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## Reconnecting Athens and Sparta: A Review of OPMS XXI at 20 Years

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Heidi A. Urben

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**The Institute of Land Warfare**  
ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY

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## LAND WARFARE PAPER No. 114, October 2017

### Reconnecting Athens and Sparta: A Review of OPMS XXI at 20 Years

by Colonel Susan Bryant, U.S. Army, and Colonel Heidi A. Urben, U.S. Army

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## **Preface**

This work reviews the Army Officer Personnel Management System XXI (OPMS XXI) on its 20th anniversary from the perspectives of a basic branch officer and a functional area officer. The authors jointly conclude that although the underlying logic of OPMS XXI remains sound, its implementation in conjunction with 16 years of war and the Army's cultural preference for tactics over strategy have produced serious unintended consequences for the development of Army strategic leaders and the force as a whole. The authors explore the tensions created by the dual requirements for specialization and broad strategic understanding within today's Army officer corps and make recommendations to cope with these competing demands. This monograph calls for the Army to recommission an OPMS task force aimed at creating a new talent management system that not only better aligns skillsets with requirements, but also purposefully earmarks and grooms officers with strategic leadership potential earlier in their careers.

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## **Reconnecting Athens and Sparta: A Review of OPMS XXI at 20 Years**

*OPMS was never meant to be that rigid. In fact,  
it was designed to be a flexible, adaptive system.*

Lieutenant General David H. Ohle, USA, Ret.<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

Twenty years ago, the Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS) XXI Task Force published its final report, launching landmark personnel reform for the Army officer corps. The year-long task force—commissioned by then Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) General Dennis J. Reimer and chaired by then Major General David H. Ohle in 1996—opened its report with the argument that the existing OPMS required “field-grade officers to do too many things today for them to excel at any one of them.”<sup>2</sup> Today, the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction. What was designed to increase expertise and specialization in the officer corps and to offer “reasonable opportunity to promotion to colonel,” regardless of branch or functional area, has instead created a system of rigid stovepipes that inhibit a broader development of the officer corps, for both basic branch and functional area officers.<sup>3</sup> Most important, the current system is suboptimal for developing strategic leaders. In short, in many cases today, those who achieve the rank of general officer, well-prepared to thrive in the role of a strategic leader, have succeeded in spite of the Army’s OPMS, not because of it.

Even the very best programs require constant evaluation. OPMS XXI capably served the Army for 20 years and through two wars; many of its principles have impacted the Army and its officer corps for the better. In its final report, the OPMS XXI Task Force called for “OPMS XXI [to] become a living system that the Army cyclically reviews and adjusts as necessary. It will become better and stronger through successive refinement.”<sup>4</sup> Yet, cyclical reviews and program management evaluation studies—to periodically evaluate how well OPMS XXI has been implemented, what elements should be retained or what aspects should be revisited—have been considerably lacking. True, certain incremental changes have occurred over the past 20 years, such as the revised Officer Evaluation Report (OER) implemented in 2014, but few people would suggest that OPMS XXI has become the living system it was intended to be. A CSA Strategic Studies Group report on talent management prepared for then CSA General Raymond T. Odierno in 2015 reached the same conclusion: “The most recent reviews [of OPMS XXI] occurred only sporadically and in response to *ad hoc* requirements.”<sup>5</sup> In short,



we have gone from a peacetime Army to a wartime Army to a drawdown—all with the same personnel system.<sup>6</sup>

For the 20th anniversary of the OPMS XXI Task Force’s final report, the Army should recommission an OPMS task force aimed at creating a new talent management system that not only better aligns skillsets with requirements, but also purposefully earmarks and grooms officers with strategic leadership potential earlier in their careers. Through interviews with Army leaders past and present, this monograph reexamines OPMS XXI from the vantage points of both a basic branch officer and a functional area officer, identifies limitations in the current system and proposes five reforms that must be a part of any reinvigorated OPMS.

## **Revalidating the Key Assumption**

The report that was commissioned by CSA Reimer in 1996 proceeds from the argument that the personnel system in place required too much specialized knowledge for any single officer to truly master.<sup>7</sup> This remains true, as the strategic environment has only grown more complex and dangerous in the ensuing two decades. During this timeframe, the Army has been required to adapt in fundamental ways to such changes as the rise of cyber as a coequal domain of conflict, as well as the rise of non-state actors capable of strategic impact. The Army has also had to relearn to fight and resource a counterinsurgency fight and develop strategies and capabilities to combat adversaries operating asymmetrically—all while fighting two ground wars. The multiple adaptations to the shifting environment and responsive evolutions in doctrine have been both profound and admirable. They also serve to underscore the continuing validity of OPMS XXI’s key underpinning assumption—the requirement for specialization.

The 2014 Army Operating Concept (AOC), *Win in a Complex World*, is perhaps the most authoritative single Army publication to illustrate this point. Its central premise demonstrates the continuing critical requirement for specialization. The concept mandates that the Army be globally responsive, working in multiple domains and capable of presenting multiple simultaneous dilemmas for an increasingly diverse set of potential adversaries.<sup>8</sup> After describing the myriad challenges facing the United States military, the AOC goes on to state: “Decentralized operations in complex environments require competent leaders and cohesive teams that thrive in conditions of uncertainty.”<sup>9</sup> It further enjoins Army forces to “process, exploit and analyze information from multiple disciplines” and to “gain intellectual advantage over adversaries through cross-cultural competencies and advanced cognitive abilities.”<sup>10</sup> Finally, the AOC mandates that the Army “develop agile and innovative leaders who thrive in conditions of uncertainty and chaos.”<sup>11</sup> Winning in a complex world requires harmonization of multiple skillsets, the mastery of which is beyond any single person, but the broad understanding of which is required by all strategic leaders. Thus, there are two competing mandates at play—increased specialization for field-grade officers *and* broader education for strategic leaders—both of which require thoughtful and targeted talent management.

Undoubtedly the Army continues to require a large number of true specialists who have real mastery of an expanding set of specific skills, all of which are required in order to “take the hill” and hold it in the current strategic environment. Conversely, the increasingly complex and ever expanding mission set for which the U.S. Army is responsible places an equally expanding intellectual burden on its strategic leaders; they must be more broadly educated, institutionally savvy and politically astute than ever to deliver both options and outcomes to national leaders. OPMS XXI as it is currently conceived is succeeding at the first task (developing specialization) and failing at the second one (ensuring broad strategic acumen in its strategic leaders).

Army leaders must still possess tactical mastery to win in major combat operations. This is an unquestionable fact. However, the contemporary operating environment also requires cyber skills and expertise in space operations, as well as language skills, diplomatic skills, expertise in the acquisition process and a nuanced understanding of the inner workings of the Department of Defense bureaucracy. This is a heavy load.

To operationalize this daunting set of requirements and capabilities, Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) created 20 “Army Warfighting Challenges” in tandem with the publication of the AOC: “enduring first order challenges, the solutions to which improve the combat effectiveness of the current and future force.”<sup>12</sup> The list is both diverse and widely encompassing, ranging from “Counter Weapons of Mass Destruction,” to “Conduct Space and Cyber Electromagnetic Operations,” to “Set the Theater, Sustain Operations and Maintain Freedom of Movement.” Underpinning the entire list is the tenth challenge, “Develop Agile and Adaptive Leaders.”<sup>13</sup> The list serves as confirmation of the dual requirements identified previously—specialization and strategic acumen. The two must become equal ends of any successful 21st century talent management process.

### **Growing Strategic Leaders in a Culture That Prefers Tactics**

Given that the fundamental assumption underpinning the implementation of OPMS XXI remains valid, we argue that the problem has been the unintended consequences arising from its implementation. We are *not* calling for a return to secondary specialties among all Army officers. Rather, we are looking for review and refinement of the current system to allow it to manage both systemic requirements and to better develop the officer corps to meet those challenges.

Clearly, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have required laser focus from Army leaders since 2001. The lack of periodic reviews of the personnel system is hardly surprising. Further, the unintended adverse consequences on the strategic development of emerging senior leaders passed largely unnoticed amidst the daily urgent demands of war. However, 16 years of continuous operations have produced an Army culture that has largely lost touch with the criticality of the interaction between tactics and strategy, as well as the necessity for mastery of both in its most senior leaders.

In his history of the United States Military Academy (USMA), *Carved From Granite: West Point Since 1902*, Brigadier General Lance Betros, USA, Ret., explores the omnipresent tension between the requirements of the academy’s academic mission and its military one. He frames this tension as the debate between Athens and Sparta.<sup>14</sup> This useful frame was later adopted by Spain, Banks and Mohundro in their article “Toward a Smarter Military, Intellectual Capital: A Case for Cultural Change.”<sup>15</sup> They argue:

Contextually, Athens represents an institutional preference for intellectual ability, critical thinking, education, etc. Conversely, Sparta represents an institutional preference for motivation, tactical ability, action-bias, diligence, intensity, physicality, etc. Many in the Army may generally associate the Spartan descriptions as more in line with the expectations of the combat arms culture(s), and the Athenian description as more in line with the other-than-combat arms culture(s). . . .<sup>16</sup>

Adopting this line of argument, it follows that the “Spartan” culture would dominate the combat-arms branches, while the functional area specialists would be predominantly “Athenian.” This framework perfectly encapsulates what is perhaps the largest unintended consequence of

the OPMS XXI system. It has inadvertently decoupled tactics from strategy, to the detriment of the entire Army regardless of basic branch or functional area; strategic leadership requires both.

In an interview with Lieutenant General David H. Ohle, USA, Ret., the principal architect of OPMS XXI, he explained that the system was never actually implemented in the manner he envisioned. Ohle's original vision was to allow room for a certain number of officers to continue to cross back and forth between functional areas and traditional branch career progression.<sup>17</sup> In actual implementation, this never occurred, thus creating the unintended rigid stovepiping of specialization and the concomitant narrowing of all officers' perspectives. This was undoubtedly exacerbated by a decade and a half of war and the unrelenting rotational requirements for service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

However, the strategic consequence for the Army has been the institutional decoupling of tactics and strategy. Further, the vast majority of the officers who achieve the ranks of strategic leadership have matured in a purely "Spartan" culture. Unfortunately, senior leadership—even amidst protracted war—requires both Sparta and Athens, i.e., a combination of attributes that have been systemically almost entirely precluded by the current career progression system and practically precluded by rotational requirements.

There has been no shortage of recent studies decrying the state of strategic leadership in the military today, especially among the most senior general and flag officers. Major General Robert H. Scales, USA, Ret., recently opined, "something is missing in American strategic generalship," arguing that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan exposed a lack of depth in strategic leadership among senior officers, despite their proven success at the tactical and operational levels.<sup>18</sup> Scales blamed this phenomenon on the Army having a tried and true method of selecting officers for tactical command at the battalion and brigade levels, but having no such process for identifying those with the potential to succeed at the strategic level. Scales noted, "We most certainly have officers with the requisite intellect to succeed at strategic leadership. We simply don't have a system in place for finding those with the right strategic stuff, those with the strategic 'genius' Carl von Clausewitz wrote about."<sup>19</sup>

While we do agree with Scales, we point again to the unintended consequences of OPMS XXI as the root cause. By stovepiping the officer corps, we have inadvertently given the impression that strategy need no longer be the province of basic branch officers—the very officers who will eventually dominate the ranks of the general officer corps. Meanwhile, Functional Area 59 (Strategist) officers—arguably the officers best educated, trained and prepared to be strategic thinkers—largely occupy advisory roles and rarely have opportunities to lead. It is necessary to identify ways to close this gap and break down these stovepipes.

### **OPMS XXI 20 Years Later: From the Basic Branch Perspective**

*OPMS XXI's single-track founding principle is that it can't expect officers to walk and chew gum at the same time. I think OPMS XXI sold us short.*

Major General Christopher G. Cavoli

One of the central problems that the OPMS XXI Task Force identified was a decline in the amount of key developmental or branch-qualifying time for officers and the perceived impact that had on the Army's warfighting capability:

Most branches cannot even provide all of their majors at least one year of field-grade, "branch-qualifying" time in key battalion and brigade positions, because the number

of officers in each year group exceeds the number of branch-qualifying positions available.<sup>20</sup>

By increasing the amount of key developmental time, especially for field grade officers, not only would expertise increase, but so would unit stability.<sup>21</sup>

Explicit in the task force's conclusions was the need to maintain the Army's "muddy boots culture."<sup>22</sup> Yet, 16 years into what Andrew Bacevich, among others, has termed "perpetual war," is the muddy boots culture really in jeopardy?<sup>23</sup> Has it ever been? The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have arguably reinforced a cultural predisposition within the Army that favors experiences at the tactical level, evidenced by Dr. Leonard Wong's observation of a "growing disdain in Army officers for any leadership position away from troops."<sup>24</sup> Analysis of captains' key developmental or company command time in 2017 has shown that on average, no branch is able to provide 36 months in a post-key developmental utilization tour. For combat-arms branches, the average utilization post-command is two years or less.<sup>25</sup>

Another critical observation of the OPMS XXI Task Force was that "the dual-track system [did not produce] very many officers with true dual-track expertise and experience," and noted that among officers with special skills who were selected for command, "only a relatively small percentage" spent more than three years in those functional areas.<sup>26</sup> In other words, not only did time outside one's basic branch degrade warfighting capabilities, but for seemingly little benefit. All the more reason to focus basic branch officers almost exclusively on their core competencies that reside at the brigade-and-below levels.

In many regards, OPMS XXI achieved exactly what it sought for basic branch officers—orienting them toward the tactical level, free from distraction. That said, we contend that this exclusive focus has come at a cost, providing a narrow developmental model for basic branch officers, especially those in the combat arms. This developmental model prepares them well for service at the tactical level, but perhaps little more beyond that, as Major General Christopher G. Cavoli, Commanding General of the 25th Infantry Division (Light), has observed:

Under OPMS XXI's single track, our focus has been making sure our combat arms officers are expert in combat operations. Yet, among our general officers, how many hold duty positions that require them to be experts in ground combat? There are ten division commanders and three corps commanders—so 13. What are the other 200-plus doing? They either run the institution or contribute to our strategies and policies. It seems as if we are carefully preparing our officers to be experts at something that will end up being a small subset of their eventual duties.<sup>27</sup>

Major General Cavoli's observation has long been echoed by some of the Army's premier talent management experts. In their seminal work, "Senior Officer Talent Management: Fostering Institutional Adaptability," Michael J. Colarusso and David S. Lyle from the Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis at USMA argue that the Army's personnel system today "requires senior land combat experts to perform optimally in any assignment they receive yet rarely affords them the specialized education, development or assignment tenure needed to succeed in the fundamentally different world of institutional leadership and management."<sup>28</sup>

Broadening experiences help build agile, adaptive and strategic leaders capable of critical thinking and self-awareness. In a 2011 speech at USMA, then Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates made a forceful argument for such experiences. He provided a pretty good definition of broadening assignments in the process:

So, in addition to the essential troop command and staff assignments, you should look for opportunities that in the past were off the beaten path, if not a career dead end—and the institutional Army should not only tolerate, but encourage you in the effort. Such opportunities might include further study at grad school, teaching at this or another first-rate university, spending time at a think tank, being a congressional fellow, working in a different government agency or becoming a foreign area specialist.<sup>29</sup>

Note that Secretary Gates did not include observer/controller-trainer at one of the Army's training centers, division/corps staff officer or doctrine developer at a TRADOC branch school-house as examples of broadening assignments. Yet, according to DA Pamphlet 600-3 (DA Pam 600-3), *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management*, each of those could be considered broadening under the Army's current parameters. A recent attempt by the Army G-1 to clarify the broadening definition by establishing three subcategories—tactical broadening, institutional broadening and academic broadening—served only to continue the trend of generously counting any and all developmental assignments as broadening.<sup>30</sup> This expansive definition of broadening tends to devalue those assignments that are truly broadening and makes it a synonym for anything that is not considered “key developmental.”

We prefer a more narrow definition of broadening and so adopt the formula published in a recent *ARMY Magazine* article. An assignment must meet two criteria to be considered truly broadening. First, it must foster critical thinking, and second, it should place officers “outside their comfort zone, where they cannot solely leverage their own past experiences in the Army in order to excel and where they are exposed to different organizational cultures and dynamics.”<sup>31</sup> Using a narrower definition of what constitutes broadening might also help the Army to reorient broadening assignments away from its current self-select model to a more selective, performance-based one that chooses the Army's top performers across all branches, but especially combat arms. Moreover, it might help the Army reframe why broadening opportunities exist—not simply as a reward for that top company commander in the brigade, but as deliberate recognition that the Army's top performers must be further developed so that they can excel in a variety of challenging environments and eventually at the strategic level.

In emphasizing the importance of graduate school in an officer's development, Colarusso and Lyle argue that “adaptability stems from developmental programs that place people in unfamiliar situations and require them to figure things out. Civilian graduate education is a proven way to develop mental agility and adaptability.”<sup>32</sup> Consider the following reflection from former Vice Chief of Staff of the Army General Peter W. Chiarelli, USA, Ret.:

Although I have spent the majority of my 35-year career serving in traditional “muddy boots” Army organizations, the experience that best prepared me for division and corps command in Iraq was the five years I spent earning a master's degree and teaching in the Social Sciences Department at the U.S. Military Academy.<sup>33</sup>

Despite recognition by senior Army and Department of Defense leaders of how critical graduate school is to officers' development, the Army has struggled to prioritize civilian graduate education since the 1980s. Colarusso and Lyle point out how ACS slots plummeted during the post-Cold War drawdown from 5,500–7,000 annual slots in the mid-1980s to fewer than 400 by 1995.<sup>34</sup> Programs aimed at improving junior officer retention such as the Graduate School Option (GrADSO)—where West Point and Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) cadets could guarantee ACS in exchange for a three-year additional service obligation—and the Performance-based Graduate School Incentive Program (PB-GSIP) have been well-intentioned

and at least indicate that the Army understands the problem. However, GrADSO was suspended in 2014, “pending officer corps reshaping efforts,” and PB-GSIP only allows for up to 50 selections each year.<sup>35</sup> Even the Army’s websites devoted to ACS paint a bleak picture, noting that “no more than 412 students may enter ACS annually.”<sup>36</sup> Not counting GrADSO, “officers have a one-in-ten chance of attending fully-funded graduate school while in the Army,” putting today’s numbers closer to the ACS nadir witnessed during the 1990s.<sup>37</sup>

It should not come as a surprise that many senior Army leaders serving today have not been afforded the same full-time civilian graduate school opportunities that their predecessors were offered 20 and 30 years ago. According to Colarusso and Lyle, by 2010 only 31 percent of all brigadier generals possessed a resident civilian graduate degree, down from almost 54 percent in 1995.<sup>38</sup> Analysis of the last nine cohorts of officers selected to the rank of brigadier general (n=333) yields findings even more stark. Overall, 22 percent of officers selected to brigadier general from 2008 to 2016 attended full-time, resident graduate school at a civilian institution at some point in their career. However, a significant disparity exists between basic branch and functional area officers. While 47 percent of functional area officers attended full-time graduate school at a civilian university, only 17 percent of their basic branch peers did.<sup>39</sup>

This trend has arguably been overlooked, as most senior officers do indeed possess master’s degrees—many have multiple degrees—but the majority of those officers obtained their degrees through attendance at senior service colleges, in conjunction with other professional military education, or by doing it the hard way as 45 percent of the cohort did—attending a civilian institution part-time, often at their own expense and through satellite campuses on military installations.<sup>40</sup> Yet, as Lieutenant General David W. Barno, USA, Ret., has observed, graduate degrees obtained through professional military education or in civilian settings dominated by military students lack the immersive experience and rigor of those obtained through civilian institutions:

We have people getting two and three master’s degrees during their time on active duty without ever having to encounter a civilian. They are not getting the exposure to tough-minded, civilian-thinking academics and bright, divergent-thinking civilian students that surround you when you go to a resident graduate program.<sup>41</sup>

It is unclear how much OPMS XXI is to blame for limiting such opportunities as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq could also be to blame during this same timeframe. “I think this would have been an outcome of OPMS XXI with or without the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan,” reflected Barno. “The wars have exacerbated that, but OPMS XXI would have delivered the same kind of general officer corps in 2017 without the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.” Both Cavoli and Barno—infantry officers who were the beneficiaries of broadening experiences and full-time graduate education at civilian universities—argue that basic branch officers, and combat-arms officers in particular, have been disadvantaged by OPMS XXI. According to Barno:

The biggest downside or unintended consequence of OPMS XXI is we have a general officer corps that is narrower than probably at any time in the past 30–40–50 years, because they haven’t had to have that second specialty and therefore haven’t had assignments outside the operations career field and they probably haven’t gone to [a full-time] civilian graduate school. . . . That’s the big hole that OPMS XXI created.<sup>42</sup>

Major General Cavoli, an infantry officer who speaks multiple languages and holds a graduate degree in Russian studies from Yale, is one of the rare combat-arms officers serving

today who successfully served in a dual-track capacity in the pre-OPMS XXI era. He likewise laments the narrowing effects OPMS XXI's single-track focus has had, most acutely within the ranks of combat officers:

OPMS XXI, by declaring that we can't walk and chew gum at the same time, ensured that all of our infantry officers would be undistracted by anything other than synchronizing the brigade fight. But it also ensured that you would never have a guy like John Abizaid or Karl Eikenberry or Jeff Schloesser. [OPMS XXI] assumes that if you get a guy to the executive level, he will be able to master strategic thinking, as part of a to-do list, in on-the-job training.<sup>43</sup>

Barno has offered similar criticism and takes aim by forcing officers to choose between remaining in basic branches and leading formations and pursuing specialization and civilian graduate schooling opportunities found in functional areas:

We're hemorrhaging our intellectual talent out of the combat arms into a specialty that's very narrow. . . . In the past, some of the people who became FA59s would have stayed in the operations career field and would have become the Wes Clarks, the Eric Shinsekis, the Jim Dubiks, the John Abizaid, the Karl Eikenberrys. . . . So the Army is losing intellectual cognitive talent at the flag-officer level in command. As a combat-arms guy, that scares the hell out of me.<sup>44</sup>

Today's cohort of senior Army leaders is arguably the most experienced and battle-tested in generations. But many of them also missed out on opportunities in their formative years to question their assumptions, engage individuals who hold dramatically different worldviews and gain exposure to how the Army operates at the institutional and strategic levels. That may very well be an inescapable cost of an Army at war for more than 16 years, but if it is a byproduct of our personnel system, then we need a new personnel system that balances operational experience with strategic broadening and education more effectively.

### **OPMS XXI 20 Years Later: From the Functional Area Perspective**

The 2014 AOC posits that winning requires a careful balance between change and continuity in warfare. Although the human motivations for war remain constant, its character shifts over time in response to changing norms of behavior and emerging technologies.<sup>45</sup> DA Pam 600-3 describes a vision for officer development in line with this thinking. It "recognizes the need for balanced specialization to meet the Army's challenges in the 21st century."<sup>46</sup> In these authors' estimation, the creation of the functional area specialties is an institutionalized recognition of the requirement for change.

As of May 2017, functional area officers comprise roughly 20 percent of the active duty competitive category force in the grades of major through colonel. If you add the medical specialties, the Judge Advocate General Corps and the Chaplain Corps, the number falls to just over 14 percent.<sup>47</sup> This statistic is important to note. The Army has not undertaken a wholesale shift toward functional area expertise. Rather, the vast majority of officers remain within their basic branches.

The 2014 DA Pam 600-3 lists 12 separate functional areas (FAs), many of which encompass multiple sub-specialties.<sup>48</sup> The qualification requirements for these FAs represent a diverse set of skills, many of which directly track with emergent technologies and the rise of new conflict domains. Among them one can find the more established functional areas such as Foreign

Area Officers (48) and Operations Research Specialists (49). However, the list also contains such specialties as Electronic Warfare (29), Simulation Operations (57) and Army Astronaut (40C), which are less well-known and represent efforts to shift in time with the changing character of war.

Several of the functional areas accept officers beginning in their fifth year of commissioned service; others require successful company command as a precondition.<sup>49</sup> Reading through the selection and qualification criteria in DA Pam 600-3 is illuminating, as it paints a comprehensive picture of the diversely talented officers required. Multiple functional areas require undergraduate degrees in technical fields such as computer science, electrical engineering or mathematics. Others require minimum Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores and language aptitude, while still others seek strong interpersonal skills or proven performance in simulation and modeling.<sup>50</sup>

Further, the qualifications and desired attributes section for every functional area includes a discussion of preferred and/or required education, which is mostly satisfied through civilian advanced civil schooling. Although not every functional area guarantees ACS for their officers, several do; others have competitive selection processes for existing ACS slots within the FA. For instance, the Foreign Area Officer qualification requires language training, in-country training and a relevant civilian master's degree (fully-funded), along with a military education. FA 59 (Strategist) requires its own 14-week qualification course, in addition to the Defense Strategy Course, along with a civilian master's degree (fully-funded) and completion of an intermediate-level education (ILE). The specific qualification requirements differ widely among FAs. However, there is a consistent call for further graduate education and continuing education within every functional area.

Unlike basic branch officers, who have little opportunity to attend civilian ACS, many functional area officers face a different problem. As Army promotion and selection boards completely discount the value of Academic Evaluations Reports (AERs) in favor of OERs, functional areas that have significant educational requirements must ensure that the "timeline" works for officers applying to become FA officers. Once accepted, the ratio of OERs to AERs has to be carefully managed to ensure that officers are not put at risk for promotion against their peers for having what is in effect "too much" education. In addition to funding master's degrees, several functional areas also provide complete funding for doctoral work. Once again, officers contemplating competitive selection for a fully-funded doctorate must carefully watch their OER/AER ratio to ensure that they do not place themselves at too great a risk for promotion. Athens must never stray too far from Sparta.

In Scales' article "Are You a Strategic Genius?" he enumerates four separate types of "genius" required within the Army today: Combat Genius, Political Genius, Institutional Genius and Anticipatory Genius.<sup>51</sup> Although we are uncertain how to quantify genius, we would agree with General Scales that these four broad categories represent discrete competencies required in today's Army, particularly at the senior-leader level.

The difficulty is that OPMS XXI has provided education and experiential opportunities for political (strategic) and institutional competence nearly exclusively—in particular, for functional areas below the rank of colonel.<sup>52</sup> Further, Army culture places enormous value on combat competence while dismissing or denigrating both implicitly and explicitly the value of the other competencies. Scales' fourth element, anticipatory genius (competence) is associated with the ability to forecast accurately or to think in time. He believes that this capacity



is the most rare of the four and is likely to be inherent rather than learned. The upshot is that the Army is over-preparing large numbers of officers for roles requiring combat genius while under-preparing the much greater numbers required in the other categories of “genius.”

Scales’ article raises a thorny issue that the military has had difficulty dealing with—differing cognitive capacity among the members of its officer corps. Spain, Mohundro and Banks take on this issue in their article “Toward a Smarter Military, Intellectual Capital: A Case for Cultural Change,” in which they reach the disturbing conclusion that officers with the highest cognitive capacity are less likely to be selected for command and promotion than their one order of magnitude less intelligent peers.<sup>53</sup>

We do not wish to reopen this discussion, but rather to accept the article’s conclusions and place them alongside two other critical variables that constitute a large piece of the 21st century talent-management rubric: intrinsic motivation and propensity for creativity and innovative thinking. The Spain article focuses predominantly on cognitive capacity, but it also affirms motivation as an important predictor of job performance.<sup>54</sup> Scales’ article, the AOC and DA Pam 600-3 all also mention the desirability of innovative behavior within certain segments of the 21st century officer corps.<sup>55</sup>

Finding the “sweet spot,” in which talent, desire and personality types intersect seems an overwhelmingly daunting task. Nonetheless, one area where the Army has operationalized such a process is with talent-based branching at USMA and ROTC. Rather than simply allowing cadets to choose a branch in their senior year based solely upon each commissioning source’s Order of Merit List (OML), both sources of commission have undertaken a program to match cadet talents with the required talents of the basic branches. Through this process, the Army is working to create a ‘talent market’ that identifies individual talents and strengths and leverages them to the benefit of the institution and the individual, “placing every officer into a career field in which they are most likely to be engaged, productive and satisfied leaders.”<sup>56</sup>

Using this methodology, cadets are assessed through multiple lenses to include a comprehensive battery of cognitive and noncognitive tests, as well as more traditional forms of evaluation. In addition, cadets receive much more comprehensive branch education and mentoring throughout their time at USMA or enrolled in ROTC. As a result, they are far better educated to make a branch choice that matches their talents, as well as their passions. Reviews of this process indicate that there are statistically significant improvements in both officer satisfaction and, as a result, in long-term retention.<sup>57</sup> Although relatively new (three years old at the time of this writing), there are indications that these sorts of measures could be implemented for functional area officer selection as well.

Having spent the better part of the last 20 years as an FA 59 (Strategist), one of us recently undertook a project on behalf of the proponent to see if it was possible to create an “archetype” of a successful Army strategist in hopes of using it as a model to improve the initial assessment and selection process (Voluntary Transfer Incentive Program) for FA 59. The research was underwritten by Army Staff G-3/5 Major General William Hix, who serves as the proponent for the Foreign Area Officer and Strategist functional areas and used the Idea Connections Systems Innovative Strengths Preferences Indicator along with personal interviews of high-performing strategists in the ranks of colonel and lieutenant colonel.<sup>58</sup> Specifically, the research investigated why an adequate GRE score along with a good file in basic branch jobs did not necessarily predict success as an Army strategist. The hypothesis was that there is a mindset difference in individuals that is rooted in more than mere cognitive capacity. The research was designed

to test this hypothesis. Although the findings remain preliminary at this point, there are some strong hints in the data that can potentially be of use in the broader OPMS XXI review.<sup>59</sup>

The research was also inspired by the findings of Wong and Gerras in their 2013 paper “Changing Minds in the Army: Why Is It So Difficult: and What To Do About It?” The work explores why Army strategic leaders struggle with changing their minds.<sup>60</sup> The authors focus on the “openness” personality factor taken from the Five-Factor Personality Model. They describe openness as “the recurrent need to enlarge and examine experience.” Openness also indicates strong intellectual curiosity, creativity, comfort with ambiguity and tolerance for novelty.<sup>61</sup> Conversely, low scores for openness indicate preference for convention and tradition and a desire for the familiar versus the novel.<sup>62</sup> In their research, Gerras and Wong conclude that most successful Army officers at the ranks of lieutenant colonel and colonel score lower on openness than the U.S. population as a whole. Worse still, those selected for brigade command (colonel level) have even lower scores for openness than their non-selected war college classmates.<sup>63</sup> This suggests that these officers, once settled upon a solution, are unlikely to continually question their assumptions and reassess whether their solution remains the best option over time. In short, change and new ideas will not be well-received.

Finally, the decision to study the mindset of Army strategists was also influenced by a 2015 Mission Command Center of Excellence (MCCOE) white paper on creativity and the relative lack thereof reported by serving Army officers evaluating their immediate supervisors.<sup>64</sup> The white paper examined creativity within the Army officer corps and proceeded from the AOC’s call to develop agile and innovative leaders who can “Win in a Complex World.”<sup>65</sup> Like Gerras and Wong, the authors of this study also reached some depressing conclusions. Specifically, they cite the Center for Army Leadership’s Annual Survey of Army Officer Leadership. In it, officers are asked to rate how well their immediate supervisors demonstrate 13 specific leadership attributes. Innovation (the ability to practically apply creative ideas) is one of the two areas that consistently scores the lowest rating.<sup>66</sup> This relatively low level of creativity is disturbing, as multiple strategic documents highlight the requirement for creative innovative leaders in the current and projected strategic environment.<sup>67</sup> The study also finds that “The Army’s junior leaders feel they are not currently being placed in situations that allow them to be innovative, and this appears to be a contributing factor in their decision to leave the Army.”<sup>68</sup>

The MCCOE finding is not the only study to have considered the propensity for innovation as a factor in the decision to leave military service. In the mid-1980s, a team of researchers examined the entering class at the U.S. Naval Academy and studied whether an innovative mindset was a factor in initial success or failure at the Naval Academy.<sup>69</sup> Interestingly, the research team found that the mean score on the innovation cognitive style for the plebes was about one standard deviation lower than that found among incoming freshmen at five similarly competitive nonmilitary universities.<sup>70</sup> Further, the 98 plebes who voluntarily withdrew in the first year scored higher on average for innovation than those who remained.<sup>71</sup> Once again, innovative propensity seemed to be negatively correlated with success in the military. This is not surprising given that military culture is both steeped in tradition and highly risk averse. In his groundbreaking 1957 publication *The Soldier and The State*, Samuel Huntington categorizes the mindset of the Army officer corps as a whole. He opines that the military ethic is one of “conservative realism,” and that the military “exalts obedience as the highest virtue.”<sup>72</sup> It is the authors’ opinion that this mindset remains largely the same within the contemporary Army. That said, the nature of the current strategic environment requires creativity and innovation. Thus, the Army has been presented with a paradox, or at least with significant tension between

the identified need for innovation and creativity and the strong desire of the dominant culture for tradition and conservatism.

The FA 59 study showed that, on average, FA 59 officers had a higher level of openness and intellectual curiosity than Army officers overall. As a group, the strategists' mindset is more in line with innovative and creative professionals than with the conservative/incrementalist thought process that dominates the Army. In familiar terms, strategists are more "Design" than "Military Decisionmaking Process" focused. As a group, they also exhibit a higher degree of "openness" than Wong and Gerras' War College population. In every qualitative interview, intellectual curiosity was a fundamental motivation. Further, tolerance for ambiguity was high, as demonstrated in this quotation from a successful senior strategist, "With ambiguity comes opportunity. It means no box."<sup>73</sup> This quotation should be contrasted with one from a former Assistant Secretary of State commenting upon his experience working with senior military officers in a class at the National Defense University. He observed, "They are certainly smart enough, but they have trouble being creative. Even when you remove the guardrails they just can't get out of the box."<sup>74</sup>

In addition to high levels of creativity/innovation and openness, the research also revealed several other unanticipated trends among the high-performing strategists. First, the majority said that if they had not been able to move into the strategy career field, they probably would have left the military at the rank of captain or junior major.<sup>75</sup> The second surprising finding is that more than 75 percent of them held doctorates or were ABD complete (all but the dissertation) and actively in the process of writing their dissertations. Further, more than 80 percent of them had had one or more teaching assignments, predominately as rotating faculty members at USMA.<sup>76</sup> Although preliminary, these findings are interesting. It is likely that the other functional areas have also attracted populations with cognitive profiles different from those of basic branch officers. This should be studied more carefully and the differences should be employed to the benefit of the Army as a whole.

We are not advocating a wholesale recruitment of innovative risk-takers. The Army is conservative and risk averse for good reason. However, the current environment requires innovation and creativity, traits that are more rare within the military than within the population as a whole. It is our contention that in creating functional areas, the Army inadvertently created incubators for non-dominant but critical mindsets to survive and thrive. If OPMS XXI had not allowed the nontraditional career paths, many of the remaining "outliers" would no doubt have left. The challenge then is multifaceted. First, the Army needs to recognize and develop a pathway for reconnecting Athenian and Spartan cultures within its basic branch officers. Second, it needs to determine how to identify, protect and encourage its truly innovative and creative outliers to allow for maximum contribution in solving the many ambiguous and hydra-headed challenges of the current strategic environment.

Another factor in the differences in the developmental models of functional area officers versus basic branch officers has been the effect of the rotations to Iraq and Afghanistan. As already noted, the rotational requirements have severely limited the ability for basic branch officers to take broadening assignments. For the functional area officers, the effect has been the reverse. Rotational requirements into theater have served to keep portions of the functional-area officers in touch with the operational force. As the rotational requirements have decreased, the ability of functional area specialists to interact with and remain current with the operational Army is decreasing. The experiential gap that is being created as a result is to the detriment of

the both the FA officers and the Army as a whole. If left unchanged, Athens is on a trajectory to drift even further from Sparta.

Ohle explains that OPMS XXI was originally conceived to allow a certain number of officers to cross back and forth.<sup>77</sup> For functional area officers, the wars allowed this to occur. Now that the rotational requirements have slowed, there must be a way for certain functional area officers to remain current with the operational forces to allow for broadening of individual officers and to allow for the cross-pollination of ideas between the tactical and institutional forces.

Functional area officers comprise only 20 percent of the active component field-grade officers.<sup>78</sup> However, they manage critical requirements for the force that require expert knowledge. There is also an indication that functional area officers bring different mindsets as well as different skillsets to the table. For these reasons, we do not advocate a return to the dual-track system. Nonetheless, functional area officers must also be broadened—in their case, broadening means being allowed to take assignments with the operational force to remain current with the bulk of the Army.

### **Synthesis and Final Recommendations**

One must be careful to avoid hubris in making large pronouncements about the uniqueness of the future security environment and the novelty of the current dilemma. The need for a combination of Spartan and Athenian skills is *not* new. It spans the swath of human history. However, the increasing velocity of change has made it substantially harder to acquire true expertise in more than one or two fields. This fact was the initial impetus for the enactment of OPMS XXI. Nonetheless, creativity and the potential for significant change often lie at the intersections of differing fields. Thus, institutionalizing one-dimensional career paths has further hamstrung an already necessarily conservative organization from developing multi-dimensional officers with the knowledge and necessary experiences to recognize the “box” in which they exist. This is the tension that must be managed and the problem that must be solved for the Army to remain intellectually agile *and* tactically proficient enough to truly “win” in an increasingly complex world.

We offer five major recommendations to rebalance the officer corps, to address the unintended rigidity and stovepipes created by OPMS XXI and to ensure that our officer corps—especially its most high-performing cohort—is ultimately prepared to lead and excel at the strategic level.

First, CSA General Mark Milley should commission a task force charged with establishing a new OPMS before his term ends in 2019. Addressing only components of the problem, such as talent management, is insufficient; the task is too large for the Army G1 to undertake as a matter of routine business. The CSA should appoint a general officer with a combat-arms background to lead the task force, and the Army should acknowledge that such an effort will likely take at least six months to a year to complete. Bottom line—a new OPMS is required and we need fresh eyes to look at it.

We stop short of recommending a return to the dual-track officer personnel management system for three reasons. First, from a philosophical standpoint, we prefer to find new, creative solutions that will meet tomorrow’s challenges rather than seeking out a return to old ways of doing business. Second, we argue that a retreat from specialization would be imprudent as we try to keep pace with a rapidly changing operating environment. Third, there is nothing to suggest that most Army battalion and brigade commanders would encourage their top basic

branch performers, especially those in the combat arms, to seek out a tour in a functional area assignment without some type of top-down directive.

We do believe, however, that top performers in basic branches must be afforded the opportunity to attend civilian graduate schools full-time and fulfill a tour in a true broadening assignment before they are considered for promotion to lieutenant colonel. This is our second major recommendation aimed at reforming officer personnel management. To achieve this and to help reduce the timeline risk for our top performers, we should do the following:

- limit the amount of key developmental time for captains in their basic branch to no more than 18 months to allow for broadening time at the other end;
- reorient selection for ACS and broadening opportunities away from simply being self-select in nature; they must be performance-based, and the CSA should charge his three- and four-star commanders with implementation and division commanders and two-star commanders serving as talent scouts; consider making ACS and broadening opportunities for senior captains and junior majors centrally selected at the Headquarters, Department of the Army level;
- provide more latitude for officers who have completed full-time, resident graduate school at civilian institutions in attending Command and General Staff College (CGSC) by either waiving it entirely or sending officers to the Common Core portion only at satellite CGSC campuses; and
- rather than being viewed as risky endeavors that could derail an officer's career, ACS and broadening experiences must be incentivized; the best way to truly incentivize such paths is to explicitly emphasize them both in promotion board guidance and Centralized Selection List command/key billet selection.

If we allow ACS and broadening opportunities to remain largely self-select, we are opting for nothing more than the status quo. If we are serious about reform, these opportunities must be performance-based, incentivized and closely managed by commanders at the general officer level.

Conversely, we recommend that high-performing functional area officers continue to be afforded "re-greening" assignments with operational forces in theater so that they can remain current with Army operations. For this to succeed, it must be carefully managed by senior leaders who do not allow high-performing functional area officers to become part of a "sacrifice pool" in OER Senior Rater Profiles. These re-greening opportunities are as critical to high-potential functional area officers as broadening opportunities are to basic branch officers.

Our third recommendation is to greatly expand the number of fully-funded, full-time ACS opportunities for both basic branch and functional area officers. We applaud the Army's recent establishment of the School of Advanced Military Studies' Strategic Planning and Policy Program, or ASP3, for recognizing that prospective battalion and brigade commanders require exposure to rigorous civilian academic programs. But we advocate for such experiences to occur earlier in an officer's developmental path—at the senior captain level, as opposed to the senior major, lieutenant colonel or even colonel level. Likewise, we should expand the number of ACS slots that have no utilization tour, such as the Downing Scholars program, which selects about four to six officers each year, to keep officers who are competitive for command opportunities and accelerated promotion on track.

In an effort to break down the stovepipes that exist between basic branch and functional area officers, our fourth broad reform echoes an argument made by Paul Yingling and John Nagl more than a decade ago:

The best way to change the organizational culture of the Army is to change the pathways for professional advancement within the officer corps. The Army will become more adaptive only when being adaptive offers the surest path to promotion. Toward that end, the Army should consider abolishing branch distinctions among field-grade officers for most within the operational career field. Under the current model, an officer remains in his basic branch until he retires or is promoted to the rank of general officer. This lifelong branch affiliation narrows an officer's perspective and limits his familiarity with capabilities outside his branch.<sup>79</sup>

We suggest officers should transition to O1A—branch immaterial—immediately upon selection to O6 (colonel), if not earlier. This would provide basic branch officers greater exposure to institutional and strategic assignments while also affording functional area officers the chance to serve in roles that were typically unavailable to them, such as Chief of Staff and Executive Assistant positions that are often reserved for former brigade commanders. The tables of organization and equipment for deployed Joint Task Forces invariably contain requirements for operations research specialists, as well as foreign area officers, strategists, information operations specialists and information technology experts. Continuing to funnel the best and the brightest functional area specialists into these jobs will allow them to maintain currency with the operational force *and* allow for basic branch officers to interact with functional area officers on a daily basis. In a way, this would bring back the best of what the old dual-track system had to offer without sacrificing specialization in the process.

Our fifth and final recommendation is to recognize and incentivize the value of instructor and professor assignments as key time for personal and professional growth within our officer corps and steer our best and brightest upcoming officers toward instructor assignments. In an interview with General Ohle, he expressed in the strongest possible terms the impact of his civilian master's degree and the follow-on teaching assignment at USMA as critical to his professional development and future success as an Army strategic leader.<sup>80</sup>

Although identified as broadening assignments in DA Pam 600-3, teaching assignments are generally viewed as “taking a knee” by a significant number of senior leaders. Moreover, well-intentioned mentors often steer high-performing captains away from teaching tours because of the tyranny of the career timeline (e.g., one to two years of ACS followed by two to three years as an instructor). It can be difficult to bounce back from four to five years out of a timeline and remain competitive for command or other CSL opportunities. Consequently, teaching is largely avoided by anyone aspiring to positions of strategic leadership within the Army.

Interestingly, according to General Ohle, the move toward universal ILE in the mid-2000s was designed, in part, to minimize an officer's timeline burden associated with teaching at USMA. By offering multiple paths toward ILE and by not discriminating against any particular path (e.g., distance learning, satellite campus, etc.), an officer could go to graduate school, teach and then return to a troop assignment without having to spend an additional year at Fort Leavenworth. Today, that option is virtually unavailable to basic branch officers, resulting in increased timeline constraints for those who decide to teach at USMA, while probably discouraging many high-quality officers from even applying due to the perceived career risk. Waiving

ILE for USMA instructors or directing their attendance at a satellite campus to minimize career risk is an easy fix for the Army to make.

A pejorative or agnostic view toward instructor assignments in the Army was not always the case. General George Marshall served in multiple different instructor billets over the duration of his career and spoke of them as critical to his professional development. He wrote, “The teacher was being educated at the same time he was instructing.”<sup>81</sup> Employing this philosophy, Marshall himself used the Army education system as a path to success and then personally assisted the brightest young officers to succeed through enhanced educational opportunities in spite of bureaucratic obstacles that stood in their way.<sup>82</sup>

For Marshall, education was key to military success.<sup>83</sup> As the Deputy Commandant at Fort Benning, General Marshall revolutionized both the tactical and academic aspects of the curriculum and ultimately prepared more than 150 future general officers for combat command in World War II. Further, he relied on more than 50 hand-selected officers, who also became generals, to serve as instructors at the Infantry School.<sup>84</sup> His belief in the requirements for education transcended military service. In his lecture as a Nobel Laureate in Oslo, Marshall extolled the requirements for education as essential to securing a peaceful future for the planet.<sup>85</sup> Marshall was the embodiment of both Spartan and Athenian ideals. It was his use of educational opportunities from both cultural strands that underpinned his capacity for strategic leadership and ensured the fitness of a generation of officers to lead in World War II.

Far more recently than World War II, the Army valued the importance of instructor tours and the education they required, particularly instructor tours at USMA. General Martin Dempsey, General David Petraeus, General Peter Chiarelli (all now retired) and current National Security Advisor Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster served as instructors at USMA, as did Lieutenant General Ohle, also now retired. Each of these officers completed a tour as rotating faculty before OPMS XXI forced them to make a choice. Today, the numbers of senior officers who served as instructors is far lower, to the detriment of both the instructors and the instructed. The Army should re-emphasize the importance of the rotating faculty tours as critical to the development of both the students and the faculty and seek to recruit future strategic leaders to teach.

Reviewing OPMS XXI at the 20-year mark is both appropriate and necessary. Both Athenian and Spartan ideals are required to succeed in the current operational and strategic environments. We must develop ways to reconnect these divergent cultures through the targeted broadening of our most promising officers regardless of branch or functional area to best prepare the Army as a whole for the myriad challenges we face.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Authors' interview with Lieutenant General David H. Ohle, USA, Ret., 18 April 2017.
- <sup>2</sup> Officer Personnel Management System XXI Task Force, "Officer Personnel Management System XXI Study," July 1997, pg. xiii, <http://usacac.army.mil/CAG2/cgsc/carl/docs/OPMSXXI.pdf>.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xv.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. iii–iv.
- <sup>5</sup> Report on OPMS XXI prepared for General Raymond T. Odierno, Chief of Staff of the Army Strategic Studies Group, 10 June 2015.
- <sup>6</sup> Interview with Lieutenant General David H. Ohle.
- <sup>7</sup> "Officer Personnel Management System XXI Study," p. xiii.
- <sup>8</sup> Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), *The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World* (Washington, DC: The United States Army, 2014), p. 17, accessed 3 July 2017, <http://www.tradoc.army.mil/tpubs/pams/tp525-3-1.pdf>.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 20.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- <sup>12</sup> Army Training and Doctrine Command, "Army Warfighting Challenges" (as of 31 January 2017), accessed 2 July 2017, [http://www.arcic.army.mil/App\\_Documents/AWFC-Current.pdf](http://www.arcic.army.mil/App_Documents/AWFC-Current.pdf).
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>14</sup> Lance Betros, *Carved from Granite: West Point since 1902* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 2012), pp. 123–125, 221–222, 235–237.
- <sup>15</sup> Everett S.P. Spain, J.D. Mohundro, Bernard Banks, "Toward a Smarter Military, Intellectual Capital: A Case for Cultural Change," *Parameters*, vol. 45, no 2, Summer 2015, p. 86.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> Interview with Lieutenant General David H. Ohle.
- <sup>18</sup> Robert H. Scales, "Are You a Strategic Genius? Not Likely, Given Army's System for Selecting, Educating Leaders," *ARMY Magazine*, vol. 66, no. 11, November 2016, p. 25.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> "Officer Personnel Management System XXI Study," p. vii.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvii.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> Andrew Bacevich, "American Imperium: Untangling Truth and Fiction in an Age of Perpetual War," *Harpers Magazine*, May 2016.
- <sup>24</sup> Leonard Wong, "Op-Ed: Where Have All the Army Generals Gone?" U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 15 November 2011.
- <sup>25</sup> "CPT Key Developmental/Command Time and Utilization Post-KD," U.S. Army Human Resources Command, 2017.
- <sup>26</sup> "Officer Personnel Management System XXI Study," p. 4-14.
- <sup>27</sup> Authors' interview with Major General Christopher G. Cavoli, 13 March 2017.
- <sup>28</sup> Michael J. Colarusso and David S. Lyle, "Senior Officer Talent Management: Fostering Institutional Adaptability," *U.S. Army War College Press*, February 2014, p. 12.



- <sup>29</sup> Robert M. Gates, speech delivered at the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, 25 February 2011.
- <sup>30</sup> Arpi Dilanian and Taiwo Akiwowo, “New Talent Management System Will Significantly Change the Army: An Interview with Lt. Gen. James McConville,” *Army Sustainment Magazine*, January–February 2017, p. 23.
- <sup>31</sup> Brian C. Babcock-Lumish, Zachary N. Watson and Heidi A. Urben, “The Value of Broadening Assignments,” *ARMY Magazine*, December 2016, p. 34.
- <sup>32</sup> Colarusso and Lyle, “Senior Officer Talent Management,” p. 111.
- <sup>33</sup> Peter W. Chiarelli and Stephen M. Smith, “Learning from Our Modern Wars: The Imperatives of Preparing for a Dangerous Future,” *Military Review*, September–October 2007, p. 13.
- <sup>34</sup> Colarusso and Lyle “Senior Officer Talent Management,” p. 110.
- <sup>35</sup> GrADSO information available on the Army’s Career Satisfaction Program at [https://www.career-satisfaction.army.mil/departments/goh\\_overview.html](https://www.career-satisfaction.army.mil/departments/goh_overview.html). Information on PB-GSIP allocations provided via e-mail exchange between the authors and U.S. Army Human Resources Command, Advanced Education Programs Branch, on 7 February 2017.
- <sup>36</sup> ACS slot numbers available at [http://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Home/Benefit\\_Library/Federal\\_Benefits\\_Page/Advanced\\_Civil\\_Schooling\\_\(ACS\).html?serv=147](http://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Home/Benefit_Library/Federal_Benefits_Page/Advanced_Civil_Schooling_(ACS).html?serv=147).
- <sup>37</sup> Data available at [https://www.career-satisfaction.army.mil/departments/goh\\_overview.html](https://www.career-satisfaction.army.mil/departments/goh_overview.html).
- <sup>38</sup> Colarusso and Lyle, “Senior Officer Talent Management,” p. 109.
- <sup>39</sup> Analysis of biographical data of general officer résumés is available at the U.S. Army’s General Officer Management Office (GOMO) website, [www.gomo.army.mil](http://www.gomo.army.mil). While the majority of general officers in this sample do possess graduate degrees, we focus our analysis on those who attended civilian graduate school in a full-time, resident status (typically for a year or longer), which in most cases indicates that the Army fully-funded their graduate education. We find this variable instructive for our analysis, as it points out a segment of the officer corps whom the Army identified as having high potential and were worth investing in for advanced schooling. The sample also stands out as a group willing to absorb some potential career risk by effectively shortening their timeline to complete key developmental jobs at the field-grade level.
- <sup>40</sup> Forty-five percent of the general officers in this sample obtained a civilian graduate degree on their own time. Of those who did, 47 percent earned their master’s degree through either Central Michigan University or Webster University. Both institutions offer cooperative degree programs in conjunction with the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.
- <sup>41</sup> Authors’ interview with Lieutenant General David W. Barno, USA, Ret., 21 April 2017.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>43</sup> Authors’ interview with Major General Christopher G. Cavoli, 13 March 2017.
- <sup>44</sup> Interview with Lieutenant General David W. Barno.
- <sup>45</sup> TRADOC, “Win in a Complex World,” p. 9.
- <sup>46</sup> Department of the Army, DA PAM 600-3, *Officer Professional Development and Career Management* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2014), p. 17, accessed 4 July 2017, <https://www.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/376665.pdf>. The following functional areas each have a devoted chapter in the current DA PAM: Information Operations (FA 30), Telecommunications Systems Engineering (FA 24), Information Systems Management (FA 53), Space Operations (FA 40), Strategic Intelligence (FA 34), Public Affairs (FA 46), Nuclear and Counter Proliferation (FA 52), Foreign Area Officer (FA 48), Strategist (FA 59), Force Management (FA 50), Operations Research (FA 49), Acquisition Support (FA 51), USMA Professor (FA 47), Simulation (FA 57),

Electronic Warfare (FA 29). There are also Army medical functional areas, but they are beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>47</sup> These numbers were provided by the Army Staff G-1's Directorate for Military Personnel Management and were current as of 31 May 2017.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* Every branch and functional area has a chapter detailing desired attributes, selection and qualification requirements. These vary greatly by specialty.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Scales, "Are You a Strategic Genius?: Not Likely, Given Army's System for Selecting, Educating Leaders," *ARMY Magazine*, 13 October 2016, accessed 1 July 2017, <https://www.ousa.org/articles/are-you-strategic-genius-not-likely-given-army's-system-selecting-educating-leaders>.

<sup>52</sup> Many of the concepts or ideas are introduced in the curricula at senior service colleges. However, we contend that this is too little and too late for emerging senior leaders who often end up doing on-the-job training in strategic and institutional billets as senior colonels and brigadier generals.

<sup>53</sup> Spain, Mohundro and Banks, "Toward a Smarter Military," pp. 79–82.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Scales, "Are You a Strategic Genius?" p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Michael J. Colarusso et al., *Starting Strong: Talent Based Branching of Newly Commissioned U.S. Army Officers* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2016), IX, accessed 27 August 2017, <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1317>.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> The Innovative Strengths Preferences Indicator (ISPI), introduced in 2008, is an online self-report assessment which identifies preferences for approaching innovation processes. It has been used widely by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness for its Ministry of Defense Advisors (MODA) and the Civilian Expeditionary Workforce (CEW) initiatives. It has also been employed by the United States Marine Corps in its innovation symposia. Within the Army, the ISPI has been used by the CSA's Strategic Studies Group in their talent management and human performance optimization research. For a more comprehensive explanation of the tool, please refer to Robert B. Rosenfeld, Gary J. Wilhelmi and Andrew Harrison, *The Invisible Element: A Practical Guide for the Human Dynamics of Innovation*, Innovatus Press, 2011.

<sup>59</sup> There are approximately 425 FA 59 officers serving on active duty on any given day. At the time of this publication, the ISPI had been administered to more than 130 of them and the results are consistently being refined. However, the overall conclusions are holding relatively stable as the number of instruments administered increases.

<sup>60</sup> Stephen J. Gerras and Leonard Wong, *Changing Minds in the Army: Why It is So Difficult and What to Do About It* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2013), p. 3, accessed 6 July 2017, <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB1179.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> Human Capabilities Development Task Force, U.S. Army Mission Command Center of Excellence, *Creativity in the Army: Creative Process, Creative People and the Creative Climate* (unpublished white paper, 2015), p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3. The other consistently low-rated attribute is, unfortunately, tact. The white paper defines creativity as the ability to produce novel ideas that others value, while innovation is the ability to operationalize that idea.
- <sup>67</sup> Scales, “Are You a Strategic Genius?”; The Army Operating Concept, “Win in Complex World,” Foreword by General Raymond T. Odierno and Human Capabilities Development Task Force, U.S. Army Mission Command Center of Excellence, *Creativity in the Army: Creative Process, Creative People and the Creative Climate* (unpublished white paper, 2015), p. 2.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- <sup>69</sup> Tom Mitchell and Alice Cahill, “Cognitive Style and Plebe Turnover at the U.S. Naval Academy,” *Perpetual and Motor Skills* no. 101, 2005, p. 55.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, This case used the Kirtron–Adaption Innovation inventory as the measure.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>72</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and The State* (Boston, MA: Harvard University, 1957), pp. 79–81.
- <sup>73</sup> Direct quotation from a 59 Colonel when asked about how to deal with problem-solving in ambiguous situations. Interview with Idea Connections Systems research personnel in February 2017.
- <sup>74</sup> This comment was made to the author during a conversation on the academic requirements at National Defense University. The ambassador preferred not to be identified by name but allowed the quote on background. Conversation occurred 13 June 2017.
- <sup>75</sup> Aggregation of interviews conducted with 14 top-performing 59 Colonels between February and April 2017.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>77</sup> Interview with Lieutenant General David H. Ohle.
- <sup>78</sup> This statistic was provided by the Army G-1 staff, Director for Military Personnel Management, and was current as of 31 May 2017.
- <sup>79</sup> John A. Nagl and Paul L. Yingling, “New Rules for New Enemies,” *Armed Forces Journal*, 1 October 2006, available at <http://armedforcesjournal.com/new-rules-for-new-enemies/>.
- <sup>80</sup> Interview with Lieutenant General David H. Ohle.
- <sup>81</sup> Larry Bland, “George C. Marshall and the Education of Army Leaders,” *Military Review*, vol. 68, October 1988, p. 29, accessed 8 August 2017, [http://www.marshallfoundation.org/marshall/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2014/04/Education\\_of\\_Army\\_Leaders.pdf](http://www.marshallfoundation.org/marshall/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2014/04/Education_of_Army_Leaders.pdf).
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>83</sup> Marshall held three instructor assignments over the course of his career. He was an instructor for the National Guard in California before World War I, a professor at the Army War College and the Deputy Commandant of the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. His primary biographer, Forrest C. Pogue, believed Marshall to be one of the Army’s greatest “Teacher Leaders” and writes that Marshall recounted to him that he sometimes regretted not seeking a career in academia. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Vol. 1, Education of a General, 1880–1939* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1963), pp. 101–102.
- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>85</sup> George C. Marshall, “Essentials to Peace” (lecture, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway, 11 December 1953).