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Defense alters policy on question of counseling for clearances.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates announced May 1 that applicants for security clearances will no longer have to state whether they sought counseling after serving in a combat zone. Speaking to a group of junior officers and later at a press conference at Fort Bliss, Texas, Gates called the question on mental health counseling “infamous” on the Office of Personnel Management’s Questionnaire for National Security Positions. He said, “I share your frustration” at the slow pace of change in the department in this and other areas. Gates said the review of the question took eight months. The question asked whether counseling had been sought in the past seven years. If the applicant said yes, he or she had to list names, address and dates they sought counseling unless it was for marital, family or grief counseling.

The new question allows applicants to say no if the treatment was “strictly related to adjustments from service in a military combat environment.” Army officials said that would include seeking counseling for “the stresses of preparing for, be engaged in, of coming back from deployment,” including those missions providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

About 1.5 million service members out of more than 2 million serving have security clearances, defense officials said. The change also applies to DoD civilians and contractors. At this point, defense officials said the change in policy does not apply to other federal agencies and departments.

That same day at the Pentagon, Adm. Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called the move “a significant change.” He added, “Good people, many of whom have seen combat up close and faced its grim reality, whose courage is absolutely unquestionable and who deserve only the best physical and mental health care we can provide, are actually willing to deny themselves that care out of the fear that doing so hurts them and their families in the long run. Nothing could be further from the truth, and it’s time we got over that.”

“We know that early intervention makes all of the difference,” Col. (P) Loree Sutton, director of the Defense Center of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, said. “This is a readiness issue, it’s a leadership issue, it’s a fundamentally human issue” in getting the word out “that seeking health is a sign of strength.”

Institutional Army launches transformation initiatives.

The Army’s G-4 said that although the operational Army is stressed and stretched, it is continuing to transform, while the institutional Army “hasn’t been changed since 1972.” Speaking at the Association of the United States Army logistics symposium and exhibition in Richmond, Va., Lt. Gen. Ann Dunwoody asked, “What are the old processes that need to be transformed,” so the institutional Army is thinking how to work collaboratively and not in stovepipes.

Dinner speaker William Bellows, a mechanical engineer with Pratt & Whitney, also issued a warning on thinking in traditional ways. He said enterprise organizations realize that “working independently, one-plus-one equals two in silos. [But] it could be zero.” Organizations and individuals can “run into problems by seeing things only in black and white,” rather than in a continuum of grays.

“The Army’s budget last year was \$250 billion,” when the base budget and the emergency spending appropriations are added together, Dunwoody said. “We need an enterprise approach” in using business techniques inside the Army. Her deputy, Maj. Gen. Vincent Boles, said it was a matter of knowing “who’s got what,” and being able to get “the same common operating picture across the Army.”

Looking at the supporters of the warfight in a slightly different way over the same time was Michael Kirby, deputy under secretary of the Army for business transformation. “I say we optimize” rather than transform, but now that innovation “curve has been lifted” for the two-thirds of the Army that is not operational. “We need to run the business [side of the Army] like we run the warfight,” Kirby said.

But the challenges go beyond the Army, the director for logistics in the Defense Department said. Lt. Gen. C.V. Christianson noted, “We’ve got to get it right across the board in DoD.” Adding, “We need to see not only requirements, but resources and how they are connected” from personnel management to medical and engineering. He said that relationships needed to be more clearly defined such as those between the Army, responsible for distribution of equipment using surface transportation, and Transportation Command, responsible for bringing equipment into theater via air or sea. “We’ve got to see if the customer got” what he or she asked for in a time-definite manner.”

Industry, military changed to fight war on terror. “The war on terror changed the game for industry and the Army,” the president of BAE Systems, land and armaments operations, told more than 400 attendees at a special Association of the United States Army symposium and exhibition on logistics May 14.

Linda Hudson, speaking in Richmond, Va., said, “New systems are being fielded at record rates” and “systems we field this week are not the same as the ones we fielded last week.” She said communication has been a challenge with such a fast pace marking acquisition and stressing an ever-increasing supply chain with multiple versions of a single system.

Using the Defense Department’s number one priority, Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles, as an example, Hudson said BAE has produced 2,800 MRAPs in eight variants in the past 14 months. Two more variants will be added soon. “Commonality and compatibility are huge logistics drivers,” she said.

Some of the most important partnering is with depots, such as Letterkenny in Pennsylvania where the vehicles are assembled and Red River in Texas where an MRAP University has been established.

The impact of the rapid fielding of the MRAP is also being felt in the production of other vehicles, such as the 40,000 in the Family of Medium Tactical Vehicles already fielded with 7,000 of those deployed to Afghanistan or Iraq.

Hudson said recapitalization work on legacy systems, such as Bradley fighting vehicles, has also been affected “because of the very tight time lines driven by the deployment schedule” and the units’ needs to have the equipment in place for training before deployment.

Petraeus expects troop cuts in fall. Gen. David Petraeus told the Senate Armed Services Committee that he expected to make recommendations on future troop withdrawals from Iraq before he steps down as commander of coalition forces there in September.

Testifying May 22 at his confirmation hearing to become Central Command commanding general, he said, “My sense is I will be able to make some recommendations” on further reductions by “either re-deploying or not deploying by fall.”

Adding, “I don’t want to imply that that means a [brigade combat team] or a major combat formation, although it could.”

By July, U.S. force levels are expected to be between 130,000 and 135,000 service members, down from the 165,000 deployed to Iraq to improve security in and around Baghdad earlier this year.

Operations field manual recognizes difficulty in transitioning operations. The deputy commanding general of the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command said the Army’s newest field manual on operations recognized the difficulty the armed forces and other governmental and non-governmental operations have had in transitioning from either offensive or defensive operations to stability operations.

Speaking May 14 in Richmond, Va., as part of an Association of the United States Army symposium and exhibition on logistics, Lt. Gen. David Valcourt said that in National Training Center rotations in the past, “We always found the transition ... the most challenging.” Adding, “If we thought it tough back then, we only have to look at Iraq and Afghanistan now.”

He said that all Army units will have both cultural and language capabilities in place before they deploy, and all Army leaders will possess culture and language capabilities before they deploy.

Valcourt said that the use of civilian anthropologists as part of human terrain teams inside brigade combat or regimental brigade combat teams has dramatically improved the units’ and leaders’ understanding of socio-cultural factors that come into play during deployments.

He said that more federal agencies are attending Army schools, such as the Command and General Staff College, and this classroom interaction helps the students overcome jargon difficulties between departments when they are operating together in the field.

Valcourt said the new field manual on training, 7-0, would be out relatively soon but will not be fully rolled out until dwell time for soldiers returning home from deployments reached 18 months.

For the latest developments on Capitol Hill, check out the AUSA website: www.ausea.org. For AUSA’s electronic legislative newsletter, e-mail Bill Loper at: bloper@ausea.org.

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Restoring balance, retaining captains were topics of discussion. Although the larger theme was looking from different perspectives at the Army as an enterprise at a special Association of the United States Army symposium and exhibition on logistics, restoring the Army to balance and the retention of captains were subjects that crept into panel discussions and addresses.

Speaking May 14 in Richmond, Va., Col. Audrey Piggee, former commander of the 15th Sustainment Brigade at Fort Hood, Texas, said retaining captains would be helped by giving them “an opportunity to take a knee so we can give them a certain amount of control” over their personal lives and their careers. He said the Army needed to re-examine the timelines that have been established for career progression. “Give these young captains options” and “other alternatives to get to field grade.”

“There has to be some space to step out and step back in refreshed,” Col. Stephen Lyons, commander of Task Force All American in the 82nd Airborne Division, said.

While attrition of captains is following historic norms, Maj. Gen. Vincent Boles, assistant deputy chief of staff, G-4, said, “This is a captain’s fight.” Adding, Gen. George Casey, Army chief of staff, approached two of his predecessors and asked how they knew at what time the Army became hollow in the 1970s, both said: “When we lost the captains and the NCOs.”

The speakers were picking up on testimonies from Casey and Army Secretary Pete Geren delivered several weeks earlier. “We have to retain more captains to make more majors,” the Army chief of staff told an important Senate subcommittee during an April 25 hearing. Gen. George Casey said retention of captains was a vital step in modularizing the Army into brigade combat teams, which will require more majors. “It is something we have to work to mitigate and it will take us a couple or three years,” Casey said.

Acting Army Secretary Pete Geren said during the Senate Armed Services Airland Subcommittee hearing that the Army would soon be offering \$20,000 bonuses for the first time to selected captains in exchange for a three-year commitment beyond their initial obligation. In the recent past, the Army has offered captains choice of branch, post of choice and graduate education in exchange for a longer commitment to remain on active duty.

Another reason the Army is short of majors now, Casey said, was the decision in the 1990s not to access as many junior officers through ROTC because of the Army’s downsizing from 535,000 soldiers in the active force to 482,000.

“The majors today came in ’97,” Casey told the subcommittee.

Secret lies in keeping everyone on same path.

“The real secret of the enterprise approach [to running the Army] is keeping everyone on the same path,” a senior personnel official told attendees at the Association of the United States Army symposium and exhibition in Richmond, Va. Karl Schneider, assistant deputy chief of staff, G-1, speaking May 15, added, “We need to have one Army. No longer will we be set up by components” and that includes Department of the Army civilians. For the Army to succeed, he said it needed to recognize that the future will continue to be an era of persistent conflict, that it must develop leaders for the full spectrum of operations and, as an institution, it needs to be agile and adaptive.

Schneider said the Army needs to encourage diversity and quality that goes beyond ethnic, racial and gender definitions. It means “having people who have different competencies,” such as understanding how other people think. In looking specifically at the Army’s civilian work force, he said the service is “looking at a bow wave” of potential retirements, with the impact of base realignment and closure having not yet been felt. Success also comes through readiness at best value and “looking at how things cost.”

Maj. Gen. John Macdonald, commanding general of the Family, Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command, said to keep an all-volunteer force the Army needs to build loyalty by “taking care of your troops and teaching them.”

Change has marked how the reserve components are viewed today, Maj. Gen. “Sandy” Sanders, assistant deputy chief of staff, G-4, told attendees. “The reserve I’m in today is not the same as the one I joined in ’88” after a five-year hiatus from active duty. In the past, few reservists or guardsmen deployed. “You’d be hard-pressed to find a reservist who hasn’t been out of his zip code” on a deployment, and those deployments have put new strains on families and employers. In his case, Sanders eventually had to shutter his own business when called to active duty. “These problems do not have rank.”

Brig. Gen. Alberto Jiminez, special assistant to the director of the Army National Guard, said the change from a strategic reserve force to an operational reserve has been dramatic. The Army National Guard is prepared to “provide 50 to 55,000 soldiers if needed” to meet national commitments in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, but that commitment has an impact on guardsmen’s families. “We are in 2,700-plus communities, some of them hundreds of miles from a military installation.” He said the guard nationwide is adopting ideas from Minnesota’s Yellow Ribbon campaign that encourages community support before alert through reintegration, established 325 family assistance centers and is providing for the 2,500 warriors in transition that come from the Army National Guard. Adding, the National Guard has stepped up its efforts to inform spouses about retirement benefits and funeral honors.

Warrior Transition Units prepare soldiers for new careers. The Army established 35 Warrior Transition Units (WTU) throughout the United States to help soldiers ready for the next stage in their careers, whether that is military service or civilian life. While the units were established in the wake of concern over soldiers wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan, health care is also being provided to other soldiers who are recovering from non-combat injuries or life-threatening diseases.

Speaking at the Association of the United States Army's monthly Institute of Land Warfare Breakfast Series May 8 in suburban Washington, Lt. Gen. Eric B. Schoomaker, the Army surgeon general, said he had talked with a soldier at a WTU who had deployed three times but suffered a devastating injury—losing an arm in a motorcycle accident—at home and far away from a combat zone. “It’s hard to look at them and say they are different,” Schoomaker said. “We still have a duty to rehabilitate them.”

At each WTU, the only mission soldiers have is to make themselves better. To assist them along the recovery process, they have a primary care physician, nurse case manager and squad leader “from the moment they arrive to when they transition out,” Schoomaker said.

There are 400 permanent cadre throughout the 35 units, Schoomaker said. They come from a wide variety of skills and backgrounds, but many share a bond with the wounded soldiers in that they have recovered from injuries before.

A study from 15 years ago found that the Army didn’t retain a single amputee or partial amputee, Schoomaker said. Now, 10 percent of amputees are retained in uniform, and if they can’t return to duty, doctors, nurses and everyone else in the recovery process prepare those soldiers for a productive civilian life. “Healing and recovery includes a whole set of life skills to prepare them for their next step,” Schoomaker said.

The surgeon general also singled out the care soldiers are receiving if they are injured in theater. A group of civilian traumatologists visited a U.S. military medical facility in Baghdad and were “astounded by the degree of injury and survivability.” The Army has invested so much in soldiers’ training and retention, “it’s important to do what we can”—leading them on the road to recovery, Schoomaker said.

The breakfast was sponsored by AM General, an AUSA sustaining member.

Fixing barracks deficiencies are top priority.

The Army is scheduled to complete a worldwide walk-through inspection of all barracks on more than 155 installations in early May to ensure that soldiers are not living in buildings that should be demolished and under conditions that could endanger their safety, life and health. The inspections began April 26 and are being conducted by installation commanders and command sergeants major. In the longer term, the Army will convene monthly a senior noncommissioned officers installation forum chaired by Command Sgt. Maj. Debra Strickland to ensure barracks standards are maintained. Strickland is the command sergeant major of the Installation Management Command, which is in charge of Army facilities.

Brig. Gen. Dennis Rogers, deputy director of operations and facilities in the Installation Management Command, said, “I assume responsibility” for conditions in one of 24 Korean War-era barracks at Fort Bragg, N.C., that was the subject of a 10-minute video posted on YouTube by Ed Frawley, father of Sgt. Jeff Frawley, assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment. Frawley from Menomonie, Wis., narrated the video. “We let our soldiers down,” Rogers said. “That’s not how we want our sons and daughters to live.”

The soldiers from the parachute regiment who were assigned to this barracks were returned three weeks ahead of schedule—with 72-hours notice—from a deployment to Afghanistan. Another unit had been using the barracks while the first unit was deployed. In the video using a variety of still images in a room, chipped paint is seen on walls, as well as mold. Ceiling tiles are missing, and there is rust on fixtures. Sewage water is shown backed up in the communal bathroom.

Army officials said that the building had gone through a modernization process in 2006. Most recently 40 work orders had been placed on the building for work to be completed before the unit returned from overseas. About seven of those work orders are still incomplete. Fort Bragg officials said that put the barracks in an amber condition—green being ready for occupancy and red not ready for occupancy.

“It may have happened at Bragg, but it covers the Army,” Strickland said. Adding that Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth Preston is actively involved in addressing barracks issues now and in the future.

“Most of those shortfalls have been corrected” in recent weeks, Rogers said. He added that the rooms seen in the posting now have been painted and outfitted with new furniture, and the heating and air conditioning system and the ventilation system in the building has been replaced.