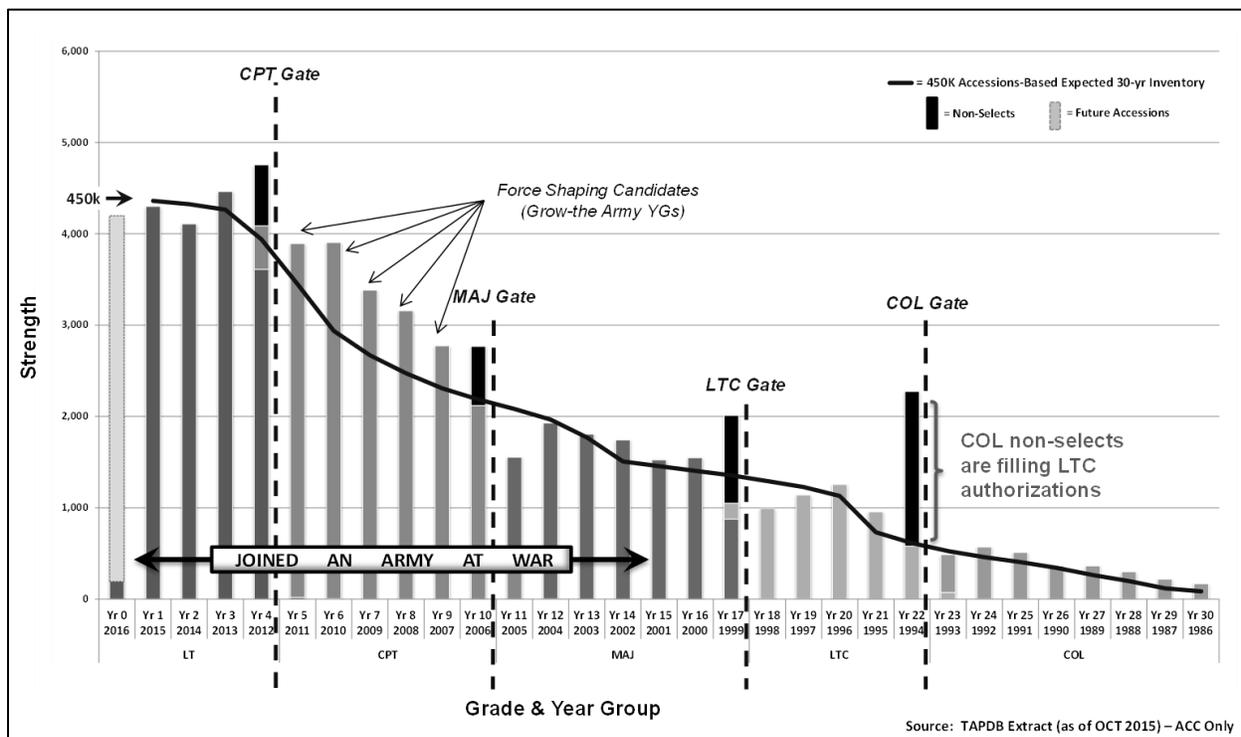


Figure 2. Picket Fence – YG and Rank Inventory Against Authorizations²⁶

Each column represents a specific YG. As one would expect, over time the YG inventories decline through attrition. A key segment of the career path is the Lieutenant Colonel population passed over for promotion to Colonel. Referred to as “non-selects,” they remain as Lieutenant Colonels awaiting the next Colonel promotion board and another opportunity for selection. The chart provides a useful visualization of officer supply over time; however, for identification of accurate force shaping targets it is also necessary to understand and overlay officer demand.

The Army’s Personnel Management Authorizations Document (PMAD) and Updated Authorized Document (UAD) “are the Army’s documents of record for active component military authorizations.”²⁷ They serve to quantify officer demand. The PMAD and UAD provide an abundant amount of data such as: Unit Identification Code, Area of

Concentration, and rank for the current year and for five years into the future.²⁸ These authorization documents are used to derive officer strength requirements over time and enable the comparison of officer requirements to officer inventory. This basic supply-versus-demand comparison generates personnel management action, such as the implementation of personnel reductions, and the shaping of ranks and their respective year groups. Further analysis ensures the balanced distribution of ranks into basic branches and functional areas in order to meet demand. Through this analysis, the Army aligns current and future strengths, required personnel reductions, and equitable promotion rates that ensure a progressive, balanced, and effective manning approach that shapes the personnel landscape. While proper YG management provides the foundation for conducting drawdowns and expansions, it is regulated through the use of accessions and promotions, as well as other tailored force shaping tools.

Tailored Force Shaping

The key to maintaining a balanced and ready officer corps, while executing a drawdown, is through the application of timely and tailored force shaping measures. After analyzing officer supply versus demand in order to identify force shaping targets by YGs and rank, the next step is to determine exactly how to reduce the targeted or excess inventory. Two common approaches used to address excess inventory are to reduce gains, and increase losses. The essential task is to balance the two approaches thereby controlling the inventory's rate of descent and properly aligning YG inventories with authorization requirements throughout the drawdown period.

The reduction of gains is an appealing drawdown tool because it allows for avoidance of the involuntarily separation of officers; however, controlling the appropriate number of officer accessions throughout the drawdown period is vital in order to build

and sustain the officer corps of the future.²⁹ With that in mind, the Army must first determine annual accession requirements to sustain future manning needs before decreasing accessions. Statistical modeling and analysis that effectively combines future authorization documents, historical loss rates, and promotion projections allows the Army to identify accurate future accession requirements. This predictive analytical tool is resident within the Army G1. Notwithstanding, there exists a great deal of institutional pressure to mortgage future YG cohorts in order to retain current serving officers of proven talent. The danger of dropping accessions too low is that you disrupt the equitable distribution of promotion, retention, and separation actions applied to any one or several YGs. An excessive number of officer retained in a particular YG or rank results in positions unavailable for subsequent YG progressions. Conversely, an undermanned YG cohort carries an insufficient amount of personnel to allow for a qualitative culling of lower performing officers because selection rates must increase to meet the manning demands of the subsequent and higher rank. This was the case during the 1990s drawdown as the Army chose to dramatically reduce officer accessions, thus contributing to the officer shortages experienced in the early 2000s.³⁰

Complicating matters further is the “closed system” feature of the officer life cycle model; meaning there is typically no lateral entry into the higher ranks of the officer corps.³¹ Therefore, if the Army under-accesses officers it has limited means to rectify the shortage in the future, creating a persistent deficiency throughout the 30-year officer life cycle. The key is in the ability to determine an accession target that allows the Army to efficiently meet manning requirements throughout the 30-year life cycle, given natural attrition and qualitative culling of lower performing officers, while providing the flexibility

to expand cohorts to meet future army growth demands when necessary. Accession reduction is an indispensable tool for force reduction, but the balancing of YG cohorts by rank and skill against projected authorizations requires tailored force shaping measures for effective and efficient management of officer losses.

The implementation of officer reductions is difficult and emotional in an AVF-- especially when recognizing the honorable service today's officers have provided for their country during a protracted period of sustained combat operations. It is for this reason that "we must manage our people carefully to neither compromise readiness nor break faith with those who have served the Nation so well."³² To preserve readiness, while keeping the faith of those who have served, it is important that the Army integrate a broad set of drawdown personnel management measures to shape YGs by rank and skill in a precise and timely manner. The leveraging of tailored involuntary separations, with assistance from existing "instruments" of separation, enables the Army to control losses, retain quality officers, and appropriately align inventory with authorizations.

The four principal involuntary instruments of separation include: Officer Separation Boards (OSBs), Selective Early Retirement Boards (SERBs), enhanced Selective Early Retirement Boards, and Promotion Board selectivity.³³ Officer Separation Boards, often referred to as Reduction-in-Force boards, target officers ineligible for retirement, typically Lieutenants, Captains, and Majors.³⁴ Selective Early Retirement Boards and enhanced Selective Early Retirement Boards shape the retirement-eligible population, primarily Lieutenant Colonels and Colonels.³⁵ Promotion Board Selectivity is the final involuntary force-shaping instrument. Its utility lies in separating Lieutenants, Captains, and Majors that have "failed of selection for

promotion to the next higher grade for the second time.”³⁶ These four indispensable instruments, made available through authorities enacted by Congress, enable the Army to manage officer YG strength levels across the entire officer corps and effectively shape each YG level and rank accordingly.

Title 10 of the United States Code governs each involuntary instrument and specifies critical components such as eligibility, quantity, and associated separation date. It is essential for drawdown planners to possess a thorough understanding of the law as it prescribes constraints on eligibility, quantity, and timing for officers subject to drawdown measures. For example, SERBs fall under Title 10 Section 638, which specifies for eligibility, quantity, and time to separation as follows:

Eligibility

An officer holding the regular grade of lieutenant colonel...who has failed of selection for promotion to the grade of colonel...two or more times.

An officer holding the regular grade of colonel...who has served at least four years of active duty in that grade.³⁷

Quantity

The Secretary of the military department concerned shall specify the number of officers...such number may not be more than 30 percent of the number of officers considered in each grade in each competitive category.³⁸

Time to Separation

An officer recommended for early retirement...shall be retired on the date requested by the officer...which date shall be not later than the first day of the tenth calendar month beginning after the month in which the Secretary concerned approves the report of the board.³⁹

As specified, SERBs are limited to Lieutenant Colonels and Colonels. A maximum of 30% considered may be selected for early retirement in each board and selected officers must be out of the Army in nine months and one day. The following table

highlights the four primary involuntary personnel reduction programs and the targeted ranks for each program.

Involuntary Officer Drawdown Lever	Rank
Selective Early Retirement Board (SERB)	LTC-COL
enhanced Selective Early Retirement Board (eSERB)	CPT-MAJ-LTC-COL
Officer Separation Board (OSB)	LT-CPT-MAJ
Promotion Board 2 x Non-Selects (2xNS)	LT-CPT-MAJ

Figure 3. Involuntary Officer Drawdown Instruments⁴⁰

The first step of the drawdown framework identifies officer over-strength levels by YG and rank. The next step requires timely application of involuntary drawdown tools. For example, YGs 2007 through 2011 accessed nearly 5,000 officers per year in the Army Competitive Category when the Army assumed permanent end strength retention of 547,400.⁴¹ Targeted end strength is now set at 450,000, which requires approximately 4,000 officer gains a year.⁴² For this reason, YGs 2007 through 2011 are substantially over strength. A combination of OSBs and reduced Promotion Board selection rates would be the recommended approach to right size these YGs.

Important to understand is the timeframe available for necessary force reductions, as that will also influence drawdown instrument selection and application. Using the example above, the speed at which officers separate from the Army is a notable distinction between OSBs and Promotion Board selectivity. The OSBs are swifter and require just one board prior to separation. Involuntary separations through the promotion board process require officers to be considered by two boards, typically spaced a year apart. After a second board pass-over, it is required that the officer exit the service approximately six months later. Therefore available time, YG strength levels,

and rank are all essential considerations when deciding what force shaping tool to apply.

A variety of 'voluntary' separation options are available for use by force planners; however, careful consideration and management is necessary when applying such options to shape the officer corps appropriately. Injudicious planning and implementation puts the Army at risk for both quality loss and rapid drops in inventory; both detrimental to readiness. The 1990s drawdown witnessed extensive use of voluntary options primarily through Voluntary Early Release/Retirement Program, Voluntary Separation Incentives (VSI), Special Separation Bonus (SSB), and SERB.⁴³ These historic programs, along with Voluntary Retirement Incentive (VRI), remain available today through the FY2012 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).⁴⁴

Much like involuntary options, the above voluntary programs span officer ranks (excluding General officers), and facilitate timely and efficient shaping of the officer corps. Immediacy and quantity are two distinct advantages of voluntary methods. Voluntary separation programs offer the potential to achieve a large-number of officer separations within a short period. In 1992, the Army anticipated that 4,100 officers and 23,000 enlisted troops would separate under SSB and VSI. Surprisingly, 31,448 volunteered, exceeding the goal by over 4,000 in a single year.⁴⁵ This occurrence highlights the need for voluntary options to be limited and tightly controlled. It is far more efficient to limit programs to select populations, specifically over-strength YGs, ranks, and skills. Personnel managers should control programs by treating each voluntary separation packet as a request, allowing the Army to determine whether the applicant is currently in an over-strength YG, whether he is in a shortage specialty branch, or

whether he is a high-quality officer that should be retained. This provides the necessary control over the rate of descent for the target YG and mitigates the impact on the overall quality of the officer corps. Likewise, the Army must assure relative anonymity (insulated from the chain of command and select personnel managers) of the applicant until after the application has been approved. This ensures that the applicant will not suffer from adverse consequences for just applying for a program, whether from lower performance evaluations in the immediate chain-of-command or from adverse assignment and school decisions at Human Resource Command (HRC) level.

Even with proper controls in place, voluntary measures present two significant challenges--cost and effectiveness. In a time of fiscal austerity it is difficult to obtain funds to pay soldiers to voluntarily leave the Army. Under the Special Separation Bonus program, the cost to separate a Captain with 10 years of active service in 2016 is approximately \$108,000.⁴⁶ Funds are scarce in a fiscally constrained environment. The resources used for funding of voluntary programs are resources not available to fund training, sustainment, or modernization programs. To make matters worse, the effectiveness of voluntary separation incentives is questionable. A Congressional Budget Office Report (CBO) report concluded "50% of VSI and SSB recipients would have left active duty even without those incentives."⁴⁷ Thus, the Army essentially funded and incentivized soldiers to leave the Army who were going to leave anyway.

The ingredients for a timely and effective officer drawdown include reduced, yet force-sustainable accessions, and further reductions through tailored involuntary and voluntary programs. Balancing accessions and reductions for the alignment of inventory with personnel authorizations is achievable with the force shaping tools provided by

Congress. If necessary, Congress has demonstrated a willingness to provide additional tools to improve the management and flexibility of inventory alignment.⁴⁸ The firm control of officer loss numbers and quality is imperative and possible through involuntary programs; however, if time is short and required drawdown quantities are substantial, voluntary separation measures may be necessary. Even with the development of a sound strategy by personnel managers, and with the adroit use of force reduction instruments, there still exists a host of strategic and organizational factors that require continuous monitoring and assessment to avoid plan-derailment. Like most operational plans, a planned strategy is only as good as its implementation.

Monitor and Assess Implementation

Drawdowns are multifaceted, multi-year efforts requiring continuous and systematic monitoring, assessment, and plan adjustment to meet desired end states. Joint Publication 3.0: *Joint Operations*, defines an operation as, “A military action or the carrying out of a strategic, operational, tactical, service, training, or administrative military mission.” Despite the fact that administrative “missions” require the same degree of active management as tactical missions, they seldom receive the equivalent leader attention. Due to the high volatility of internal and external factors that affect the use of many of the drawdown instruments, success depends upon monitoring progress, adjusting targets, assessing the impact on quality officer retention and recruitment, and assessing the lure of private sector job opportunities, as well as many other issues. An effective drawdown strategy must have a corresponding assessment framework to guide and adjust implementation.

The complex and layered downsizing environment begins with internal Army policies and behaviors and expands outward to include both national and international

policies and interests. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, opened the *2015 National Military Strategy* document by stating, “Today’s global security environment is the most unpredictable I have seen in 40 years of service.”⁴⁹ Whether internal or external to the Army, volatility, complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity exist.⁵⁰ However, through diligent monitoring and assessment of relevant drawdown components, the Army can adapt its drawdown strategy in order to accommodate the associated environmental dynamics.

Relevant components internal to Army force strength include accessions, losses and loss rates, board results, and force structure changes. As previously noted, the two fundamental actions necessary to meet drawdown targets include reducing accessions and increasing losses. This appears rather straight forward, but as Clausewitz once remarked “everything is very simple...but the simplest thing is very difficult.”⁵¹ For that reason, constructing a thorough and relevant approach to meticulously monitor accessions and losses is as important as building the drawdown plan itself.

The planning, implementation, monitoring, and assessment of the two fundamental drawdown actions are the responsibility of the Army G1 and HRC. A successful monitoring and assessment approach begins with the G1 and the HRC and requires close and continuous coordination between the two. Fortunately, these two organizations coordinate on a daily basis regardless of whether the Army is undergoing a drawdown. However, the level of coordination and information required during a drawdown is unique and involves the collection and synthesis of data among unfamiliar divisions within the Army G1 and HRC. The danger lies in the assumption that proper monitoring and assessment is going on through normal channels when, in reality, each

organization is treating the drawdown as an additional requirement to daily work and only periodically reviewing the implementation and comparing it to the Army's desired end states. Instead, the two organizations need to build a reporting format, tailored with essential drawdown components, to keep key leaders informed and to aid in any decisions required for the refinement of the current drawdown strategy. Ideally they should also develop a list of internal and external "indicators" that may help predict when a problem is developing and also enable corresponding measures of correction for prevention of an emerging manning crisis.

The tailored drawdown components must portray officer strength targets by YG, rank, and skill. However, strength is not static. Presenting officer strength over time enables drawdown managers and leaders to determine if the plan is on a proper trajectory to meet future strength targets. Each trajectory to the targeted end strength requires a set of actions intended to generate a combination of accessions, promotions, and losses. Natural loss behavior can fluctuate based on the economy and other factors, so the close tracking of natural losses for each rank is essential as it affects the number of involuntary separations required to meet the desired manning levels. Involuntary separations, such as those derived through an OSB or SERB, will fall below the target number if the eligible population sharply decreases through natural losses. Timing of officers identified for separation through an OSB will directly influence strength projections in a fiscal year.

Under- or over-accessions also influence the strength trajectory. The inter-relationships of these drawdown components make it essential for the close monitoring and assessment of each: Where are we? Where should we be? Is there a difference

and why? What must the Army do next?⁵² The dependent nature of the officer inventory on accessions and losses allows the use of related “sensitivity” analyses to aid in the active management process.

Sensitivity analysis, also known as “what-if” analysis, explores the range of outcomes based on changing conditions or inputs. In the case of downsizing, one example of sensitivity analysis would be an examination of the potential range of expected officer inventory after introducing involuntary separations through an OSB. In the immediate-term, the impact may appear straight forward; but just as important is the understanding of long-term impacts and how forced separations interact with other variables, like accessions and natural losses, to change officer inventory. A comprehensive assessment framework enables the necessary analysis that supports sound and timely decisions throughout the drawdown process. Decisions could potentially include the reversal of any one or multiple manning instruments. Compounding the inherent complexity of actively managing and adjusting the drawdown, is the very real possibility that world events may require the Army to reverse its course and expand.

History has demonstrated that unforeseen world events can create the need for rapid Army expansion.⁵³ While the Army is drawing down, it must also make provisions for swift and efficient growth. The twenty-first century strategic environment is teeming with a vast array of small to great challenges and threats; from insidious social media currents and a growing array of Violent Extremist Organizations to provocations by sizeable and potentially lethal state actors like Russia, North Korea, and Iran.⁵⁴ The enlightenment of history, combined with today’s volatile and uncertain security

environment, leads to the realization that today's Army would do well to establish a sustainable and expandable officer manning pool. As previously mentioned, the military manning system is subject to some unique constraints. The officer life cycle is a "closed system," meaning there are very few opportunities for lateral entry into the officer corps by purely civilian candidates. Because of this challenge, the expansion of any rank category above Lieutenant is difficult. However, if the force structure were to evolve with a traditional pyramid-like grade plate with competitive promotion rates, the Army could both increase accessions and concurrently raise YG cohort inventory through increased promotion rates both in the zone and below the zone. Notwithstanding, our inability to expand quickly is a lesson learned.

The Army faced rapid expansion shortly after the Army announced its "Grow the Army" initiative in January 2007: expanding the active Army from 482,400 to 547,400.⁵⁵ The Army was not able to meet the growth requirements for field grade officers, particularly Majors.⁵⁶ For years, the Army remained short thousands of Majors, even with elevated promotion rates and a shift in the pin-on-point from 11 years to 10 years.⁵⁷ The Army also introduced incentives to increase Captain retention, such as offering bonuses and graduate school, to help increase the population of Captains progressing to Majors.⁵⁸ Officer strength expansion is difficult, and poses an even greater challenge in situations of expedited need. However, the Army can mitigate this challenge by establishing a balanced officer grade plate that allows for competitive promotion rates, particularly at the field grade level. For example, with a steady-state, competitive promotion rate to Major of 80% and an eligible population of 2,000 Captains, the Army could routinely promote 1,600 Captains to Major a year. Were the need to arise for

inventory growth of Majors, the Army could elevate promotion rates to 95%. Again assuming an eligible population of 2,000 Captains, this new promotion rate would result in a selection of 1,900 Captains for promotion to Major; a net of 300 additional Majors each year. The below-the-zone rate for promotion to Major could also be increased, thus providing incentive for high-performing Captains to be recognized and rewarded and potentially increasing the retention rate of serving Captains. Elevated promotion rates do provide a useful and necessary tool for quick Army expansion in order to meet global security requirements, but they are not intended as a long-term solution due to the risk of quality degradation for the affected YGs.

An issue worthy of recognition pertains to the establishment of a sustainable and competitive force structure. There exists the potential for concealment of an unbalanced structure while executing a drawdown. An unbalanced officer grade plate occurs when force structure authorizations call for more field grade officers than are supportable by the target promotion rate for company grade officers. This is particularly evident for Majors where there is a natural tendency to over-rate positions that require “Iron Majors” during expansions. Thus, the Army will struggle to build the requisite inventory for field grade authorizations, which in turn drives the Army to increase promotion rates at the field grade level. During a drawdown, the Army logically experiences lowered promotion rates as it shrinks officer inventory. Therefore, in a drawdown environment, an unbalanced and non-competitive force structure may still exist even though force reduction measures conceal the fact. Not until the downsizing is complete and the Army enters into a more stable, steady-state environment will the manning challenges of an unbalanced grade plate surface. Currently the Army is drawing down toward the

targeted end strength of 450,000 by the end of fiscal year 2018.⁵⁹ Even though promotion rates are lowered and competitive, critical and informed modeling analysis by the Army G1 can look forward to determine whether the officer grade plate is accurately balanced and able to sustain a competitive flow of quality officers over a 30-year lifecycle.

Recommendations

Today the Army is implementing its fifth extensive downsizing operation since the end of WWII, but only the second as an AVF. The AVF distinction is significant when reducing force strength as it requires a different approach, using a different set of force reduction measures. Detailed below are four sequential recommendations to aid in the implementation of the current drawdown and for use in future drawdown and expansion efforts.

First look to the past, and then plan for the future. The Army is an organization of scholarship: continuously transforming itself through gained knowledge and experience. In today's AVF environment, it is important to study the 1990s drawdown, paying special attention to two salient lessons learned: control the pace of losses and quality of the officer corps primarily through involuntary separation measures; and maintain accessions at a level that can sustain future force requirements. The focus should be on both quality and quantity, with the Army retaining the highest quality officers within a sufficient YG population level.

Second, utilize the YG cohort construct, over a 30-year officer life cycle, to identify excess inventory relative to future manpower requirements. Officer strength management, whether through accessions or promotions, uses the YG paradigm. This management construct, portrayed over a 30-year time horizon, takes a holistic and

forward-looking view of officer inventory relative to authorizations, and identifies force-shaping YG candidates. It also ensures that the Army's force shaping actions maintain a balanced and competitive flow of officers by YG and rank. Conversely, the Army risks pursuing a myopic-strategy, such as focusing on a particular rank or single YG, that could inadvertently lead to unbalanced officer populations and cause wide swings in promotion rates and school-selection opportunities across Year Groups.

Third, tailor a package of force-shaping measures to target excess inventory without diminishing the readiness or quality of the officer corps or adversely affecting any single YG. The two chief force shaping actions are accession reductions and separation increases. Recalling the lessons from the 1990s drawdown, accessions for any YG must not drop below a level that could constrain or limit the quality of the future force. Army G1's analytical and modeling capabilities are able to identify YG accession floors, which Army leadership should endorse to avoid the temptation of simply decreasing accessions in order to skirt the un-pleasantries of using involuntary separation measures. Having set the accession floor, the Army must next "right size" over-strength YGs using either voluntary or involuntary separation measures. If time permits, the preference is to apply involuntary separation programs, such as OSBs and SERBs, allowing the Army to control the rate of officer inventory reductions and retain the highest-quality officers.

If voluntary separation programs become necessary, the Army must intensely manage them, retaining the final approval authority for applicant discharge and retention. It is important to recognize the dependence of this third recommendation on the accurate identification of excess inventory from the second recommendation. Proper

identification of excess inventory will drive the preferred force shaping approach. For instance, if the excess inventory resides in Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel, then the most appropriate instrument is likely SERBs. The word “tailored,” as related to “tailored force shaping” is apropos, as it implies that for every situation there exists an optimum reduction approach. Modeling and analysis of both immediate and long-term impacts of a drawdown strategy will aid in tailoring a suitable approach.

Finally, develop and implement a comprehensive monitoring and assessment plan that will aid in making time-sensitive decisions, keep the drawdown trajectory on path to reach desired end states, and measure drawdown progress. Downsizing takes years and involves multiple variables both internal and external to the Army. Critical internal factors that may influence in-stride modifications of a drawdown strategy include: the development of indicators to track natural loss behavior, accessions, the quantity and timing of OSB and SERB separations, and total involuntary separations. Few plans are perfectly implemented; therefore, it is essential to build an assessment framework that answers the questions: Where are we? Where should we be? Is there a difference and why? What must the Army do next? With the Army keeping diligent focus on these four questions it can commence a drawdown, with eyes wide-open, while being positioned to adjust accordingly to changing conditions. As in the past, adjustments may once again come in the form of force expansion. To expand with efficiency the Army must establish a grade plate management strategy that: meets officer authorization requirements, supports a competitive promotion system, enables the Army to expand through both increased accessions and promotions, and achieves the highest quality officer corps possible.

Conclusion

The Army should stop re-inventing the wheel for every new strategic challenge that requires force reductions or expansions. The organizational turbulence and human turmoil could be assuaged if not largely avoided with a deliberate, mindful and integrated approach using the personnel management tools available. The Army must exercise its collective wisdom to prevent past force reduction mistakes and prepare for the future by developing a comprehensive, strategic, and functional framework that carefully manages current and future reductions; after all, “He makes himself ridiculous who is forever repeating the same mistake.”⁶⁰

In summary, future drawdowns should adhere to the following four precepts: 1) look to the past to plan for the future; 2) utilize the YG cohort construct to align personnel authorizations with corresponding inventories; 3) tailor an assortment of force shaping tools to target excess without affecting readiness, quality, or any single YG; and 4) implement a comprehensive monitoring and assessment plan to aid in decisions, measure drawdown progress, and keep the trajectory on path toward desired end states.

Time marches on, and the Army officers of today will march with it, taking the knowledge and wisdom gained over years of service with them when they go. Fortunately today’s Army analysts, living and toiling through a time of force reduction, have the opportunity to share their wisdom before departure by developing a valuable and useful force-reduction framework as a useful legacy for future generations. A comprehensive and effective drawdown framework will enable the precision, quality, and flexibility necessary to meet the dynamic global security requirements in an uncertain world.

Endnotes

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