

A Dangerous Divide: Closing the Civil-Military Gap in America

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Abstract

In 1973, the US Army changed from an army of conscripts to an All-Volunteer Force. Over the last forty years, the Army has become the best in the world, but it has grown increasingly regionally focused, rural, militaristic, and it no longer represents that nation it serves. This civil-military gap has grave repercussions for America. To close the civil-military gap, the Army must launch Operation Hometown Resolve led by Recruiting Command. Operation Hometown Resolve is a strategic approach to closing the civil-military gap. This regional concept will connect, synergize, and energize all Army entities in specific regions across America. Then it will empower and enable these entities to communicate proactively with regional communities. Finally, it will deliver the right message to help America understand its Army. If the Army does not address this problem, the civil-military gap will continue to widen. Only by identifying a responsible agency to address this wicked problem will the nation be able to close the gap. The Army must give Recruiting Command the resources and authorities to reach the American public and close the civil-military gap proactively.

A Dangerous Divide: Closing the Civil-Military Gap in America

The Chief of Staff, General Mark Milley, instructed the Army to improve communication with the American public. This was one of his top three priorities when he assumed the position as the new leader of the Army. General Milley said, “The burden is on us, the guys in uniform, to make sure that we reach out to communities, and we let the people know who we are and what we do, and what we’re about.”¹ General Milley made this a priority because there is a growing civil-military gap in America. The problem facing the Army is how to close the gap with a force that does not represent the nation it serves. For 201 years, the Army was a conscript force that drafted individuals from every town in America. The civil-military gap was small because the Army was representative of the nation. However, in 1973, the Army became an All-Volunteer Force. Over the last 40 years, the Army has grown increasingly regionally focused, rural, and militaristic and is no longer representative of the nation it serves. The make-up of our force changed, but we have not changed the way we communicate to the American public.

This paper will argue that the only way for the Army to close the civil-military gap is to launch a new strategy called *Operation Hometown Resolve*. This strategy takes a regional approach to connect America with its Army and change America’s perception of the Army. The regional approach, led by US Army Recruiting Command (USAREC), will focus in three areas to close the civil-military gap: 1) connect, synergize, and energize all Army entities in a region; 2) communicate proactively and regionally; 3) deliver the right message to the American public.

Before arguing for *Operation Hometown Resolve*, this paper will explain the five reasons why the civil-military gap exists. First, the All-Volunteer Force caused a

disconnection of America from its Army. Second, this disconnection caused misperceptions in the minds of many Americans about the Army, further widening the gap. Third, a lack of geographical and social diversity in the Army is leading to the growth of the civil-military gap. Fourth, there is a growing “warrior caste,” where increasingly only the children of soldiers are joining the Army. Fifth, as the “warrior caste” grows, the number of American youth who qualify for military service is decreasing.

Then the paper will discuss the three repercussions of the civil-military gap. First, the civil-military gap is a self-perpetuating cycle that will naturally continue to widen. Second, the civil-military gap affects the ability of the nation to make sound decisions about the employment of the military. Third, because of the civil-military gap, there is a sense of elitism and entitlement forming the Army into a separate caste in America.

Among those who examine this issue, a common answer is to reinstate the draft in order to close the civil-military gap. The author sees this as an unrealistic solution that writers posit without developing an actual strategy to operationalize this idea. This option is impractical because American society is detached from the military, accustomed to the All-Volunteer Force, unfamiliar with the draft, and has a generation of youth that is ill-ready for service in the Army. It would take a separate body of research and writing to address the concept of bringing back the draft, and it is outside the scope of this paper.

Civil-military Gap: Why it Exists

There are five basic reasons for the current civil-military gap. The first is that the All-Volunteer Force caused a disconnection between the Army and the people of America. Today, many Americans simply do not know anyone who is in the Army or

who has served in the Army. They do not come into routine contact with any soldiers or veterans. During the Vietnam War, this was not the case. America's conscript Army during Vietnam consisted of draftees from across the country. When soldiers returned from Vietnam, one in four of their age-group cohort had served in the military. In contrast, when soldiers left the Army in 2010, at the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, only one in ten of their age-group cohort had served in the military.² In "Thanks for your Service," Jim Golby states that "in 1999, close to 90 percent of the public reported that they had some workplace contact with someone currently in the military, but by 2014 those numbers had dropped to between 4 and 15 percent."³ Thomas Donnelly echoed this concept, "Only 8.3 percent of Americans currently work with someone actively serving in the military."⁴ These trends demonstrate the disconnection of the citizens of America from their Army. They simply do not encounter soldiers or veterans in their daily lives.

The second reason for the growth of the civil-military gap is that because of the lack of contact with the Army, the citizens of America are susceptible to misinformation about the Army. In many cases, Americans are ignorant of the Army or they have false perceptions about the Army. Hollywood and the media often cause these misperceptions. Many of the movies made about the Vietnam War, like *Platoon* or *Full Metal Jacket* depicted soldiers as uneducated men from the inner city or the rural south. Today's Army is well educated and mirrors the racial representation of the nation. However, because of the portrayal of the Vietnam War in Hollywood, many people still believe the Army consists of "poor minorities, or rural whites, all of whom are

uneducated.”⁵ Even though this stereotype is not true, these misperceptions still cause people to distance themselves from joining the Army or striving to understand the Army.

Another issue that causes misperception about the Army arises when the media portrays most soldiers as Special Operations Forces (SOF) or soldiers wounded in combat. Only 5% of the Army serves in SOF units.⁶ In 2010, a study on casualties in Iraq found that only .03% of soldiers were combat wounded.⁷ These are very small segments of the Army, but many Americans put soldiers in one of these two categories. Reporter Amy Chase also concluded that the mainstream media skews America’s perception of who serves in the Army. She writes, “Such extremes paint a disproportionate picture of veterans and service members as frontline heroes or broken, lacking the nuance of the many roles available and wide spectrum of people who choose to serve their country.”⁸ In earlier days, Hollywood portrayed the military with humor, which helped America identify with its Army. Television shows like *McHale’s Navy*, *Gomer Pyle*, *M*A*S*H*, and *Hogan’s Heroes* portrayed soldiers as regular people. Today, much of the American public views soldiers as either Chris Kyle from the movie *American Sniper*, or as an invalid from the Wounded Warrior Foundation commercials.

These misperceptions are important because they show that although Americans respect the Army--represented by these two extremes--they fail to understand that these two images only represent a fraction of the Army. Americans do not identify with being a special operations sniper or a wounded soldier, so they do not want to become a part of an organization that they do not understand or identify with. These misperceptions blind Americans to the fact that they actually have a lot in common with

the vast majority of soldiers, and many of the jobs soldiers do are just like those in the civilian world.

The third reason for the growth of the civil-military gap is that the Army is becoming increasingly geographically isolated from the American public. Currently, half of all active duty military personnel serve in one of five states: California, Texas, Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia.⁹ These five states contain the largest Army bases. It is no surprise that eligible youth living near Army bases in the South have a high propensity to join the Army. Conversely, there are few large military bases near urban centers in the Northeast and Midwest. Youths from these areas are not familiar with soldiers, veterans, or retirees like their counterparts from the South. This is part of the reason that there is a distinct lack of representation in the Army from these areas.

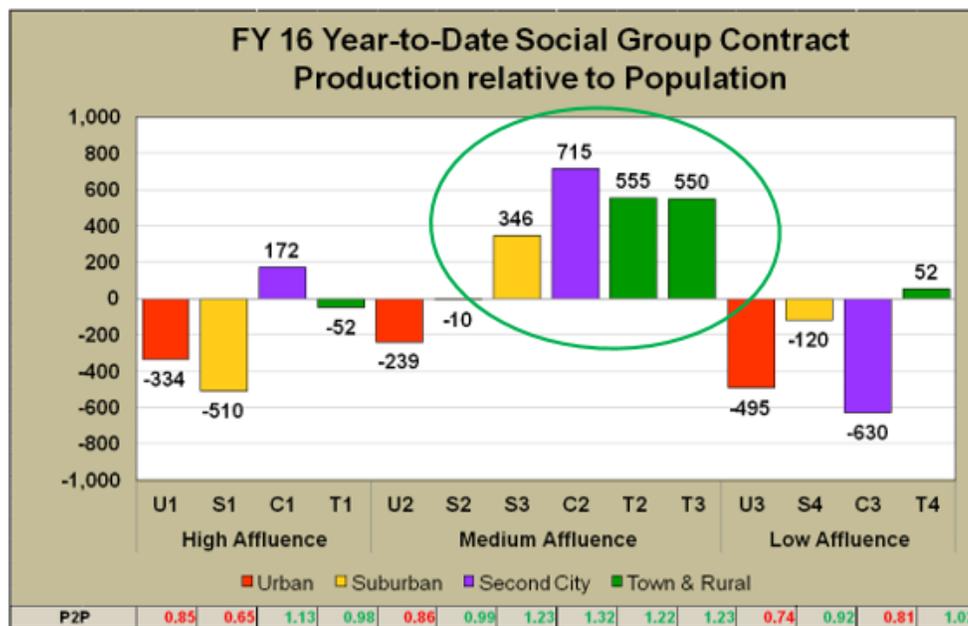


Figure 1. National Social Group Enlistment Contracts Relative to Population¹⁰

Army recruiting focuses on the South and specifically the Southeast United States. Forty-three percent of recruiting stations and forty-nine percent of Reserve

Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs are in the south.¹¹ Forty-three percent of all recruits come from the South, and the South has the highest percentage of enlistees per population. These percentages are decreasing in the Northeast and Midwest. In 1976, 32% of accessions came from the South; in 2015, the number grew to 45%.¹² Alabama has more recruits than New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles combined.¹³ These data point to fact that, along with increasing geographic isolation, the Army is becoming increasingly non-urban. Rosa Brooks, in her article “Civil-Military Paradoxes,” wrote, “States with high population densities have lower per capita military recruitment than states with low population densities.”¹⁴ In Figure 1, it shows “Medium Affluence” social groups in the “Second Cities” and “Town & Rural” areas are both highly populated and well represented in Army recruiting, and “Urban” social groups are not well represented regardless of family affluence levels. This factor increases the civil-military gap and leads to an Army that is not representative of the nation that it serves.

Family History of Service

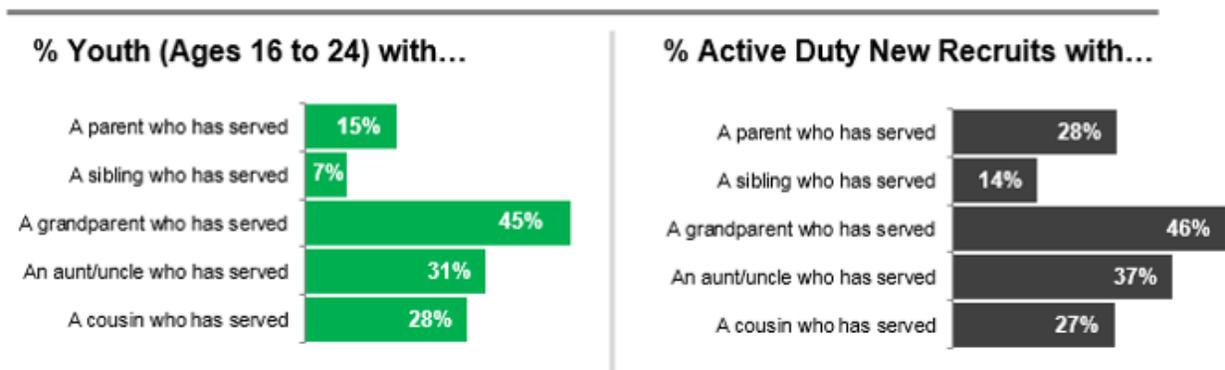


Figure 2. Family History of Service for American Youth (Civilian vs Recruit)¹⁵

The fourth reason for the growth of the Civil-Military Gap is that increasingly only those with a direct family connection to the Army are joining the Army. This is true for both the enlisted and officer ranks. Figure 2 shows the family history of service for

civilians ages 16 to 24 compared with Army enlisted recruits in the same age bracket. It shows that the Army recruits are roughly twice as likely to have a parent or a sibling who served compared to their civilian peers. This reflects the high propensity of the children of those who served in Global War on Terror (GWOT) to continue serving. The children of GWOT veterans observed their parents' experience in the All-Volunteer Force, and many of them see the Army as a positive option. It is likely they these children serve out of patriotism and tradition along with the desire for a competitive compensation package, including a housing allowance and excellent health care.

In contrast, the number of Army recruits who had a grandparent who served is the same as their civilian peers. This demonstrates two things. First, it shows that when America had a draft Army during the Vietnam era, there was a much greater familial connection with the Army for all Americans. Second, the grandchildren of Vietnam veterans have not "inherited" the desire to serve nearly as much as the children of GWOT veterans. The reasons for this likely include a negative public perception of the draft Army and the Vietnam War. As the Vietnam veterans pass away, the only remaining familial connection to the Army for many Americans will decrease while the familial connection for GWOT families is increasing. This indicates the growth of a military caste and an increase in the civil-military gap.

The growth of the warrior caste is prevalent in the officer ranks. In response to an email questionnaire from the author in November 2017, Dr. Bert Huggins, Head of Research and Diversity at US Army Cadet Command, wrote the following concerning the view of the growing warrior caste among ROTC cadets and the general misperception of the Army among college students.

The size of the military as a footprint in America has dropped significantly overall. About 12% of students on college campuses have a parent who served. In 2001, that number was 23%. 37% of ROTC freshman cadets had a parent who served in the military. Compared to the general population on the campus, the chances of a Cadet having a parent who has served is three times as likely. Students do not know the difference between being an officer and a non-commissioned officer, or officer and enlisted. Around 15-20% think that you have to enlist before taking ROTC. They also are not sold on the idea that an Army officer earns a reasonable wage. Most of their information about ROTC comes from friends and fellow students, not Cadre or Cadets. Which means that the amount of misinformation outweighs correct information. By the time they figure all that out, they are close to graduation.¹⁶

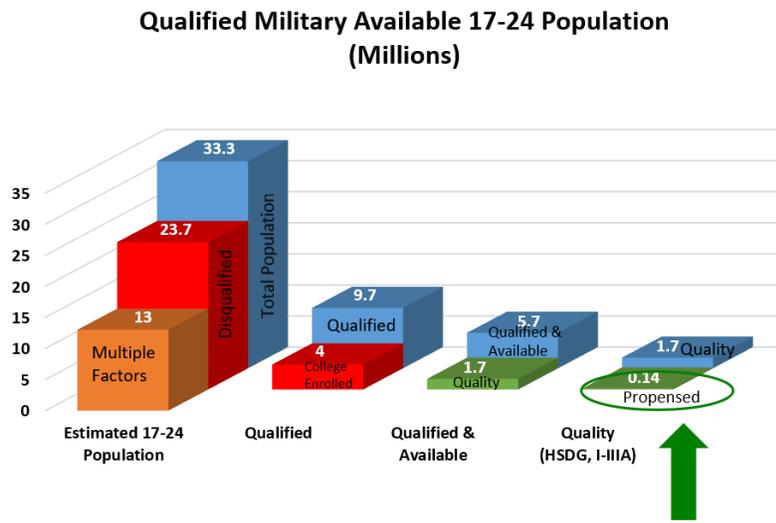
This information reinforces the reasons for the civil-military gap, including disconnection of college students with the Army, misperceptions of college students about the Army, and the growing warrior caste among military families involved in ROTC.

The fifth reason for the growth of the Civil-Military Gap is that the number of American youth who are qualified to serve in the Army is decreasing. Figure 3 compares the total number of American youth with those who are qualified and have the propensity, or desire, to serve. There are 33.3 million youth ages 17-24 in America. Only 9.7 million, or 29%, are qualified to serve. Of that 9.7 million, only 1.7 million are quality applicants who are not attending college, and of that 1.7 million only 136,000 have a desire to serve. The number of qualified applicants is decreasing, and the number and propensity of applicants from military families is increasing. "Propensity" is a recruiting term that refers to the level of desire a prospective recruit has toward joining the Army. This is a disturbing trend as the Army tries to connect with America to close the civil-military gap.

Only 29% Qualified to Serve

Disqualifying Factors

- Medical/Physical (30%)
- Drugs (30%)
- Conduct (10%)
- Dependents (12%)
- Overweight (31%)
- Mental Health (15%)
- Aptitude (9%)
- Multiple Reasons (2 or more of the above 39%)



Propensed, Quality 17-24 year old population = 136K

Figure 3. Qualification and Propensity of American Youth to Serve¹⁷

The current civil-military gap is a cause for concern, but the future looks worse. As veterans of the Vietnam War fade away, the percentage of Americans who know someone in the Army will plummet. This will reduce the connection of Americans to their Army even more.¹⁸ Additionally, the Millennial Generation is the least likely age group to be familiar with the military. During a recent survey, Millennials scored the lowest on questions determining familiarity with the military. Although Millennials have the most contact with current service members, they have the least knowledge of or connection with the military.¹⁹

The civil-military gap is present because of a disconnection of the Army with America that arises fundamentally because it is an All-Volunteer Force. This disconnection causes misperceptions among Americans about its Army. Because of these misperceptions, increasingly areas with military bases and a preponderance of

veterans in the rural South are over-represented in the Army. Increasingly, children of military families are joining the Army while the number of American youth qualified to join the Army is decreasing. These are the reasons for the civil-military gap, but more important are the effects that this gap is having on our nation.

Repercussions of the Civil-Military Gap

The repercussions of the civil-military gap are threefold. First, the civil-military gap is self-perpetuating and if left unchecked, the gap will continue to grow. Second, the civil-military gap affects the ability of the nation to make sound decisions on the employment of the military. Third, because of the civil-military gap an actual class divide is forming in America between those who have and have not served.

Repercussion 1: An Ever-Widening Gap

If Army leaders and American citizens do not take proactive steps to close the civil-military gap, the gap will naturally continue to widen. The gravest repercussion of the civil-military gap is that it is self-perpetuating and will naturally worsen over time. The graphic in Figure 4 depicts the civil-military gap consisting of four steps. First, Americans are disconnected from and thus do not understand the Army. Second, Americans from urban centers in the north, away from military bases, sparingly join the Army, while legacy soldiers and recruits from the rural Southeast join the Army in increasing numbers. Third, the Army becomes more insular and thus does not proactively communicate with or reach out to vast portions of America. Fourth, the cycle starts over with fewer Americans truly understanding their Army. The result of this cycle is a growing civil-military gap that affects how the nation develops policy.

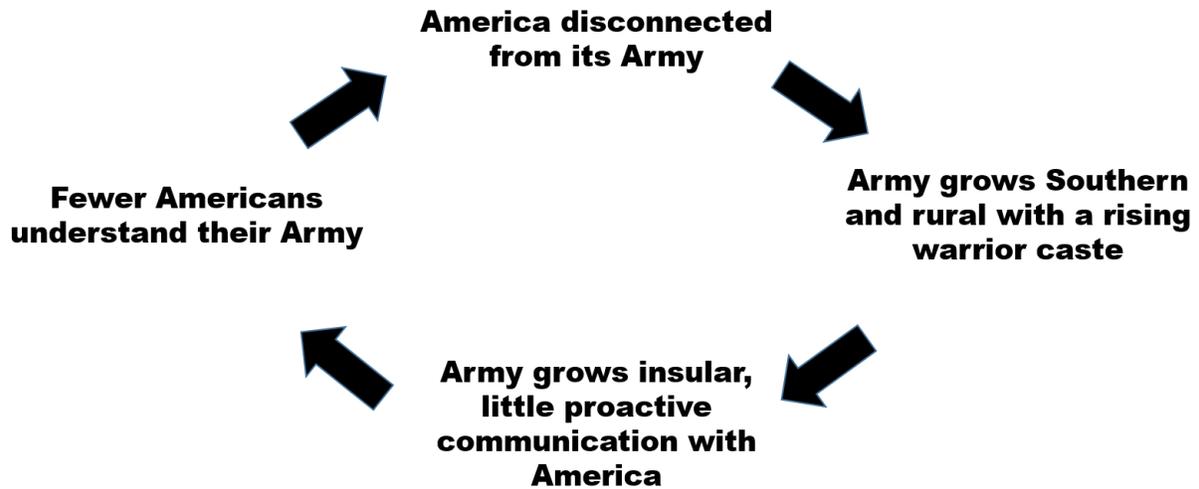


Figure 4. Cycle of the Growing Civil-Military Divide²⁰

Repercussion 2: Poor National Decision-Making

A large civil-military gap is prohibitive to sound decision-making by our national leaders. The distance between civilian policy makers and military leaders makes it difficult for these two key actors in national security decision-making to have sensible discourse on the employment of the military. This is a threat to soldiers on the battlefield and to US national security.²¹ The gap hinders sound decision-making in two ways. First, because the Army is an All-Volunteer Force, policy-makers can employ the Army with little accountability to the nation. If politicians were employing an Army consisting of draftees (including potentially their own children), they might be more hesitant to send the Army into battle. They would have to answer to the entire American public for this decision. However, since the Army is an All-Volunteer Force, they only have to answer to the small and increasingly insular group of Americans who choose to serve in the Army. This means there are “few consequences for the misuse of force” by America’s policy-makers.²² The All-Volunteer Force allows the public to remain indifferent to the

employment of the Army.²³ The citizens of the United States do not have to sacrifice when politicians send the Army to war: the All-Volunteer Force will take care of it.

Another factor that hinders the kind of productive dialogue between civilian and military leaders that result in good policy decisions is the growing lack of military experience in America's civilian leaders. In 1969, 75% of Congressmen had military experience. In today's 112th Congress, only 23% have military experience.²⁴ This lack of military experience in Congress causes Members to defer important decisions to the military. Charlie Lewis in his article, "A New Sparta: America's Threatening Civil-Military Gap," wrote, "When leadership lacks the most basic understanding of military institutional knowledge, it risks inadvertently placing too much authority in the hands of the military leaders who control the strings of military power."²⁵ From the White House to the junior congressman, it is political suicide for a politician to refute a military leader on a military subject.²⁶ "The military has become something of a priesthood. It is virtually worshipped for its admirable qualities while its less admirable ones are hardly mentioned or known. It has such standing that it is awfully hard for mere civilians, including the commander-in-chief, to question it."²⁷ President Obama experienced this when he tried to craft a new strategy for Afghanistan, but was unable to overcome the force of military leaders advocating a troop surge in Afghanistan. President Obama wanted a variety of options for the future of Afghanistan, but military leaders essentially cornered the president, leaving him only their desired option for Afghanistan.²⁸

Civilian leadership of the military is a foundational principle in America. The Founders deliberately created checks and balances to ensure the military would not

supplant civilian leadership in decision-making. The trend today is that many civilian leaders are dangerously hesitant to say no to the military. Civilian leaders need to be the honest brokers, but with little military experience, they are often reluctant to refute any positions represented by the military. This polarization among civil-military leaders is a stepping-stone on the way to the next repercussion of the civil-military gap, the growth of a class divide in America.

Repercussion 3: A Class Divide in America

As the civil-military gap widens among the military and policy makers there is a threat that a separate class will grow in America consisting of those who have served, distinguished from those who have not. As the Army continues to carry much of the burden of the nation in ground combat and soldiers increasingly only come from military families and from the Southeast, the “gap also may lead to a sense of isolation that can manifest as elitism.”²⁹ This could harken back to the days of fifth-century B.C. Sparta, where an elite class of warriors were born, bred, and trained to fight the enemies of the city-state. The Spartan warriors were above the people of Sparta. They received special rights, treatment, and deference from Spartan society. Mattis and Schake warn of this phenomenon in their introduction to *Warriors and Citizens*,

The military could even come to consider itself as a society apart, different from, and more virtuous than, the people they commit themselves to protecting, like praetorian guards at the bacchanalia. Or our military could begin to feel that society ‘owes’ them something, fostering entitlement attitudes that would chip away at the culture essential to retaining warriors in our military forces.³⁰

Although extreme, a separate class for the military in America is possible. Currently, fewer than 30% of Americans 17-24 years old can even qualify for service in the Army. From the highest levels, leaders rebuke civilians who dare challenge the

military. White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, defending President Donald Trump's interaction with a Gold Star mother, suggested to the press corps covering the story that "they were not merely incompetent to pass judgement on military affairs, but unworthy of doing so."³¹ An entitled and elite warrior class, at odds with civilian lawmakers, and distant from the citizens they serve would be terrible for the nation and at odds with the very Constitution that all Army leaders have sworn to uphold.

Operation Hometown Resolve: A Strategy to Close the Civil-Military Gap

With a disconnected American public, a rising warrior caste, a widening civil-military gap, and a host of international threats that will likely require a military solution, the outlook for the Nation's Army seems grim. To close the civil-military gap and ensure the Army is ready to defend the Nation, the Army must launch *Operation Hometown Resolve*. The ends of *Operation Hometown Resolve* are to stop the growth of the civil-military gap and instead increase the connection between America and its Army. In short, *Operation Hometown Resolve* seeks to change the perception of America about its Army, increase the geographical and social representation in the Army, and close the civil-military gap.

It may seem that the means for *Operation Hometown Resolve* are not present in an Army that is an All-Volunteer Force. However, the Army has powerful resources in the form of soldiers and veterans who live in almost every town in America. These people are part of organizations like the Army National Guard, the Army Reserve, ROTC Programs, Junior ROTC Programs, Army Corps of Engineers, veterans, veterans' organizations, soldiers studying at universities in fellowship and advanced civil schooling programs, and soldiers training with industry. This is an influential group of potential Army ambassadors, but the Army must connect them to develop synergy,

resource them properly, and charge them with the mission of proactively communicating to the American public. United States Army Recruiting Command is organized regionally across America and is best suited to assume responsibility for *Operation Hometown Resolve*.

General Milley told the Army at large to communicate proactively to the American public, but he did not specifically assign this mission to anyone. Thus, Army leaders are free to ignore this dictum because they are extremely busy and assume someone else will do it. A critical part of the means to *Operation Hometown Resolve* is to assign to this problem a commander and resource that commander to solve the problem. Recruiting Command is the critical means to accomplish the ends. Additional means are the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs (OCPA) and the Army Marketing Research Group (AMRG). All three of these organizations are excellent means to accomplish the strategic ends of *Operation Hometown Resolve*, as their missions are parallel in reaching America and America's youth with a positive message about the Army. Recruiting Command, with OCPA and AMRG in support, must work together in three critical ways to make *Operation Hometown Resolve* successful.

Step 1: Connect, Synergize, and Energize Army Entities Regionally

Recruiting Command Headquarters charges its battalions to conduct semi-annual Reserve Recruiting Partnership Council (R2PC) events. These are for the express purpose of gathering local Army entities to connect and network. These events are the core of the regional approach to closing the civil-military gap. The R2PC events facilitate connection between Army entities in the region. Once these leaders connect, they begin to communicate about their environment, mission, challenges, and successes. With communication comes collaboration as the different entities find ways

to help each other. That collaboration leads to synergy as leaders begin to share ideas, discuss lessons learned, and discover shared interests. The definition of synergy is “the interaction of elements that when combined produce a total effect that is greater than the sum of the individual elements.”³² None of Army entities in a given region is in the same chain of command. However, once they begin to network at well-run, well-resourced, stimulating, and succinct R2PC events, this synergy will develop naturally. Once they synergize, they need to be energized.

A goal often energizes individuals and groups. Once Army entities gather at R2PC events, each group needs to believe that it is in its best interest to proactively reach the American public. Army senior leaders can provide the vision for this goal by attending and speaking at R2PC events. This can be in person or through video or social media. Recruiting Command leaders can coordinate for Army senior leaders through the Meet Your Army program (covered in detail in Step 2, below). These senior leaders provide a draw to motivate all Army entities to attend, and they provide purpose and direction for the group to communicate with the American public.

After all leaders are connected, synergized, and energized, the focus of the R2PC turns to the calendar. The Recruiting Command Battalion HQ maintains the annual calendar of community events. Each Army entity is responsible for adding its events to the calendar. Then the group collaborates on who will contribute to each event and how to enable each event to reach the public in that area. Once all planned events are on the calendar, the discussion turns to proposed events that attendees deem necessary to reach the public. These are original ideas that are proactively seeking to fill in gaps in communication or connection with the public. Once the calendar is set with

confirmed and proposed events, the discussion turns to how to best boost and expand the reach of each event. Because the group is looking six-twelve month out, group members can request Army assets to add “sizzle” to events. These assets are controlled by the AMRG, like the Golden Knights Parachute team or Army Interactive Trailers, and this detailed calendar synchronization allows each Recruiting Battalion to request and obtain these assets far in advance.

Step 2: Proactive and Regionally Focused Communication and Community Outreach

Currently, Army Public Affairs (PA) personnel support Army units around the world. Army Public Affairs personnel do a good job communicating to Army internal audiences and reacting to external problems. Simply put, they help the Army “talk to itself” and react when there are negative stories in the civilian media, but they often struggle to communicate proactively to the American public. Additionally, there is little incentive for Army leaders to reach out and message to civilian media sources, but there is a tremendous amount of risk. Many Army senior leaders do not reward commanders at any level for reaching the American public, but if a commander commits a *faux pas* in the media a reprimand will be sure to follow. This is another factor contributing to the insular nature of the Army, which contributes to the civil-military gap.

A way to change this paradigm is to organize public affairs regionally and directly in support of Recruiting Command battalions. These public affairs personnel, and the Recruiting Command battalion leadership, would proactively communicate with the American public through print, radio, TV, social media, and direct contact events. They would use the twelve-month calendar to coordinate outreach events to reach the public with positive Army messages. The public affairs team would help prepare the right person, with the right outlet, and the right message. The PA team could draw from any

of the long list of Army entities in a region to carry the right message to the right audience. The decisive point is having a detailed calendar developed and synchronized at the R2PC events. This is what allows the PA team to identify, propose, and properly exploit each event. This would help close the civil-military gap, and directly help the USAREC battalions change the propensity of their target audiences to enlist.

In Figure 5, the AMRG describes the cycle of awareness and engagement that leads to a civilian joining the Army. In Steps 1 and 2, AMRG builds awareness and engagement with potential recruits. Then Recruiting Command and Cadet Command enlist the recruits in the Army. The area for improvement comes in “Step 3: Build Advocacy.” This step is where soldiers and veterans “build advocacy” in their communities by sharing their positive experiences in the Army. This personal approach is often better than media commercials concerning increasing the desire of an individual to serve or be an advocate for the Army. When soldiers and veterans do build advocacy by supporting and recommending the Army to the American public on the “loyalty loop,” it shortens the time to build awareness and preference and leads to a quicker activation and joining by the civilian. The regional approach, in which Recruiting Command enables regional Army entities and public affairs personnel to facilitate communication with local communities, is a practical way that the Army can operationalize and execute Step 3, to “Build Advocacy” and better recommend the Army to the American public.

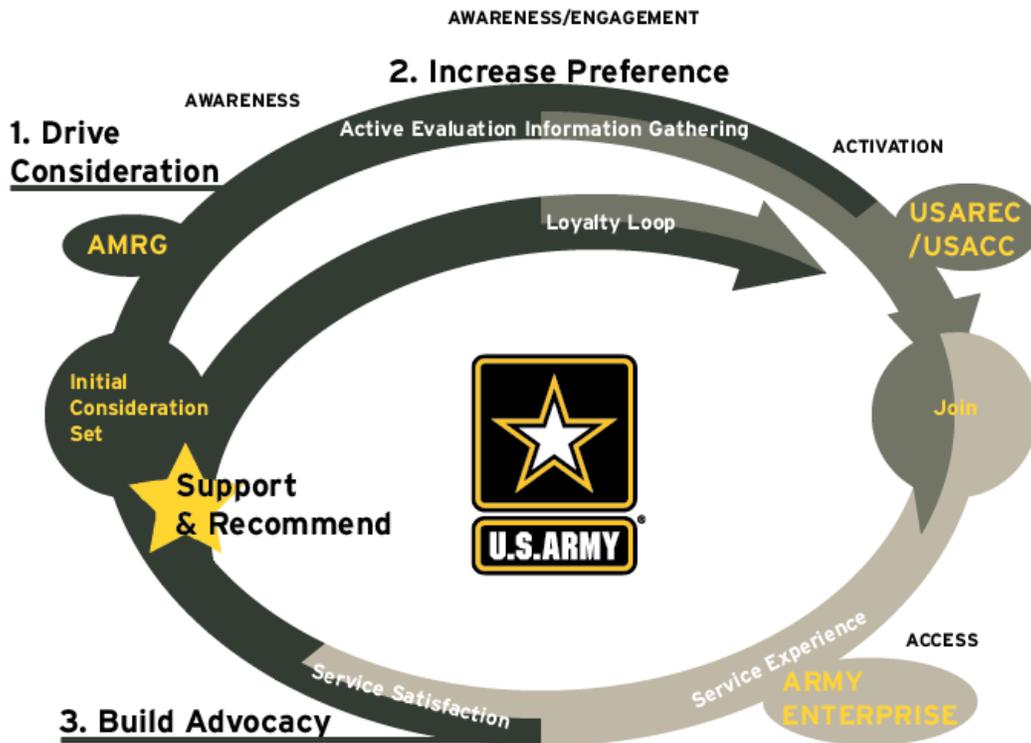


Figure 5. Army Marketing and Recruit Decision Journey³³

Another way that the public affairs team can help get the message to the American public is by enabling a cycle of messaging to get the maximum benefit from each event. For each event on the calendar, the PA team would conduct a 3-step cycle:

Step 1: Pre-event media build-up. In the weeks leading up to any given event, the PA team would target the proposed audience with social media posts, and pre-event media engagements.

Step 2: Event execution media expansion. During any event, the PA team would seek to expand the message through live streaming, social media posts, and direct media coverage of each event.

Step 3: Post-event follow-up. After the event, the PA team would continue to connect through audience by gaining social media followers and connecting the audience to Army entities in the area for continued relationship building. Currently, when there is an Army event in an area, it is a singular event with little preparation and little follow-up. This messaging cycle would greatly increase the effect of each regional event and help in communicating to the public.

The OCPA has a program called “Meet Your Army.” This program “put[s] real Soldiers out among the public, so civilians will get a chance to engage with them actively, rather than just seeing them on the television.”³⁴ Starting with general officers, “Meet Your Army” seeks to connect soldiers with the American Public. However, former Army Chief of Public Affairs Major General Malcom Frost stated, “It takes a tremendous amount of planning and understanding of who are in the communities the Army considers visiting.” Army leaders are already extremely busy, and many do not have the time to plan and execute these complicated events. Also, Army bases are not located in the very areas that “Meet Your Army” needs to target. An effective way to execute and expand the “Meet Your Army” program is through the Recruiting Command battalions. They are already located in all the critical areas where “Meet Your Army” needs to go. They have the needed connections with all Army entities through the R2PC events, and they have the annual calendar to determine when and where the “Meet Your Army” events should take place. With these items in place, the Recruiting Command battalions are in a good position to work with OCPA to schedule “Meet Your Army” events to proactively reach the American public and help close the civil-military gap.

Step 3: Deliver the Right Message to the American Public

With PA teams supporting USAREC battalions throughout America, they need the right message to change the perception of the American public and close the civil-military gap. The message needs to change from honor and gratitude, or “thank you for your service,” to identification and understanding of the Army. America is already extremely grateful for Chris Kyle “The American Sniper” and the wounded warriors on TV. Now, the Army needs to shape a message to maintain that gratitude but increase the identification with and understanding of their Army. Leader of AMRG Mark Davis,

aptly said, “America is thankful for their guard dog, but they don’t want to be the guard dog or their kids to be the guard dog.”³⁵

In Figure 6, the AMRG has an excellent model of Awareness – Engagement – Activation not only to change the perception of the American Public, but also to drive activation and behaviors. The USAREC battalions and their PA teams should adopt this model. The proper message changes throughout the three steps. The message begins in Steps 1 and 2 with challenging misperceptions about the Army, and then building awareness and increasing understanding. In Step 3, the message serves to engage the audience and validate the changed perception of the Army. In Steps 4 and 5, the message must begin to help the audience self-identify with the Army institution and ultimately activate the audience either to join the Army or to support or recommend the Army.

ENTERPRISE ARMY BRAND STRATEGIC JOURNEY ⁷

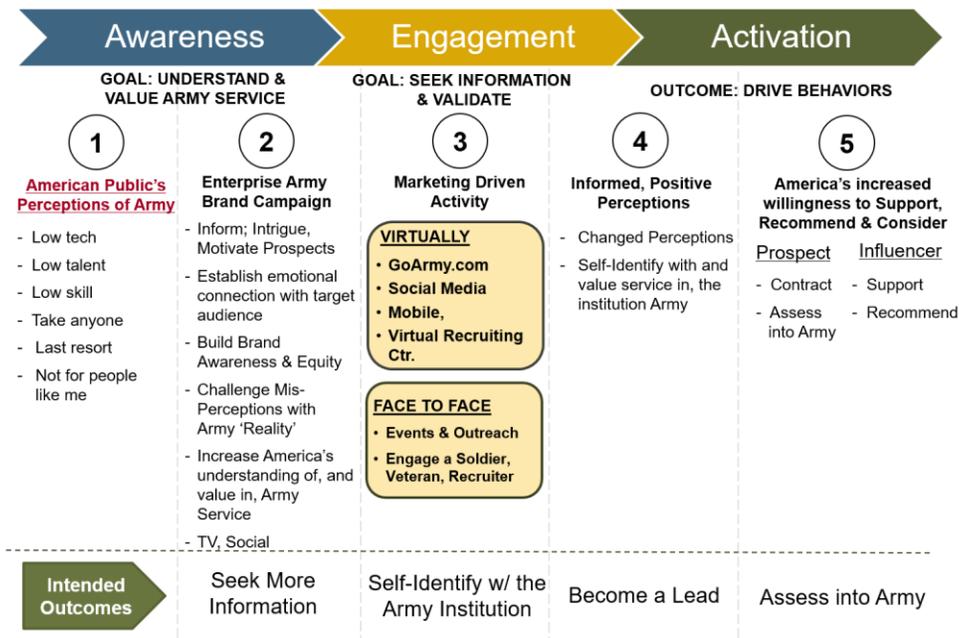


Figure 6. Enterprise Army Brand Strategic Journey³⁶

Conclusion

General Milley made communicating with the American public one of his top three priorities because the civil-military gap is a serious threat to America. If left unchecked, the gap will continue to widen, separating America from its Army. This will have many negative repercussions for America and go against the fundamental principles that the Founding Fathers used to build the nation. America needs a large and ready All-Volunteer Force to face the daunting array of current global threats.

Operation Hometown Resolve is a strategic solution to closing the civil-military gap. The Army already possesses the latent personnel and energy throughout America to reach the public, but must now channel these assets effectively. Recruiting Command must take the lead and use a regional approach to close the civil-military gap by first connecting, synergizing, and energizing all Army entities in a region. Then Recruiting Command must use these Army entities to proactively communicate and deliver the proper message to the American public. If the Army does this, the All-Volunteer Force can continue to exist and function to defend America and provide the security that supports the American way of life.

Endnotes

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