



THE LAND WARFARE PAPERS

No. 67 JULY 2008

The War on Terror and the War for Officer Talent: Linked Challenges for the U.S. Army

Kevin D. Stringer

A National Security Affairs Paper
Published on Occasion by

**THE INSTITUTE OF
LAND WARFARE**

ASSOCIATION OF THE
UNITED STATES ARMY
Arlington, Virginia

**The War on Terror
and the War for Officer Talent:
Linked Challenges for the U.S. Army**

by

Kevin D. Stringer

The Institute of Land Warfare
ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY

AN INSTITUTE OF LAND WARFARE PAPER

The purpose of the Institute of Land Warfare is to extend the educational work of AUSA by sponsoring scholarly publications, to include books, monographs and essays on key defense issues, as well as workshops and symposia. A work selected for publication as a Land Warfare Paper represents research by the author which, in the opinion of ILW's editorial board, will contribute to a better understanding of a particular defense or national security issue. Publication as an Institute of Land Warfare Paper does not indicate that the Association of the United States Army agrees with everything in the paper, but does suggest that the Association believes the paper will stimulate the thinking of AUSA members and others concerned about important defense issues.

LAND WARFARE PAPER NO. 67, JULY 2008

The War on Terror and the War for Officer Talent: Linked Challenges for the U.S. Army by Kevin D. Stringer

Dr. Kevin D. Stringer has served in leadership and staff positions in the 8th Infantry Division, the Southern European Task Force and European Command as an active and reserve component officer. A 1987 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, commissioned as an Aviation officer, he holds an MA in international relations from Boston University and a PhD in history/international security from the University of Zurich. He is a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, the Combined Arms Services Staff School, the Initial Entry Rotary Wing Aviator Course, and the Airborne, Air Assault and Jumpmaster courses.

Author of the book *Military Organizations for Homeland Defense and Smaller Scale Contingencies: A Comparative Approach* (Praeger Security International, 2006), he has also contributed articles to *Military Review*, *Joint Force Quarterly* and the *Canadian Military Journal*. A former Department of State Foreign Service officer, he works as an international banker in the areas of offshoring and talent development, and teaches as a Professor of Security Studies at the Baltic Defence College in Tartu, Estonia.

This paper represents the opinions of the author and should not be taken to represent the views of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, the United States government, the Institute of Land Warfare, or the Association of the United States Army or its members.

© Copyright 2008 by
The Association of the United States Army
All rights reserved.

Inquiries regarding this and future Land Warfare Papers should be directed to: AUSA's Institute of Land Warfare, Attn: Director, ILW Programs, e-mail sdaugherty@ausa.org or telephone (direct dial) 703-907-2627 or (toll free) 1-800-336-4570, ext. 226.

Contents

Foreword.....	v
Introduction.....	1
The Strategic Environment and the Challenge of Expansion	1
Definition and Philosophy of Talent Management	3
Officer Retention and Recommendations	4
Recommissions	7
Direct Commissions.....	9
Conclusions.....	10
Endnotes.....	11

Foreword

The war for personnel talent has a great impact on businesses and institutions globally, and the U.S. Army is no exception to this imperative. Officer talent is a critical success factor for winning the current war on terror. This paper proposes “best practice” talent management solutions for better staffing of the Army officer corps—both active and reserve—in order to field an expanded and skills- and capabilities-oriented force for the future.

According to the author, the Army is operating in an “old economy” personnel system in terms of recruitment, retention and, more broadly, talent and skill management. The pressures of the strategic threat environment of the future and the mandate to substantially increase the size of the Army in the next five years place inordinate strains on this archaic system to access and retain the right types of officers in the right numbers. The current and future challenge is to excel in attracting, developing and retaining the best people to ensure top organizational performance.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gordon R. Sullivan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

GORDON R. SULLIVAN

General, United States Army Retired

President, Association of the United States Army

July 2008

The War on Terror and the War for Officer Talent: Linked Challenges for the U.S. Army

Introduction

In a speech at Harvard University in 1943 Winston Churchill observed that “empires of the future will be empires of the mind.” He might have added that the battles of the future will be battles for talent.¹ In 1997, the consulting firm McKinsey conducted an important study entitled the “War for Talent,” which researched the subject of talent management and provided critical recommendations for the personnel management of any institution seeking excellence and ultimately success in its defined missions and tasks.² This research was updated in 2000 and formed the basis for a subsequent book on the subject.³

The lessons of this consultancy’s study are pertinent to all branches of the military and provide a useful prism for specifically examining the U.S. Army’s current officer management challenges and recommending much-needed improvements to how it retains and acquires its commissioned talent. Such changes could well be one of the main keys to victory in the continuing “Long War” against terrorism.⁴ Given the pressures of the strategic threat environment of the future, the central role played by landpower in current and future conflicts, and the mandate to substantially increase the size of the Army in the next five years, this paper proposes “best practice” talent management solutions for better staffing the officer corps—both active and reserve—in order to field an expanded and skills- and capabilities-oriented force for the future. The triad of recommendations consists of simple talent-oriented retention measures, a concerted recommissioning initiative, and expanded direct commissioning opportunities.

The Strategic Environment and the Challenge of Expansion

The strategic environment for the U.S. Army in the next two decades looks daunting. On 7 October 2007, the United States entered its seventh year of major combat operations in the global war on terrorism, making this the third longest war in American history after the Revolutionary War and Vietnam. This is also the first extended conflict since the Revolution to be fought with an all-volunteer force.⁵ According to the Army’s Chief of Staff, General George W. Casey, Jr., the United States should prepare for a “future of

persistent and protracted conflict.” In a 2007 speech at Harvard University, he highlighted the strategic environment by stating that the international trends of globalization, technology, demographics and resource competition have created breeding grounds for terrorists. General Casey stated,

As I look to the future . . . the trends are going in the wrong direction. . . . To prepare for such conflicts, the U.S. military will increase its size by 74,000 over the next three years. The Army also desperately needs more “cultural leaders” to help in urban warfare.⁶

The U.S. Army, in particular, seems to struggle on the personnel side to meet the demands of this protracted conflict. The problems are not fully transparent, as there are contradictory statements emanating from general officers and senior Defense Department officials about the true human state of the Army. In sifting through the official statements, it seems that the main conclusion is that there is something definitely wrong. General Casey warned that U.S. forces are overstressed. “I searched hard for a term to describe the state of the Army. The term I came up with is that we are ‘out of balance.’”⁷ The reality may be worse.

Indications mount that the current way of doing things is not working. Lieutenant General Douglas E. Lute, assistant to the President and deputy national security adviser for Iraq and Afghanistan, said he is concerned about the toll the war in Iraq and extended deployments are taking on U.S. forces. The man who is widely known as the “war czar” also said that from a military standpoint, a return to a draft should be part of the discussion.⁸ Congress is also concerned. Representative Ike Skelton, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, stated:

The Army has some of the finest people in the world, but I’m worried about them. I’m worried about your ability to retain them after so many rotations to combat that their heads must be spinning—particularly the mid-career sergeants, and the lieutenants and captains upon whom the future of this force depends. I’m worried about your ability to recruit them in the numbers we need, even as we grow the Army, without relying upon measures that threaten the quality of the force.⁹

As Representative Skelton alludes to, the strategic environment alone is not the only catalyst for a better officer talent management system. Other unique stressors on the Army’s commissioning programs include the expansion of the Army’s officer corps as part of the congressionally authorized mandate to increase the Army endstrength and the Army’s need for higher numbers of officers as part of its ongoing transformation effort to create more modular, quickly deployable units.¹⁰ The current mandate is to rapidly increase the U.S. Army by 65,000 regulars and 9,000 reservists by 2010, rather than by 2012 as originally planned.¹¹

Given these numbers and timing, and realizing how long it takes to build effective ground forces, the announced intention to expand them is best seen not as “relief” for forces rotating through Iraq and Afghanistan, but rather as a sensible way of hedging

against an uncertain—but possibly dangerous—future. However, it is a matter for debate whether the Army can reach the given endstrength figure and, if it can, what costs this will incur both in terms of achieving the target and then paying for a larger force. Most relevant for implementation is the fact that it takes time to build new units and the officers to command and staff them.¹² All of these new units—both combat and support—will require trained and experienced officers, some with skills not currently present in large numbers, to form their cadre.¹³ This point is a serious consideration if the Army is to avoid the “shake and bake” solutions offered by speeding up promotions or lowering promotion standards. Unfortunately, both these measures are already being used by the Army to cover shortfalls.¹⁴ With this background, the Army’s retention and acquisition of the right talent becomes a paramount concern for the future.

Definition and Philosophy of Talent Management

The talent war has a great impact on business and institutions globally. The challenge is to excel in attracting, developing and retaining the best. To start, the definitions of talent and talent management are necessary to understand the importance of personnel management change in the U.S. Army system. One simple definition of talent is the brainpower that gives the ability to solve complex problems or invent new solutions.¹⁵ Talent refers to those people who have high potential, scarce knowledge and skill or who can successfully lead transformation and change in the organization. Such individuals are usually sought after in the market, and their contributions to the business add direct value to its strategic or competitive positioning.

Talent management in the broadest possible terms is the strategic management of the flow of talent through an organization. Its purpose is to assure that the supply of talent is available to align the right people with the right jobs at the right time based on strategic business objectives. But talent management is much more than just another human resources process. It is a mindset that goes beyond the rhetoric toward a holistic and integrated approach to leveraging the greatest competitive advantage from people.¹⁶ It also refers to those special strategies an organization deploys to recruit, retain and develop its pool of top talent. Benchmark studies show that these strategies are typically highly innovative and are not in any way bureaucratic.

One of the biggest impediments to transforming the U.S. government for the Long War is personnel policies that were designed for a different kind of world with different kinds of enemies.¹⁷ The Army is operating in an “old economy” personnel system in terms of recruitment, retention and, more broadly, talent and skill management. The current military personnel system for officers of both components is based on a World War II conscription model. The task is to put bodies into slots, checking the boxes and flowing an officer through a career path. This system is characterized by generally short-term assignments, many of which are designated as branch qualifying and therefore allow little leeway if an officer wants to remain competitive for promotion. Finally, the structure places an emphasis on youth, which in a world of changing demographics and a need for skills and expertise that come only with age, is extremely short-sighted.

As the McKinsey study stated, “You *can* win the war for talent, but first you must elevate talent management to a burning corporate priority.”¹⁸ Unfortunately Soldiers, and by extension officers, are often viewed, especially by today’s Defense Department, as an “overhead expense, not a source of investment.”¹⁹ Equally, Army personnel managers look at officers as fillers of slots rather than talent to develop. To shift away from this current situation, the military personnel system needs to truly focus on the credo of former Army Chief of Staff General Peter J. Schoomaker, who stated, “The American Soldier remains indispensable. Our Soldiers are paramount and will remain the centerpiece of our thinking, our systems and our combat formations.”²⁰ Since talent management means being clear about the kinds of people that are good for the organization, a range of innovative channels is needed to bring them in, and an organization has to have a complete commitment to getting and keeping the best.²¹ With this in mind, this paper proposes talent focused solutions in the areas of retention, recommissioning and direct commissioning for improving the substance of the U.S Army’s officer force.

Officer Retention and Recommendations

It takes years to grow experienced leaders, which presents an officer career management challenge—officer retention. The important descriptor of the people factor is turnover. The downside of officer turnover is constant inescapable turbulence, because of the perpetual need for recruiting, training and assignment, which has a much greater effect on military organizations than on businesses. Closely associated is the seemingly never-solved problem of balance in career-long experiential and educational maturation to achieve sufficient numbers of qualified officers working in new technologies, foreign relations, strategy and the economics of defense.²² Ensuring the existing leadership stays “Army” is a difficult task during the best of times. As one senior officer noted, “Clearly, these are not the best of times.”²³

Unfortunately, the current retention issues are serious. If proactive measures are not taken to mitigate the adverse effects of this protracted global counterinsurgency, inadequate officer retention in an over-extended Army will result. The starting point for this discussion is in the intertwined area of accessions. Reduced officer accessions magnify retention issues. The Army has not been accessing enough officers from its Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) and U.S. Military Academy (USMA) sources. Army officials have stated that to meet their current ROTC goal they need at least 31,000 participants in the program, but in Fiscal Year 2006 there were only 25,100 participants.²⁴ Similarly for USMA, projections for newly commissioned officers show difficulties in the future. In FY 2005, USMA commissioned 912 officers, fewer than its mission of 950 officers, and its class of 2006 commissioned 846 graduates, short of the Army’s goal of 900.²⁵ Therefore, given the extended time horizon to recruit, educate and train junior officers, if large numbers of members of these reduced accession pools separate prematurely, this invariably results in a ripple effect in future Army readiness.²⁶

If attrition levels are high, this condition results in fewer officers available to meet the demand at the correct future grades, thus leaving critical positions unfilled or filled with less

experienced officers. Consequently, selection rates will far exceed the norm as promotion boards are then obligated to select proportionately greater numbers of “fully qualified” versus “best qualified” officers to meet minimum future requirements. Furthermore, promotion pin-on dates will be accelerated in an effort to “grow” officers earlier.²⁷ In terms of talent management, this means that the best performers are not differentiated from adequate and substandard performers, and good performers do not get enough duty time in formative assignments. Depending upon the grade and specialty, unprogrammed officer attrition can thus have a devastating effect on the Army, particularly in the technical, readily transferable skill-sets such as information technology, engineering, military intelligence and aviation.²⁸ The overall result of both falling accession and retention rates is a lower-quality officer corps for both generalist and specialist positions.

For retention focus, as noted in the McKinsey findings, it is the early and middle ranks of managers three to eight years out of college, their basic training already paid for, that represent a company’s investment in its future. Senior executives seldom notice them, and they may not feel connected to the organization; they are also more mobile and demanding.²⁹ This conclusion certainly finds its mirror in the U.S. Army. The 9th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (QRMC) recognized the inherent challenges of meeting manning requirements primarily at the early to middle ranks of officers in pay grades O-3 (captain) and O-4 (major).³⁰ And “connectivity” to the organization definitely seems to be important to this officer segment. Some junior and mid-level officers who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan have been particularly outspoken in their criticisms of the organization, saying the Army’s current leadership lacks a hands-on understanding of today’s conflicts and has not listened to feedback from younger personnel.³¹

As the corporate world shows, talented people in organizations give their best when they have confidence in managers who value their contributions—by actions, not just the right words. Winning the hearts and minds of talented people is not a matter of quick fixes, glib and easily broken promises or lip service. Commitment to talent management is a process based upon mutual respect and informed, intelligent professionalism. It is an area of leadership, perhaps more than most, where leader credibility and example are tested to the full.³² And this latter point seems to be where the Army apparently stumbles in its efforts to retain its future talent.

Certainly, the Army tries to retain experienced younger officers—recently offering \$35,000 bonuses to captains—who are leaving partly because of their extended deployments in war zones but also because they feel alienated from leaders who lack their combat experience.³³ The short-term fix to such an issue may be money, but the long-term solution is probably a fundamental revamping of the way the Army communicates with and properly mentors its junior and mid-rank officers. Every company needs to understand why its high performers are leaving. Attrition must be tracked by performance level. The common practice of tracking voluntary versus involuntary attrition is not good enough; it’s probably the high performers who are choosing to leave.³⁴ This may well be the case with the Army. “There are some great captains and majors who have great insight into [counterinsurgency]

warfare. They are not leaving because they don't have enough money; they are leaving because no one is listening to them. They don't trust the people above them," said an Army officer who served two tours in Iraq, speaking on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak on the record.³⁵

To address the retention issue, the U.S. Army Human Resources Command (HRC) needs to think more with a talent mind-set, identifying "at risk" officers early, before they resign. This sort of methodology is already used by innovative private-sector firms who need to hold on to their talent to maintain a competitive edge. For example, one of the oldest banks in Italy wanted a way to identify which of its employees were most likely to resign, because these people take their valuable knowledge and skills with them—assets that are expensive and time-consuming to quantify and replace. Discovering the underlying reasons that prompted employees to leave and then designing effective strategies that encouraged them to stay were the critical success factors for the bank. With predictive modeling capabilities, this bank was able to identify and predict the key employees most likely to leave and to act upon the information to retain them.³⁶

Such a methodology would be one way to proactively manage retention in the officer corps, and identify and keep talent for the future. In this aspect, the Army is more advanced than most private firms, as it already knows exactly where to focus its efforts. Most of the officer corps attrition occurs at two specific windows of opportunity: first, at the four-year point, or approximately seven months after these officers have been promoted to captain, and when most ROTC-commissioned officers complete their initial active duty service obligation (ADSO); and the second is at the five-year point when the USMA-commissioned officers have completed their ADSO.³⁷ Taking the latter group, officers educated at West Point are currently leaving at a rate not seen in 30 years, with the consequence that the Army has a shortfall of 3,000 commissioned officers—and the problem is expected to worsen.³⁸ USMA's continuation rate in FY 2005 was 62 percent—20 to 30 percentage points lower than the other service academies' continuation rates for the same fiscal year.³⁹

To address such attrition, three basic recommendations to stanch this outflow revolve around real mentoring and proactive communication. First, given the plethora of general officers in the Army, the first general officer in the chain of command should personally and regularly meet with "at risk" officers to mentor and counsel them on the very good career opportunities the military offers and to give them a sense of organizational belonging. This measure would align with comments found in the McKinsey article, where a senior executive of Arrow Electronics points out, "It's harder to quit if you are having lunch every quarter with your senior mentor." A talent-oriented institution should send its future human investments a clear message that they are valued: two very well-run companies discovered that several high performers had no idea they were highly regarded and were being groomed.⁴⁰

Second, when resignations of company-grade officers are submitted, Human Resources Command should have a generic process in place to pull the records, evaluate

the performance and the potential and, if a good officer, intervene to persuade him or her to stay. This intervention should occur via senior management—general officers—to preserve their future leadership cadres. A personnel officer who did this for then-Captain Eric Shinseki saved a transformational Army Chief of Staff for the force.

Third, based upon a proper analysis of resignation reasons, the Army should think strongly about “quality of life” retention options rather than only monetary bonuses or schooling. One idea would be to offer officers with families an 18- to 24-month stabilization tour in a training or nominative assignment after a combat tour. This offer would need to be accompanied with enough flexibility in the career and promotion system that such a tour is given credit equal to that of so-called “branch qualifying” positions.

Another option for a mid-career active duty officer, beyond current fellowships, might be to spend one to three years working for a large corporation to learn how industry handles issues ranging from logistics to personnel management.⁴¹ This would not only broaden an officer’s perspective, tap nonmilitary sources for new ideas and corporate best-practice, and stabilize the family, but it would also highlight the many benefits of a military career by allowing a direct contrast to be made. Again, talent management is not about lock-step career paths. Since keeping an already trained officer in the force is much cheaper than a new accession both from a pure cost perspective and from the qualitative aspects of talent development, such flexibility is just good business sense.

In the end, as the Government Accountability Office (GAO) study *Military Personnel: Strategic Plan Needed to Address Army’s Emerging Officer Accession and Retention Challenges* alluded to, the Army needs to look at the individual as talent, and not as a statistic in an aggregate.⁴²

Recommissions

Another grave issue with talent management in the officer corps is the manning gap created by ill-conceived personnel decisions in the aftermath of the Cold War. The Army experiences a shortfall of mid-level officers because it commissioned fewer officers 10 years ago due to the post-Cold War force reduction. Moreover, the Army projects that it will have 83 percent of the majors it needs in FY 2007 and, likewise, projects that the positions for majors in 14 Army general specialty areas (termed “branches” by the Army) will be filled at 85 percent or less—a level that the Army calls a critical shortfall.⁴³ The Congressional Research Service confirmed this finding and reported that for FY 2008, the Army’s projected shortage includes 364 lieutenant colonels, 2,554 majors and 798 captains.⁴⁴

Although the Army has developed several plans to address retention, most of them involve newly accessed officers and therefore will not be effective for the next 10 years. Many of these plans are also not prioritized or funded in the current budget. One alternative and pragmatic solution for this shortfall would be to access the already trained pool of Reagan-, Bush- and Clinton-era officers who staffed the 18-division force prior to the drawdown in the mid-1990s. Providing recommissioning opportunities for year group

1982 and forward for both active and reserve slots would be one way to systematically access already trained and acculturated talent.

Besides the immediate return on investment of readmitting members of this talent pool to the force, there may also be other benefits more aligned with the competencies needed for non-conventional warfare. McKinsey research has divided jobs into three categories: “transformational” (extracting raw materials or converting them into finished goods), “transactional” (interactions that can easily be scripted or automated) and “tacit” (complex interactions requiring a high level of judgment). The company emphasizes that “tacit interactions” are growing exponentially as the world becomes more complex.⁴⁵ Applying this view to the military, arguably, counterinsurgency falls heavily into the “tacit” range of interactions. These types of tasks seem best addressed with older age and broader experience beyond the military. In fact, scientific research suggests that social intelligence and diplomatic skills increase with age. Older soldiers are more stable in crisis situations. Experience within special operations units also suggests that more mature soldiers are better suited for fighting in complex human environments.⁴⁶ Thus, these older, more mature ex-officer pools would be one element with which to address the holistic talent needs of the officer corps. Proponents of the current system, which emphasizes youth, should note that Marshal Gustav Mannerheim of Finland and Marshal Henri Petain of France were in their 60s when they achieved their greatest military impact.

To implement the recommissioning effort for talent, a number of measures must be instituted since the current process is too cumbersome, not known to potential applicants, and not understood by a number of Army personnel experts. Some anecdotes provide a view to the current deficiencies. A West Point-educated officer who resigned in the mid-1990s as an Advanced Course-trained captain wanted to return to active service after 9/11. He was told that recommissioning was not possible and was advised to enlist as a sergeant.⁴⁷ Similarly, an ROTC-accessed officer who had resigned as a captain, and in his civilian career had gained extensive regional and language expertise in Latin America, was given the same message.⁴⁸ This would be the corporate equivalent of rehiring an experienced mid-level manager as a clerk in the mailroom.

As for the bureaucracy of the current process, a West Point-educated, Command and General Staff Course (CGSC)-trained aviator was required to fill out a cumbersome packet for recommissioning despite the fact that HRC already had his complete records and clearance details. No website information was available and he only received a telephone number and point of contact from an active-duty colleague. When he called and referred to his existing files that would preclude most of the application process, he was told that the process does not allow for this and requires an analyst to check off all of the items in the submitted packet and to reject it if something was missing.⁴⁹ Considering the cost of graduating a USMA cadet at \$349,327, plus this candidate’s pilot training, such a bureaucratic approach to “rehiring” would either get the head of a corporate human resources department fired or the whole process outsourced to a professional HR company who could manage it more effectively.⁵⁰

To address the aforementioned deficiencies, the Army could market the recommissioning option via the Recruiting Command to this already trained pool of talent and provide comprehensive website information and outreach for application. Furthermore, HRC could simplify the process by requiring an undemanding application that focuses on the civilian skills and experiences gained since the officer left service. The military records could be accessed by the officer management area. Medical physicals could be scheduled after a provisional commissioning that makes finalization dependent upon a clean bill of health. Security clearances could then be done once the officer is recommissioned.

Particularly for the recommissioned officers, the system must be reconfigured to get the maximum out of highly skilled and trained talent. For those who cannot or do not want to be “professional” reservists, this means greater flexibility to participate for shorter times. Innovations such as limited mobilization periods of 90 days would be options. For those who do make the Army a full-time profession again, greater benefits in the form of reduced retirement, and career perspectives as a reserve officer on active duty are needed.⁵¹ Again, talent management is more about skill contribution—both experiential and specialized—than about mere longevity of tour.

Direct Commissions

As a result of its unique requirements and responsibilities, the Army maintains an essentially closed personnel system for the active component wherein virtually all personnel enter at the lowest officer grade, receive training, and rise through the ranks over time based on promotion potential and predetermined officer promotion selection windows based primarily upon time in service.⁵² Leaders are selected and promoted from within the Army. The lack of lateral entry into the military is one of the key points differentiating military service from the civilian sector.⁵³ Officers are commissioned out of ROTC from a university, the U.S. Military Academy or Officer Candidate School (OCS) and then indoctrinated in the “tribe” with skills and competencies acquired through a number of schools and on-the-job training assignments. With the changing threat and global environment, this process has limitations, especially when it comes to accessing specific skills. Current conditions and future contingencies necessitate a reevaluation of this approach and a more extensive use of direct commissions to man the force.

This measure aligns well with industry HR best practice. Even where the dominant strategy is to spot talent early and train it within, companies should consider regularly hiring executives from outside. Rather than seeing this as a failure of the internal development pipeline, they should view it as a way to accommodate rapid growth, refresh the gene pool and calibrate the internal talent standard.⁵⁴ Such outsiders bring broader skills and new insights to the benefit of the organization.

Currently, the Army directly commissions only officers with particular professional skills, e.g., physicians, dentists, nurses, lawyers and chaplains, who do not need to attend the major commissioning programs. The global counterinsurgency has enlarged the need for many skills beyond the current Army officer inventory. The solution would

be to expand direct commissions to address the need for language, cyber, regional and thematic skills. One identified skill need for the Army is the recruitment of more regional experts and specialized social/cultural anthropologists as advisers of officers in all leading positions of a counterinsurgency. To source 50–100 experts in this field, an officer's direct commission and rank in the reserve component and a grant for future research are obvious incentives.⁵⁵

In a similar vein, the armed forces also need to promote linguistic knowledge. Such skills are to be found primarily in foreign area officers, but that is another career field whose practitioners are traditionally seen to be committing “career suicide.” The military needs to increase the ranks of foreign area officers and to provide more rewards for their much-needed service. The military will have a hard time prevailing in today's war as long as less than one-half of 1 percent of all servicemembers have any grasp of Arabic.⁵⁶ Direct commissions would be an effective way to solve this conundrum, and one additional incentive to attract such highly qualified civilians would be to use the Uniformed Services Pay Act of 1958 (H.R. 11470) to offer special pay for those potential officers who have unusual or critical skills.⁵⁷

It must be clear to personnel managers, however, that these direct-commissioned men and women are inducted not as generalists, but as specialists to enhance and extend the Army's reservoir of skills needed for the complexities of counterinsurgency and the fight against terrorism. Hence they will need tailored career paths and incentives for promotion that will be dissimilar to those of an officer from one of the standard branches and sources of accession. This requires a shift to a tailored, talent-oriented system rather than a “cookie cutter” personnel approach.

Conclusions

The war for talent must be taken seriously.⁵⁸ The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have clearly proven that a human approach to future conflicts is now the Army's most glaring shortcoming and greatest challenge.⁵⁹ The key to talent management reform for the Army is to start now. The coming war for talent may seem like a crisis, but like any crisis, it's also an opportunity to seize—or to squander.⁶⁰ The Long War can be won only by harnessing the social and human sciences as the essential amplifiers of military performance.⁶¹ Shifting to an organization that values talent and manages it accordingly would be the first step in this direction. Through application of simple retention measures, recommissioning of ex-officers and widening of the direct-commissioning opportunities for unique skills as highlighted in this monograph, the Army would initiate steps toward true talent management. In the end, superior talent will be tomorrow's primary source of competitive advantage⁶²—both in the corporate board room and on the battlefield.

Endnotes

- 1 Adrian Wooldridge, “The battle for brainpower,” *The Economist*, October 5, 2006.
- 2 See Elizabeth G. Chambers, Mark Foulon, Helen Handfield-Jones, Steven M. Hankin and Edward G. Michaels, “The War for Talent,” *The McKinsey Quarterly* 1998, number 3, pp. 44–57.
- 3 See Ed Michaels, Helen Handfield-Jones and Beth Axelrod, *The War for Talent* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 2001).
- 4 Bradley Graham and Josh White, “Abizaid Credited With Popularizing the Term ‘Long War,’” *The Washington Post*, February 3, 2006; p. A08, online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/02/AR2006020202242.html>.
- 5 The Honorable Pete Geren, Secretary of the Army, Testimony, House Armed Services Committee, United States House of Representatives, September 26, 2007, online at <http://www.army.mil/speeches/2007/09/26/5082-secretary-of-the-army-statement-before-the-us-house-of-representatives-armed-services-committee-on-the-armys-strategic-imperatives/>.
- 6 Daniel I. Brenner, “General Warns U.S. of Future Global Conflict,” *Crimson*, November 16, 2007.
- 7 *Ibid.* Casey also said this in an earlier speech. See General George W. Casey, Jr., “Persistent Conflict: The New Strategic Environment,” Address, Los Angeles World Affairs Council, September 27, 2007, online at <http://www.lawac.org/speech/2007-08/CASEY,Gen.George2007.pdf>.
- 8 “War Czar Concerned over Stress of War on Troops,” NPR, August 10, 2007, online at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12688693>.
- 9 Chairman Ike Skelton, Opening Statement, Full Committee Hearing on the Army’s Strategic Initiatives, House Armed Services Committee, September 26, 2007, online at http://armedservices.house.gov/apps/list/speech/armedsvc_dem/skeltonos092607.shtml.
- 10 Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Military Personnel: Strategic Plan Needed to Address Army’s Emerging Officer Accession and Retention Challenges*. GAO-07-224. Washington, D.C.; January 2007, p. 20, online at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07224.pdf>; and “Secretary Gates Recommends End Strength Increases,” U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), News Release, No. 029-07, January 11, 2007, online at <http://www.defenselink.mil/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=10388>.
- 11 See, for example, “U.S. army expansion set to speed up,” BBC News, October 11, 2007, online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7039331.stm>, accessed January 12, 2008.
- 12 See Carl Conetta, “No good reason to boost Army, Marine Corps end strengths,” Project on Defense Alternatives Briefing Report No. 20, 31 January 2007, p. 1, online at <http://www.comw.org/pda/fulltext/0701br20.pdf>.
- 13 See International Institute for Strategic Studies, “Expanding the U.S. Army,” *Strategic Comments*, vol. 13, issue 1, February 2007.
- 14 For example, the Army has reduced the promotion time to the rank of major (O-4) from 11 years to 10 years and has promoted 97 percent of eligible captains to major—more than the Army’s goal (see GAO, *Military Personnel: Strategic Plan Needed to Address Army’s Emerging Officer Accession and Retention Challenges*, GAO-07-224, p. 27). It has also decreased the promotion timeline to captain from 42 months to 38 months and has lowered standards for promotion. These changes are set in a historical context wherein the goal is to promote only 90 percent of all eligible officers. Besides majors, in recent years the Army has promoted 98 percent of eligible lieutenants to captain. This artificially raised level of promotion rate raises the question whether the truly high performers are being promoted or if it has just become an exercise in filling the empty officer

slots to compensate for reduced accession and higher attrition rates—both characteristics of organizations that are losing the war for talent.

- 15 Wooldridge, “The battle for brainpower.”
- 16 Rhea Duttagupta, “Identifying and managing your assets: talent management,” PricewaterhouseCoopers, London, undated, online at http://www.buildingipvalue.com/05_SF/374_378.htm, accessed November 20, 2007.
- 17 Max Boot, “The Right Promotions,” *Contentions*, November 19, 2007, online at <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/blogs/index.php/boot/1335>.
- 18 Chambers, *et al.*, “The War for Talent,” p. 46.
- 19 Major General Robert H. Scales, Jr., Statement for the Record, Senate Armed Services Committee, April 25, 2007, online at http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/congress/2007_hr/070425-scales.pdf.
- 20 Peter J. Schoomaker, 35th Chief of Staff, Army Arrival Message, August 1, 2003, online at <http://www.army.mil/leaders/csa/messages/1aug03.htm>, accessed November 24, 2007.
- 21 Chambers, *et al.*, “The War for Talent,” p. 53.
- 22 Adapted from Captain Wayne P. Hughes, Jr. (USN), “A Bimodal Force for the National Maritime Strategy,” *Naval War College Review*, vol. 60, no. 2, Spring 2007, pp. 29–47, specifically p. 43, online at <http://www.nwc.navy.mil/press/review/documents/NWCRSP07.pdf>.
- 23 Colonel Kevin M. Badger, “Officer Attrition: Impact of Combat Deployments and Compensation on Retention,” U.S. Army War College Strategy Research Project, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA, May 2004, p. 12, online at <http://stinet.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA423361&Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf>.
- 24 GAO, *Military Personnel: Strategic Plan Needed to Address Army’s Emerging Officer Accession and Retention Challenges*, GAO-07-224, p. 6.
- 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22.
- 26 See Badger, “Officer Attrition,” p. 3.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 Chambers, *et al.*, “The War for Talent,” p. 56.
- 30 Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel Readiness, *Report of the Ninth Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation* (Washington, D.C., 2001), Executive Summary.
- 31 Ann Scott Tyson, “Petraeus Helping Pick New Generals,” *Washington Post*, November 17, 2007, p. A01.
- 32 Duttagupta, “Identifying and managing your assets.”
- 33 Tyson, “Petraeus Helping Pick New Generals”; and Lisa Burgess, “Army Captains Offered up to \$35,000 to Stay,” *Stars and Stripes*, September 19, 2007, online at <http://www.military.com/features/0,15240,149817,00.html>, accessed November 26, 2007.
- 34 Chambers, *et al.*, “The War for Talent,” p. 56.
- 35 Tyson, “Petraeus Helping Pick New Generals.”
- 36 “How to Predict if your Best Employees are about to Walk Out the Door: SAS Human Capital Management helps Banca Carige to retain employees and save costs,” SAS Success Stories, 2007, online at <http://www.sas.com/success/carige.html>, accessed November 19, 2007.

- 37 Badger, "Officer Attrition," p. 2.
- 38 Peter Beaumont, "Fatigue cripples U.S. Army in Iraq," *London Observer*, August 12, 2007.
- 39 GAO, *Military Personnel: Strategic Plan Needed to Address Army's Emerging Officer Accession and Retention Challenges*, GAO-07-224, p. 7.
- 40 Chambers, *et al.*, "The War for Talent," p. 56.
- 41 See William Navas, Jr. Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, "A New Order of Things," *The Officer*, October 2007, pp. 44–46, specifically p. 54, online at http://www.roa.org/site/DocServer/0710_officer.pdf?docID=3741.
- 42 GAO, *Military Personnel: Strategic Plan Needed to Address Army's Emerging Officer Accession and Retention Challenges*, GAO-07-224.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 44 The shortfall in line officers includes infantry, armor, air defense, aviation, field artillery, engineer, military intelligence, military police, chemical, ordnance, quartermaster, signal, transportation, adjutant general, and finance. See Congressional Research Service, *Army Officer Shortages: Background and Issues for Congress*, RL33518 (Washington, D.C.: July 5, 2006).
- 45 Wooldridge, "The battle for brainpower."
- 46 Scales, Statement for the Record, SASC, April 25, 2007.
- 47 Personal interview.
- 48 Personal interview.
- 49 Author's personal experience.
- 50 The Government Accountability Office fixed the cost of a USMA graduate at \$349,327. See Government Accountability Office, *DOD Needs to Enhance Performance Goals and Measures to Improve Oversight of Military Academies: Report to the Subcommittee on Defense, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Accountability Office, September 2003), online at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d031000.pdf>.
- 51 Colonel David Smith, "U.S. Reserves at Crossroad: Moving from a Militia toward a Standing Armed Force," *The Officer*, March 2006, pp. 37–40.
- 52 *Report of the Ninth Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation*, p. 16.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 54 Chambers, *et al.*, "The War for Talent," p. 54.
- 55 See Beatrice Heuser, "The Cultural Revolution in Counter-Insurgency," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1, February 2007, pp. 153–171, specifically p. 170.
- 56 Max Boot, "Send the State Department to War," *The New York Times*, November 14, 2007, online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/14/opinion/14boot.html>.
- 57 *The Uniformed Services Pay Act of 1958*, Public Law 85-422, United States Code Congressional and Administrative News, 85th Cong., 2d sess., 1958.
- 58 Wooldridge, "The battle for brainpower."
- 59 Scales, Statement for the Record, SASC, April 25, 2007.
- 60 Chambers, *et al.*, "The War for Talent," p. 57.
- 61 Scales, Statement for the Record, SASC, April 25, 2007.
- 62 Chambers, *et al.*, "The War for Talent," p. 48.

