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societal rift is silently and rapidly widening between America and its Army. On one side is the Army, with a clear vision of its future that requires highly qualified volunteers. On the other is a youth population whose qualification and desire for service are quickly eroding. In the middle is a society that publicly applauds its soldiers but is not connected with, able to fund, or willing to provide real support to its Army.

Few seem fully aware of the expanding split. Problematically, the ongoing force reduction further masks their divergence. Unless we make significant adjustments and better communicate changing requirements, the Army of 2020 will not meet the quality Army our senior leaders envision or our country expects.

The military's senior leaders have laid out a clear vision: The future Army will be not only smaller but also more flexible and adaptable as it remains ready to meet worldwide contingencies. Tailored to cope with uncertainty and rapidly engage international threats and domestic emer-

bination. In the smaller, more highly talented future Army, we will need soldiers stronger across the physical, mental, emotional and cultural domains.

This is the hard fact: America will struggle to produce enough young men and women who meet Army qualifications. The demographic and cultural data are chilling. Today, only about one in four young Americans is qualified to serve in the Army. Obese and overweight youth are the fastest growing disqualified group. Moral and intellectual standards will screen out others, despite recent (albeit slight) improvements in high school graduation rates and a decline in the youth crime rate. Disqualifiers based on today's standards will erase any potential gain from a slight population increase among young adults projected between now and 2020.

Problems posed by demographics alone will require the Army to commit more time and resources to acquire quality soldiers. If the Army adjusts its social, emotional and character screening criteria to higher standards, we will find ourselves harder pressed to identify and recruit the enhanced talent our strategy and doctrine require. In addition, opera-

The Army We Need; The Army We

By **MG Allen Batschelet,**
Rick Ayer
and
COL Mike Runey

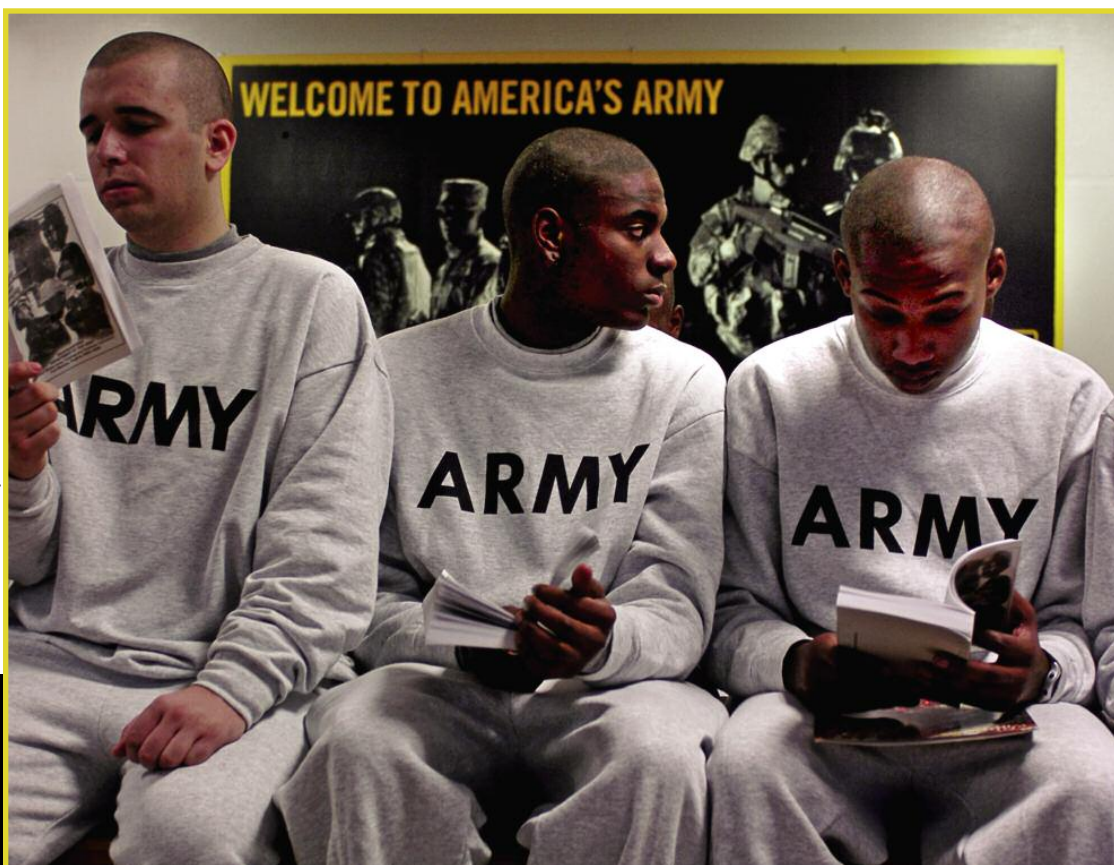
gencies, the Army must be both globally responsive and regionally engaged. In 2020, we will be the world's premier all-volunteer army, with our soldiers committed to the Army profession.

This vision is a tall order, and the soldiers we recruit must be up to the missions we will assign them. While the quality of today's recruit is very high in historic terms, the Army will require even higher quality in the very near future, with an expanded set of attributes. A solid score on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery with a high school degree will remain an entry requirement, but we also will need critical thinkers who are culturally attuned. While the majority of prospective soldiers must still meet basic physical standards, they must also be emotionally fit and fundamentally resilient. Also, although the Army fully subscribes to moral screening qualifications, we will attempt to assess prospective recruits' alignment with the Army's values. These extended markers of quality, mostly intangible, gain importance by 2020: self-discipline, trustworthiness, professionalism. While a few 18- to 24-year-olds surely possess these traits, they are even rarer in com-

tional recruiting demands—funding, personnel, technology—are increasing as available Army resources are decreasing. As a result, satisfying the Army's need for higher-quality talent will take more time, energy and effort. Even after we have identified these talented young Americans, will enough of them volunteer to serve as soldiers? The people who possess the qualities we seek have many options, and they know it. The Army is only one opportunity among many. How well will we compete?

Current research indicates not as well as we must. DoD regularly assesses the youth population's attitude toward military service. In the recruiting world, we call this attitude their propensity to serve. Today, only 13 of 100 think favorably of joining the military in general. When we look at those of high academic quality, that number drops. All four services and the Coast Guard are competing to find and recruit those with high academic quality who want to serve.

Among our service peers, the Army already works the hardest and spends the most to acquire talent. We also have the largest recruiting mission by far. Nevertheless, studies reveal that when young people ranked the services they felt



U.S. Army recruits await further in-processing after receiving their initial haircut during basic combat training at Fort Jackson, S.C.

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most favorable toward, the Army placed last (close behind the Navy). Even more troubling is they were most familiar with the Army. Another survey indicated young people viewed the Army as least prestigious, and the Army was selected last as their “service of choice.”

Despite these challenges, the Army has always capitalized on a few advantages. Although some Americans view the “olive drab” Army as boring or otherwise undesirable, they also see soldiers as the military population most closely associated with the general populace. The National Guard and Army Reserve’s presence across the country reinforces among our citizens that the Army most reflects America; this perception gives us access and trust in many parts of our country. We have also long relied on the link between military service and college education. Since 1986, the modern GI Bill has been the Army’s silver bullet in recruiting. The potential for a college degree at little to no cost has been decisive for many highly qualified young people. Our third recruiting strength has been to emphasize the power of being a veteran. We paint a picture to each young person that he or she will leave the service more disciplined, better de-

veloped and qualified, and attractive to civilian employers. Together, our broad appeal, college options and the benefits of being a veteran have proven powerful enough to get us the quality we need most of the time.

Yet recruiters are reporting young people and parents are finding other ways to pay for college, including federal loans and grants that inadvertently weaken the power of the GI Bill. The value of being a veteran is also eroding. While we continue to emphasize the benefits of service, employment struggles facing many veterans transitioning from the military undermine recruiting. This fact is reflected by data. In 2008, more than 75 percent believed military service would prepare them for a future career. Today, that percentage has dropped to 63, despite five years of tough economic circumstances and the conclusion of two long wars. To a young person today, being a veteran is not as good as it used to be.

This is not the first time societal demographics, propensity and the economy are all trending in the wrong direction for recruiting. In challenging times, Congress and the Army have approached the recruiting problem in three ways: lower the quality of our enlistees, buy the talent we need through incentives or increase propensity through advertising. The first is not an option based on the Army’s strategic direction; the latter two are costly. When we codify our higher-quality recruiting standards to build the Army of 2020, that talent will likely be even more expensive. Will sufficient resources be available? Considering the Budget Control Act, funding will remain a challenge.

Even if Congress provides new funding for the Army to

SGT Serina Glass instructs a private negotiating the "Victory Tower" during basic training at Fort Jackson, S.C.



U.S. Army/SSG Teddy Wade

recruit young people with the higher quality it will need, we are entering completely new ground as a country. Consider this: In the last 15 years, military pay has increased about 60 percent in real terms (that is, taking inflation into consideration). By 2007, Congress had nearly closed the gap with civilian pay that had emerged in the 1990s. Yet in those hard recruiting years, Congress enabled the Army to recruit with not only pay increases above inflation but also very high bonuses. Nevertheless, we still struggled to get the quality we needed. While the bonuses largely have been eliminated, pay has remained commensurate with civilian compensation. Some estimates claim that soldiers' pay is in the 90th percentile when compared to that of civilians with similar experience and education. With the benefits that accrue to military service, there is not much more to add without establishing a new paradigm for military compensation.

Another way to look at it is this: Today's soldier is already the most highly compensated in the history of the all-volunteer force, and we are still seeing signs of trouble in recruiting. When the Army requires a larger percentage of higher-quality recruits for the smaller, adaptable future force, we must re-examine resources, programs and personnel authorizations. The options that worked in the past will not likely be available to us in the future. We must adapt to the context we will soon be operating in to acquire the talent our Army needs.

Although Americans continue to support soldiers vocally and visibly, we must now ask them to extend their support by encouraging young men and women to join our ranks. Yellow ribbons and shouts of "Thank you for your service!" are always welcome, but they are focused on those already in our ranks. We need Americans to talk to those not yet

wearing our uniform. When will the American mothers and fathers, teachers and coaches, the civic leaders, and local government officials consistently and publicly encourage all young people to try to qualify to serve in our increasingly elite ranks? What will it take for the societal norm to become every adult encouraging a young man or woman to talk to a recruiter and attempt to qualify to serve?

As laid out in our security strategy, national leaders expect much of the Army and its soldiers, both current and future. The vision for strategic landpower and Army 2020 and beyond requires that we recruit a greater ratio of higher-quality soldiers than we do today. Is our government prepared to resource and empower the Army to attract and acquire that very highly talented group of people?

American society and national leadership must acknowledge a hard fact: The higher-quality men and women we will need won't need the Army. Trends show many won't want the Army either and will exercise other good options. To recruit these talented men and women, the American people, our national leaders and our Army must acknowledge the expanding rift and work together to reverse the trend.

If we do not, the Army we want will not be the Army we will get. Our way ahead with America's youth likely will be different from what it is today. In the interim, we must encourage and empower all young people to attempt to qualify to be soldiers. We must also be willing to work with those young adults who wish to join our Army but, for some reason, cannot—at least not yet. The future of our Army and our relationship with America as an all-volunteer force depend on our addressing these very real challenges *today*. Together, we can close the gap. ★

MG Allen Batschelet is the commanding general of U.S. Army Recruiting Command. Rick Ayer and COL Mike Runey are members of the Recruiting Command Initiatives Group, exploring long-term solutions to current and emerging challenges for Army Recruiting.