Rebalancing the Nation's Center of Gravity

Interagency Challenges in the Wake of Pandemic Restrictions

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In addition to highlighting the significance of the 2020–2029 decade for shaping global affairs, the 2022 *National Security Strategy* underscores the need to prevent potential conflicts. This need is crucial given China's and Russia's concerted efforts to diminish U.S. influence.[1] The U.S. government faces an unprecedented interagency challenge between 2022 and 2033 as pandemic restrictions exacerbate the vulnerabilities of young Americans, creating significant obstacles for military recruitment, potentially unbalancing the Nation's center of gravity (COG), and affecting the will of future Americans to support the government's national objectives.

This comprehensive, multidisciplinary research explores the cascading effects of pandemic restrictions, including impacts on the traditional military recruiting base, a projected increase in service disqualifiers among young Americans, and an imbalance in the Nation's COG. By integrating critical findings with relevant military theory and historical analysis, we can evaluate the potential achievement of national objectives.

A concerted interagency approach is required to address the increasing prevalence of service disqualifiers among young Americans. The military alone lacks the resources to solve the problem. As such, an approach that engages multiple departments and leverages their combined resources, personnel, and reach is paramount. Central to this effort is identifying and fulfilling information requirements that can inform actions from 2022 to 2033, ultimately paving the way to achieve national objectives.

Primer

Research methodology and approach. This research article investigates the complex issues arising from pandemic restrictions, particularly their unintended consequences on social cohesion, resilience, and the development of young Americans. It proposes an interagency approach to navigate these challenges and support the U.S. government's national objectives in the future.

The pandemic's large-scale, rapid transformation of society presented challenges to researchers studying its effects. Initial research was rushed to support decision-making and often utilized remote data collection, potentially leading to biases and other issues. These early studies, however, provide valuable insights into societal attitudes during the onset of restrictions. A significant source of data for many researchers was the reporting from parents, as children spent most of their time at home under restrictions.

Trainees assigned to 95th Adjutant General Battalion, 434th Field Artillery Brigade, are tested for COVID-19 during reception 14 May 2020 on Fort Sill, Oklahoma. (Photo by Sgt. Dustin D. Biven, U.S. Army)

The research process adopted for this article combined quantitative and qualitative data analysis, examining information from the private sector, interagency departments, and scholarly sources. Triangulation methods were used through archival analysis, household surveys, and case studies. It's important to note that firsthand observations from interacting with young Americans ages eighteen to twenty-four in Kansas City, Missouri, and surrounding areas were not incorporated in the article, yet they guided some of the research.

The collected data is piecemeal and rich, spanning various disciplines and archival repositories. It helps researchers to understand the effects of pandemic restrictions on society, the economy, and institutions. The article mainly focuses on how pandemic restrictions impacted the vulnerabilities of Americans ages five to seventeen, undermined their social cohesion and resilience, and how this might affect the Nation's COG.

Context. The federal government's oversight of pandemic policy, initiated in early 2020, ended when the emergency declarations were lifted in May 2023.[2] The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) led the federal government's response efforts to coordinate state and local resources in response to the pandemic.[3] To control the disease spread, forty-three out of fifty states implemented social restrictions such as stay-at-home orders, business and school closures, and self-isolation guidelines.[4] The duration of these restrictions varied across states, with Americans enduring an average of fifty-six days under lockdown during the initial phase from March to May 2020 (see table 1).[5]

The duration and intensity of these restrictions varied significantly based on factors such as health conditions within urban and suburban areas. This variance led to geographic disparities in how these restrictions affected people's socioeconomic conditions, educational development, and holistic health. Research suggests

Table 1. Days under Lockdown

Days under Lockdown by State—March to November 2020 (Most to Least Days)									
250	New Mexico	67	Hawaii	52	Vermont	35	Kansas	26	Alabama
161	California	64	Pennsylvania	51	Minnesota	35	Oklahoma	26	Alaska
99	New York	60	Virginia	49	Wisconsin	33	Florida	24	Mississippi
95	Kentucky	59	Maine	46	Maryland	31	Colorado	0	Arkansas
80	New Hampshire	58	Connecticut	45	Arizona	30	Tennessee	0	Iowa
80	New Jersey	57	Ohio	45	Nevada	28	Missouri	0	Nebraska
69	Illinois	57	Oregon	42	West Virginia	28	Montana	0	North Dakota
69	Michigan	55	Massachu-setts	41	Rhode Island	28	Texas	0	South Dakota
68	Delaware	53	Louisiana	39	Indiana	27	Georgia	0	Utah
68	Washington	53	North Carolina	35	Idaho	27	South Carolina	0	Wyoming

(Table by author; data from BallotPedia)

that these measures, alongside additional ones implemented by state and local authorities through 2021 and 2022, unintentionally affected the development of young Americans and delayed the return to prepandemic conditions.[6]

This impact is visible in the military's recruiting challenges, as in 2022, the Army fell short of its recruitment goal by fifteen thousand soldiers, and in 2023, the Army, Navy, and Air Force all fell short.[7] Children who were between the ages of five and seventeen during pandemic lockdowns will begin to become eligible to enter service after 2022, potentially affecting future recruitment. This research article evaluates how pandemic restrictions have affected this group's eligibility for service between 2022 and 2033. Specifically, it assesses how pandemic restrictions affected this cohort by increasing their prevalence for service disqualifiers. While the military is addressing recruitment shortfalls, it does not have the resources to tackle broader social issues stemming from the pandemic. These issues remain unresolved, reflecting the enduring impact of the interagency departments' policies and oversight during the pandemic.

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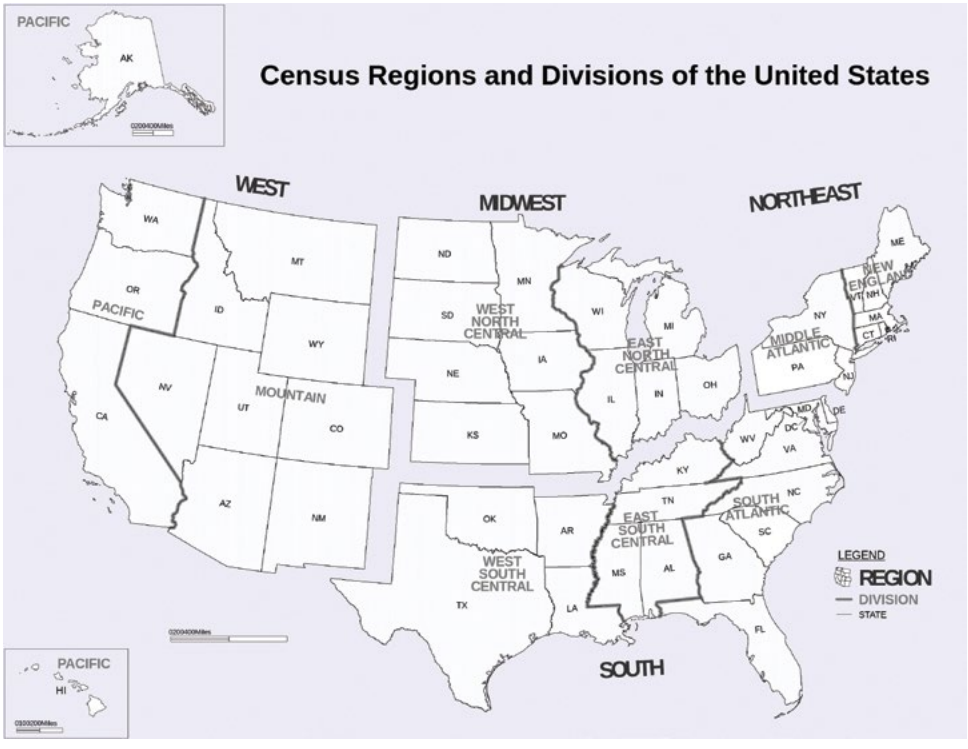
Research on America's recruiting base. The all-volunteer force, adopted post-Vietnam War, requires recruiting physically, mentally, and cognitively fit young Americans. U.S. Census Bureau data offer insights into geographic and demographic trends vital for understanding military accessions (see table 2 and figure 1). The all-volunteer force continues to increase in diversity, where in 2019, most recruits came from the southern and western states and lower or middle-income neighborhoods.[8] Due to resource and other constraints, lower-income families generally have fewer positive outcomes for children and higher susceptibility to service disqualifiers.[9] The trend of military service passed down in

Table 2. U.S. Census Diversity Index Ranking

U.S. Census Diversity Index Ranking (Most to Least Diverse)									
1	Hawaii	11	Arizona	21	Massachu-setts	31	Tennessee	41	North Dakota
2	Nevada	12	Georgia	22	South Carolina	32	Pennsylvania	42	Idaho
3	California	13	Virginia	23	Colorado	33	Minnesota	43	Kentucky
4	Alaska	14	New Mexico	24	Arkansas	34	Nebraska	44	Wyoming
5	New York	15	Illinois	25	Rhode Island	35	Indiana	45	Iowa
6	Maryland	16	Delaware	26	Mississippi	36	Utah	46	Montana
7	New Jersey	17	Washington	27	Alabama	37	Missouri	47	New Hampshire
8	Texas	18	North Carolina	28	Oregon	38	Ohio	48	West Virginia
9	Oklahoma	19	Connecticut	29	Michigan	39	Wisconsin	49	Vermont
10	Florida	20	Louisiana	30	Kansas	40	South Dakota	50	Maine

(Table by author; data from U.S. Census Bureau)



(Figure from U.S. Census Bureau)

Figure 1. Census Regions and Divisions of the United States

Table 3. Generation Diagram

Designation	Years Born	Age Today
Gen X	1965–1980	58–43
Millenials	1981–1996	42–27
Gen Z	1997–2012	26–11
Gen Alpha	2013–2025	10 and below

(Table by author; data from "2022 Generation Names Explained," CareGivers of America, https://caregiversofamerica.com/2022-generation-names-explained/)

families has increased following the adoption of the all-volunteer force.[10]

Pandemic restrictions between 2020 and 2021 brought limitations in recruiting populations, generational shifts, and the growth of the independent workforce. Population migrations across the United States influenced recruiters' access to potential recruits, particularly in suburban and rural areas.[11] Changing attitudes toward traditional workplaces and job security, shaped by pandemic experiences, also affected recruitment efforts.

A key focus of this article is young Americans ages five to seventeen, including Generations Z and Alpha, who were significantly shaped by the pandemic and the resulting societal restrictions (see table 3). Their digital engagement, online influences, and growing preference for remote work necessitate a shift in military recruiting strategies, especially considering the potential clash with traditional military culture and working environments.[12]

The pandemic and the resulting socioeconomic shock pushed more young people toward independent work.[13] This, coupled with the rise in service disqualifiers due to health, education, behavior, fitness, and other issues, has made attracting eligible recruits increasingly challenging.[14] Notably, between 2018 and 2020, service disqualifications increased from 71 percent to 77 percent.[15]

The decline of middle-income families and the growing trend of Generation Z children avoiding the traditional labor force could affect the military's recruiting base.[16] Socioeconomic conditions, lockdown effects, and potential increases in recruitment amongst lower- and middle-income households could risk higher occurrences of service disqualifiers.

Lastly, attrition and retention remain significant issues for the military.[17] While retention success has been noted, first-term attrition rates persist (see figure 2).[18] Understanding the root causes of these issues, particularly increased service disqualifiers in young Americans, is crucial in navigating recruitment challenges between 2022 and 2033.

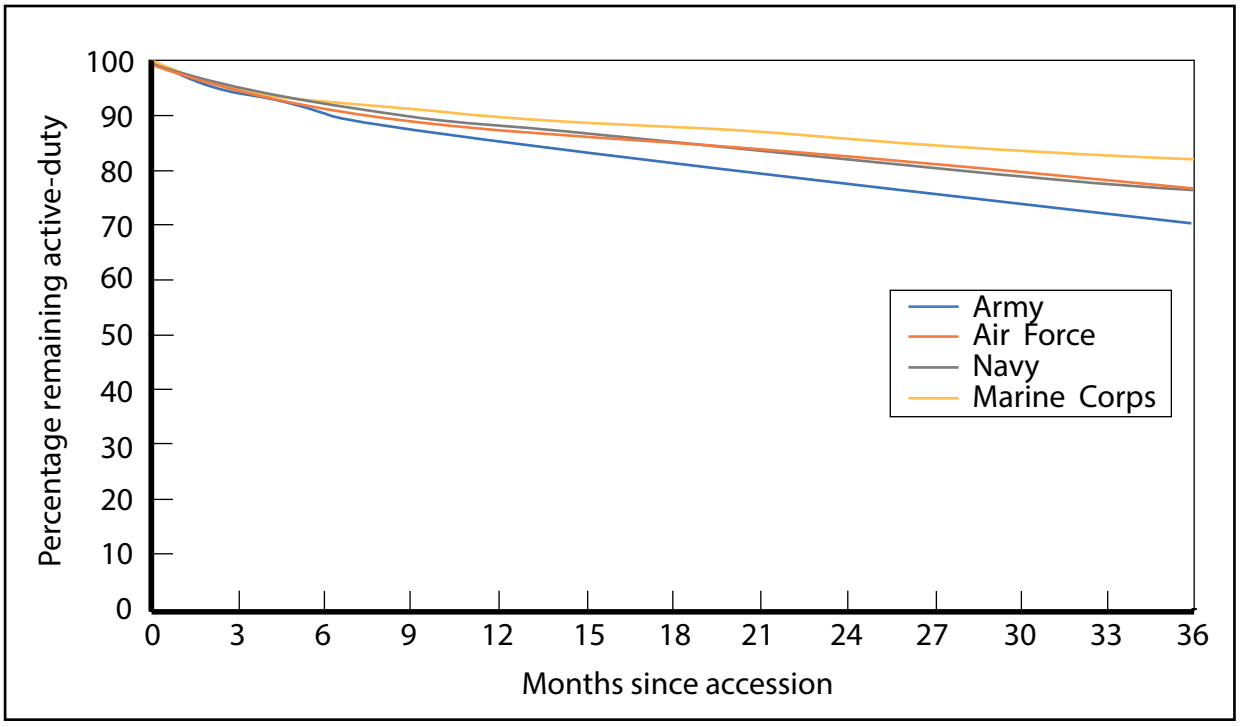
Pandemic Restrictions and Second-Order Effects

Socioeconomic impacts on service disqualifiers. The socioeconomic disruptions due to initial national lockdowns in 2020 have significantly affected the development of Americans ages five to seventeen. Prolonged pandemic restrictions increased food insecurity and the cost of living due to inflation. This section analyzes the metrics to explain the surge in service disqualifiers from 2022 to 2033. The correlation among food insecurity, high living costs, and these disqualifications is evaluated.

Food insecurity, particularly in southern and western states, is a pressing issue affecting lower- and middle-income families. Financial policies and nutritional assistance programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program somewhat mitigated this scenario.[19] However, with the ending of emergency pandemic allotments, food insecurity may resurface, disrupting grocery supply chains and potentially impeding children's physical development.[20]

Due to the lack of access to nutritious food, lower-quality food alternatives might lead to obesity and poor physical health among children.[21] Decreased physical activities due to pandemic restrictions also hamper children's musculoskeletal growth.[22] Furthermore, food insecurity negatively affects children's cognitive performance, impacting their academic scores and performance on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT).[23]

States with high living costs and food insecurity, specifically southern and western states, will likely witness increased service disqualifiers between 2022 and



(Figure from James Marrone, *Predicting 36-Month Attrition in the U.S. Military*, RAND Corporation)

Figure 2. Active-Duty Thirty-Six-Month Attrition Rates

2033 due to these health and academic challenges. The potential impact of food insecurity on the cohort ages five to seventeen gradually becoming eligible for service from 2022 through 2033 is also examined. Lastly, the role of interagency decision-makers in addressing these issues for future service-eligible children is imperative.

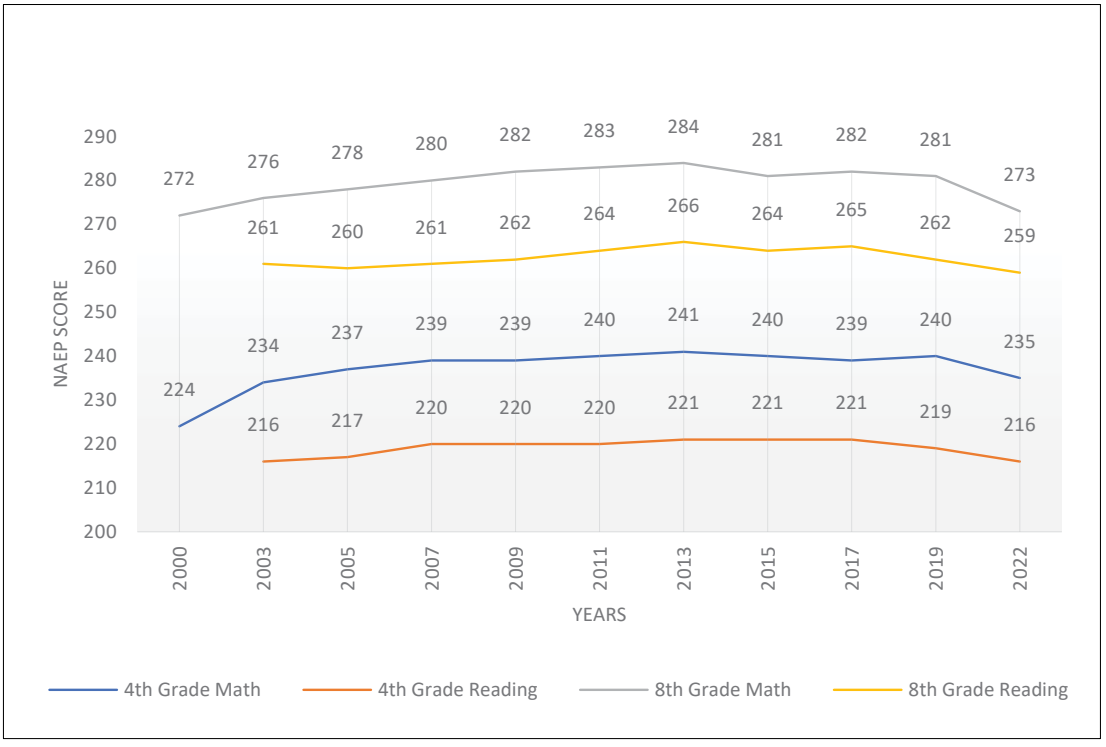
Educational impacts on service disqualifiers. The COVID-19 pandemic restrictions that began in 2020 have severely affected the education and development of American students ages five to seventeen. While the impact on older students is more readily apparent through disrupted learning and the subsequent increased prevalence of service disqualifications between 2022 and 2033, it's significant to note that even the youngest students, aged five and above, have not been immune to these effects. This research article utilizes interagency metrics to compare educational performance before and after the pandemic and explain the increased prevalence of service disqualifications between 2022 and 2033.

In response to the pandemic, many schools switched to a hybrid model of learning in the fall of 2020, leading to disparities among students of varying income levels.[24] The sudden transition to remote learning revealed a need for more preparedness for online learning, particularly affecting students' academic performance within disadvantaged communities.[25]

Learning loss was a significant issue, with one study suggesting that students had lost up to three decades of learning in math and reading, setting performance levels back to the 1990s.[26] The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed a decline in math and reading scores between 2019 and 2022, indicating a reversion to early 2000s levels of academic achievement (see figure 3).[27]

High school graduation requirements were also relaxed during the pandemic, and standardized testing participation rates decreased.[28] This leads to concerns about the quality of education and the potential for lowered AFQT performance. Students from low- and middle-income, Hispanic, and Black families in states that experienced extensive restrictions were particularly affected, falling months behind in their education.[29]

The pandemic's impact on education could have long-term consequences, including lower AFQT scores and difficulty filling critical military occupations.



(Figure from "The Nation's Report Card," NAEP Data Explorer)

Figure 3. NAEP Scores in Math and Reading, Grades 4 and 8, 2000–2022

While the military can attempt to address these issues with training programs, including pre-basic training preparation, the societal conditions causing these problems must be addressed by interagency departments.

The pandemic has exposed the educational system's vulnerabilities and created a complex problem requiring short- and long-term solutions. Addressing the disparities and lost learning caused by the pandemic is crucial for students' future success and maintaining a competent military force.

Holistic health impacts on service disqualifiers. The pandemic and its ensuing restrictions have profoundly influenced the overall health of Americans ages five to seventeen. From an increase in screen time to a decrease in physical activity, along with heightened stress and anxiety, the overall well-being of this age group has been significantly impacted. With state and local leaders shaping policies based on their respective health situations, the environment continually shifted, leading to varying learning experiences and subsequent developmental challenges. These unintended consequences have led to an increase in service disqualifiers from 2022 to 2033.

The pandemic restrictions have disrupted the development of healthy social skills and relationships among children ages five to eleven who have had limited interactions and activities with peers.[30] These interactions form a critical foundation for their overall development.[31] For teenagers ages twelve to seventeen, while their social skills were developed before the pandemic, the restrictive measures have limited their social interactions, resulting in social and emotional development consequences.[32] The transition to online learning and socialization has been a significant coping mechanism but has also presented challenges.[33] Children from low-income and minority families have faced the most significant hurdles in this transition, with limited access to necessary resources.[34] Researchers and policymakers must address these disparities to ensure that all children and adolescents have equal opportunities for healthy development.

The restrictions have also significantly affected physical health, with many children and teenagers adopting a more sedentary lifestyle.[35] The limitations on group physical activities, recess, and neighborhood play have contributed to increased sedentary behaviors

and decreased physical activity.[36] If not addressed, these behaviors can increase overweight and obese children, leading to long-term health issues such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.[37] Unhealthy diets and lack of physical activity can increase body mass index, thereby increasing health-related service disqualifiers.[38]

The pandemic has also intensified the mental health crisis among children and adolescents. As the restrictions limited their social interactions and access to support systems, many children and teenagers have faced heightened stress and anxiety. The closure of schools and loss of jobs in the family has further exacerbated these issues, leading to increased mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral problems.[39] These mental health issues have resulted in increased mental health-related service disqualifiers, a significant concern for military recruitment and readiness.

The increase in service disqualifiers between 2022 and 2033 can be attributed mainly to the pandemic restrictions and their impact on children and adolescents' overall development and well-being. These health issues align with service disqualifiers, including drug use and abuse, obesity, medical, or physical issues, mental health problems, and conduct-related issues. To address these issues, interagency departments must broaden data collection efforts to identify and address developmental setbacks in children. By doing so, interventions can be designed and implemented to mitigate these issues, reducing the potential for service disqualifiers.

The military may also need to consider additional support and resources for recruits such as mental health services within delayed-entry programs to ensure those recruits can complete basic training and the military can retain a pool of candidates and withstand first-term attrition. Policymakers and stakeholders must understand and address these societal challenges to ensure the health and well-being of the Nation's youth and safeguard the future of the Nation's defense force.

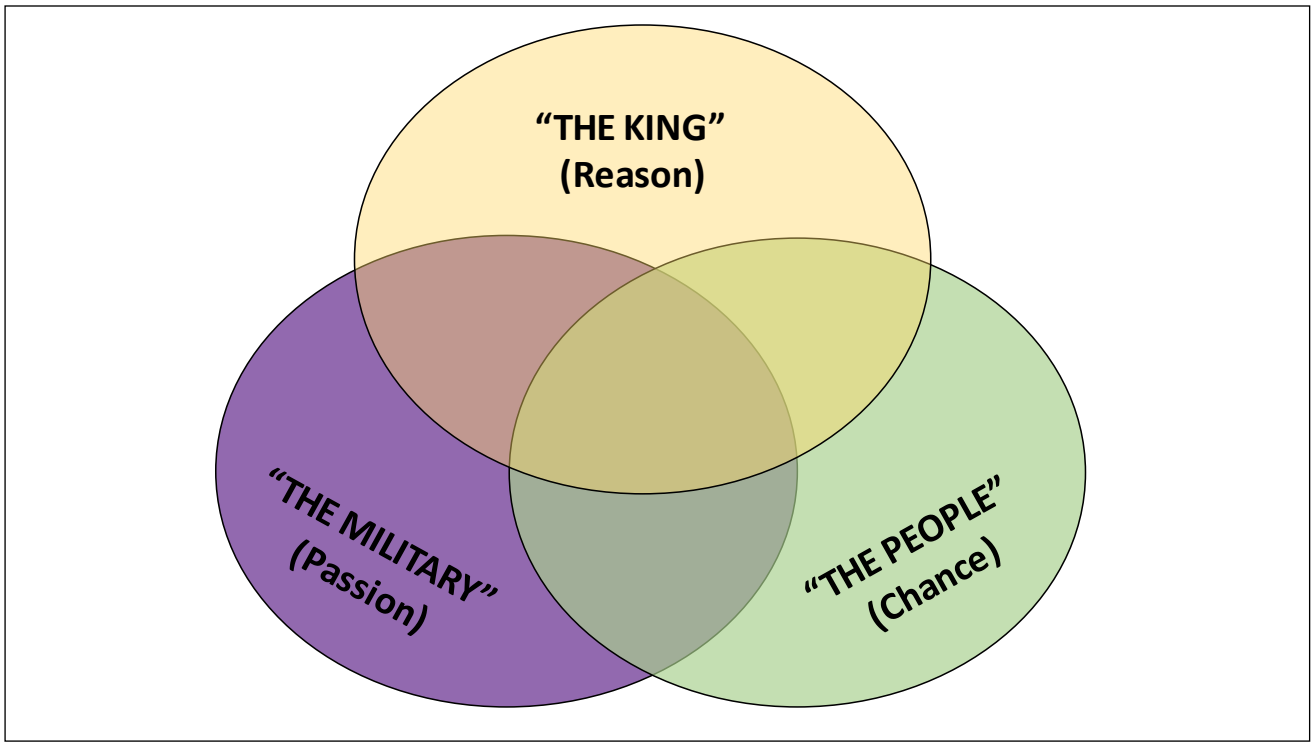
Pandemic Restrictions and Third-Order Effects

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored vulnerabilities in our younger generation that may affect our Nation's future ability to meet its strategic goals. This article examines the impact of pandemic restrictions on military recruitment, socioeconomic status, education, and the overall health of young Americans. This section will further delve into these effects and contextualize them within the framework of military theory. Using analogies from historical events, we will foresee how these third-order effects influence our ability to achieve national objectives. We will analyze these effects concerning key military theoretical concepts, such as the paradoxical trinity and the COG. As we prepare for future challenges, understanding how pandemic restrictions have affected societal vulnerabilities and how they might influence our national objectives is essential for interagency departments.

The paradoxical trinity and the COG. Carl von Clausewitz's concept of the paradoxical trinity serves as a framework to understand the interconnectedness of a nation's government, its people, and its military in determining the outcome of a conflict. In the case of the United States, the population constitutes the Nation's relative COG, balancing the tensions between the military and the government to achieve national objectives.[40] The paradoxical trinity underlines the necessity of a strategy grounded in understanding the interconnected relationship between these three elements: the people, the military, and the government (see figure 4).[41] According to Clausewitz, the interactions and tensions between these elements create a "blind natural force," which, along with "logic" and "reason," shapes outcomes, echoing war's unpredictable and chaotic nature.[42]

The COG is the "primary source of moral or physical strength, power, and resistance" within the system.[43] Identifying a COG may depend on the context or situation and can be physical or nonphysical.[44] It is also dynamic and can shift as internal and external factors influence it.[45] For example, in a military context, it could be a radar system linked to an air defense battery. In contrast, it could be the population's support of military action in a political context. Understanding the concept of a relative COG allows observers to adapt to changing situations and focus on influencing an adversary's COG.[46] Identifying and protecting relative COG while directly or indirectly influencing an adversary's COG is critical to achieving an advantage.[47] Critical factor analysis plays a vital role in breaking down the components of a system to identify its capabilities, requirements, and vulnerabilities, helping to confirm the proper COG.[48]

Critical factor analysis examines the components of a system to identify critical capabilities,



(Figure adapted by author)

Figure 4. The Paradoxical Trinity

requirements, and vulnerabilities; assess their value; and prioritize their contribution to a relative COG.[49] Critical capabilities are "primary abilities which merit a COG to be identified as such in the context of a given scenario, situation, or mission."[50] For instance, superior morale is an example of a critical military capability, while a strong sense of national identity is a political example. Critical requirements are "essential conditions, resources, and means for a critical capability to be fully operative."[51] Access to field medical services is an example of a critical military requirement, while access to health care is a political example. Critical vulnerabilities are "critical requirements or components thereof which are either deficient or vulnerable to neutralization, interdiction, or attack (moral/physical harm) in a manner that achieves decisive results."[52] A weak national response process to an emergency is an example of a government's critical vulnerability, while weak resilience to an emergency is a social example. The following section applies critical factor analysis to the United States' paradoxical trinity to evaluate the effects of pandemic restrictions on the Nation's relative COG.

Interpreting the paradoxical trinity, COG, and critical factor analysis. The will of the people is the nation's relative COG because the people balance the tensions between the military and the government in achieving national objectives. The people's critical capability to achieve this is their willingness to support the government's pursuit of national objectives, including the potential use of military force. To balance the tensions, two critical requirements must be met: resilience and social cohesion. Resilience refers to society and its institutions' abilities to face adversity and recover from setbacks caused by natural or man-made stressors such as war, natural disasters, economic downturns, and other incidents.[53] Social cohesion refers to "the strengths of relationships and solidarity among members of a community."[54] Resilience pertains to the people's ability to endure the costs associated with the government's pursuit of national objectives, including financial and national reputation, the loss of civilians and military lives, and the costs of destruction in war.[55] The critical vulnerabilities of this system include the socioeconomic conditions, educational development, and holistic health of society, all of which were impacted

by pandemic restrictions. Critical factor analysis is applied to the United States' paradoxical trinity and the relationship between pandemic restrictions and the Nation's relative COG to assess these vulnerabilities.

Impact of pandemic restrictions on the Nation's COG. Pandemic restrictions could destabilize the Nation's relative COG by impacting the vulnerabilities of young Americans, thereby influencing their support for the government's national objectives. As indicated earlier, these restrictions have affected critical vulnerabilities of young Americans, like their socioeconomic status, educational development, and holistic health. Suppose these vulnerabilities are exploited, either directly or indirectly, by adversaries. In that case, it could disrupt the Nation's relative COG, risking the critical requirements of social cohesion and resilience needed to maintain their support.

In future significant conflicts, societal divides, such as those among different income, racial, ethnic groups, and other demographic and geographic differences, may impede the ability of the people to unite for a common cause. This lack of unity can create friction during contingencies, potentially leading to an imbalance among the people, government, and military, destabilizing the relative COG.

Lessons from history (World War II and Vietnam). Historically, the people's support for the government's national objectives has played a crucial role in the success or failure of conflicts. In World War II, the American people united behind the government's objectives following the Pearl Harbor attack, showcasing their resilience and social cohesion.[56] In contrast, during the Vietnam War, the Tet Offensive caused a shift in public sentiment, leading to decreased support for the government's objectives.[57] These historical examples underscore the importance of preserving the Nation's relative COG through critical factor analysis.

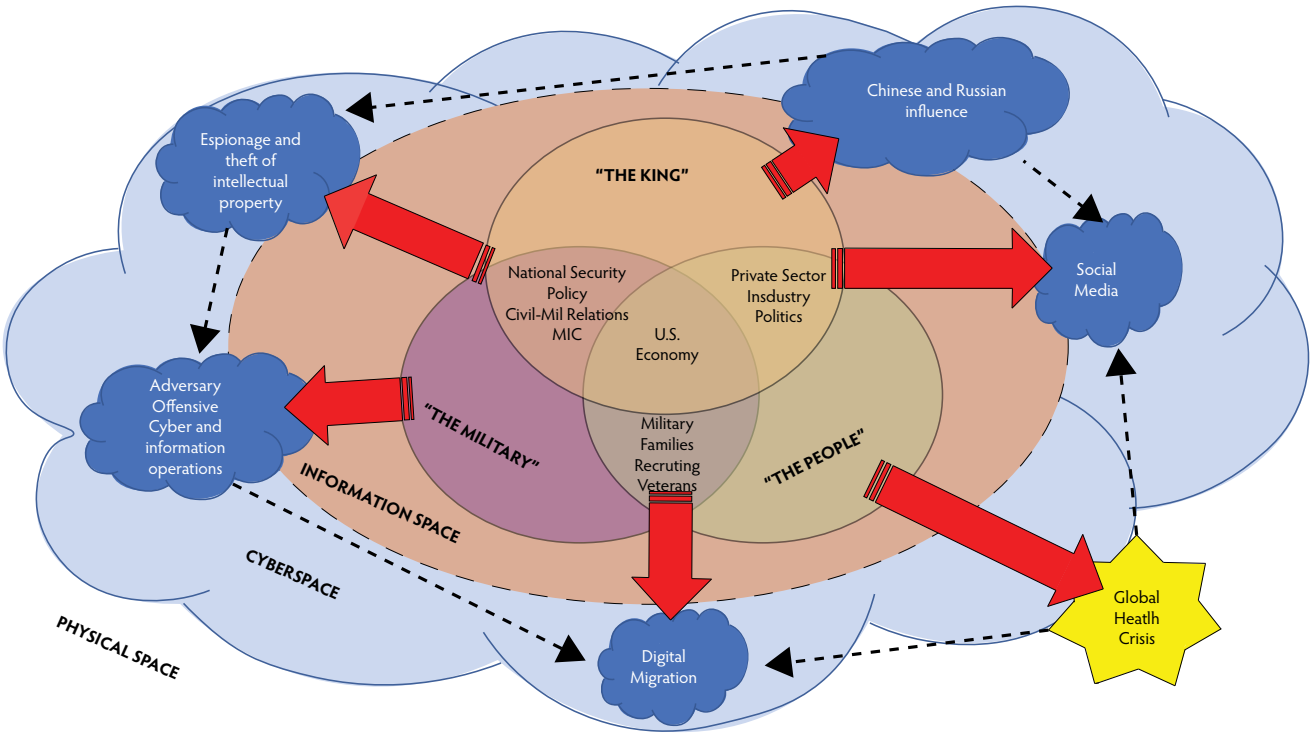
Adversary exploitation of the paradoxical trinity and the COG. Foreign adversaries aim to directly or indirectly manipulate the United States' paradoxical trinity, thereby undermining the Nation's relative COG to decrease its influence in international relations.[58] Figure 5 depicts the internal and external influences acting upon the relationships between the American people, the "king" (the government), and the military.[59] Countries like China and Russia are gaining influence through various means to increase the friction among the American people, the military, and the government.[60] Disparities in the societal experiences of the pandemic and recovery may influence the development of young Americans, shaping their future willingness to support the government's national objectives. As the pandemic accelerates the shift to digital living, foreign adversaries may increasingly leverage the information and cyber spaces to shape young Americans' perspectives, including their views on the government, the military, and the Nation's role in international affairs.

Securing key terrain in information and cyber spaces is critical to maintaining the Nation's relative COG, which can safeguard young Americans' resilience and social cohesion.[61] Interagency departments must address the vulnerabilities exacerbated by the pandemic restrictions to reinforce young Americans' resilience and social cohesion. Effective interagency coordination is essential to protect young Americans from disinformation campaigns and preserve the Nation's relative COG.

Recommendations for the Interagency Departments

The U.S. government is facing an unprecedented interagency challenge between 2022 and 2033, as pandemic restrictions exacerbate the vulnerabilities of young Americans, creating significant obstacles for military recruitment, potentially unbalancing the Nation's COG, and affecting the will of future Americans to support the government's national objectives. So far, this article has highlighted the first-, second-, and third-order effects of pandemic restrictions on military recruiting, young Americans' vulnerabilities, and the Nation's relative COG. This final section generates an interagency recommendation for addressing these complex problems.

This section is divided into five parts. Part 1 reviews the formation of a joint interagency task force (JIATF), its vision statement and objectives, and its roles and responsibilities. Part 2 provides an overview of the information gaps and required capabilities from the interagency, defense, and intelligence communities; state and national organizations; academia; and the private sector and industry. Part 3 applies the joint planning doctrine to develop a broad concept of how the JIATF will accomplish its assigned mission. Part 4 highlights potential challenges and risks the JIATF may encounter. Part 5 reviews the recommendations and highlights key points.



(Figure adapted by author)

Figure 5. The American Paradox Trinity (Direct and Indirect Influences)

Establishment of a joint interagency task force. The government's response to the challenges induced by pandemic restrictions requires forming a JIATF partnered with external stakeholders to collaborate and leverage their comprehensive resources and capabilities effectively. At the onset of the public health crisis in January 2020, HHS was designated as the lead for the government's pandemic response and associated policies.[62] As the government's Public Health Emergency Declaration ended on 11 May 2023, the pandemic recovery continued emphasizing the goal of returning society's state toward prepandemic or better conditions. To lead the cause of helping society recover from pandemic restrictions, HHS is recommended as the lead department for supervising a JIATF focused on *youth development and resilience*. Based on the scale and scope of the problem, HHS would be tasked to establish a JIATF due to its preestablished relationships with industry, national organizations, and the military. Additionally, it can maintain focus on young Americans' health and well-being.[63] Figure 6 displays the JIATF's mission statement, vision, and objectives.

To effectively address the challenges posed by pandemic restrictions on recruitment and the vulnerabilities of young Americans, HHS must leverage additional expertise, resources, and capabilities. Collaboration with external stakeholders whose capabilities are aligned with these requirements will be critical to this effort. This research article identified five information requirements that the JIATF must collect, analyze, and integrate into their approach. Over time, information across these information requirements allows the JIATF to adjust its approach based on information, assess effectiveness, and apply its capabilities.[64] These information requirements include cyber resilience, education, force readiness, holistic health, and socioeconomic status (see figure 7).

These information requirements aim to collect information to assist in cross-functional analysis and predict conditions contributing to exacerbating young Americans' vulnerabilities. For example, predicting the prevalence of service disqualifiers among young Americans based on their academic performance in locations that experienced learning disparities. To this end, several interagency departments and external stakeholders were assessed to determine their suitability and capabilities in supporting these five information requirements (figure 7):

- **Mission:** The Joint-Interagency Task Force (JIATF) is dedicated to promoting the well-being and resilience of young Americans by addressing the challenges posed by pandemic restrictions, with the aim of restoring prepandemic conditions by 2030 and laying the groundwork for continued improvement.

- **Vision:** To build a resilient and cohesive future generation by addressing the challenges and vulnerabilities of young Americans exacerbated by pandemic restrictions.

Objectives:
- Mitigate the negative effects of pandemic restrictions on young Americans' socioeconomic status, educational development, and holistic health.
- Strengthen interagency collaboration to address the Nation's center of gravity challenges.
- Strengthen youth resilience in information and cyber spaces from foreign adversary influence.
- Develop and implement comprehensive strategies to improve military recruitment and retention.
- Foster a sense of unity, purpose, and social cohesion among future generations to support the government's pursuit of national objectives.

(Figure by author)

Figure 6. Youth Development and Resilience JIATF

- Academia: Brookings Institution, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, RAND Corporation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Stanford.

Capabilities include their research expertise with specialization in policy, technology, education, health care, social sciences, and policy recommendations.

- Defense/Intelligence Community: liaisons from the Army, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, Navy, and the National Security Agency.

Capabilities include liaisons from military recruiting and force management and the National Security Agency's relationship with the national signals and cyber intelligence capabilities.

- Interagency: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Defense, Department of Education, Department of Energy, Department of Justice, Federal Communications Commission, Office of Management and Budget, and Department of Agriculture.[65]

Capabilities include the responsibilities and authorities in their respective fields and their access to interagency and external resources. This includes legal oversight and financial considerations for the JIATF's actions.

- Industry/Private Sector: Amazon, Apple, Google, Instagram, Meta, Microsoft, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube.

Capabilities include logistics, procurement, warehousing, technology and marketing expertise, innovative solutions, digital devices, student resources, machine learning, and data analytics.

- State/National Organizations: liaisons from U.S. states and organizations, including the American Medical Association, AmeriCorps, National Association for Mental Illness, National Institute of Health, Red Cross, and the Young Men's Christian Association.

Capabilities include expertise in physical health and fitness, mental health and resilience, community building and services, community outreach and volunteering, and civics.

Information requirements and available capabilities. The JIATF requires effective leadership and talent management to appropriately leverage their capabilities and generate an approach for meeting cyber resilience, education, force readiness, holistic health, and socioeconomic requirements. The interagency and external stakeholders' reputation for expertise, resources, and talents have provided practical and relevant analysis to aid policymakers in decision-making. Where they require assistance is cross-functional analysis to fuse information and generate holistic understanding. Five working groups are generated based on the broad interagency and external stakeholders that align with the five information requirements. Figure 8 displays

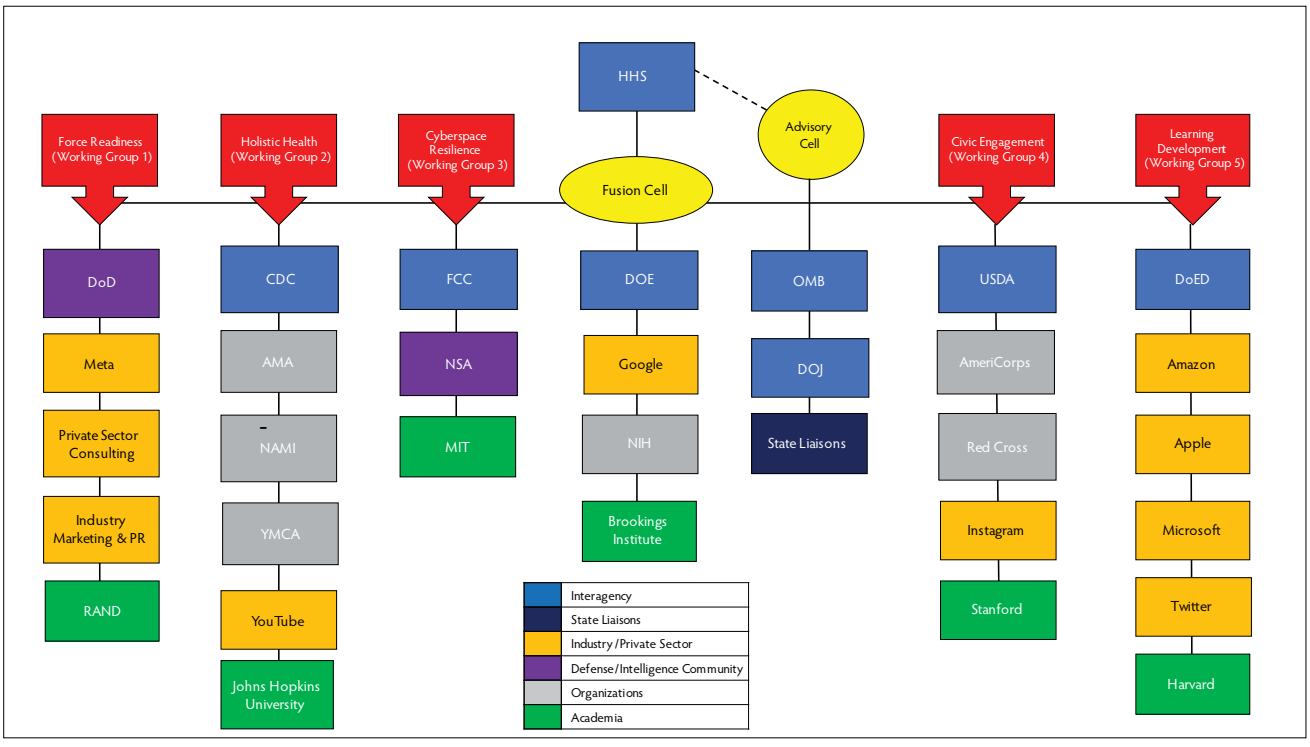
JIATF - PIR and Capabilities Crosswalk								
Priority Information Requirements (PIR)	**Specific Information Requirements (SIR)**	Working groups aligned against requirements (Capabilities)					
		WG 1	WG 2	WG 3	WG 4	WG 5	FUSION
PIR 1 How are educational workforce, curriculum, and resource shortfalls affecting student progression	How are student grades 5-12 reflecting in NAEP reading and math scores following the pandemic?					T	
	Which states still do not have emergency remote learning or online curriculums prepared for emergencies?					T	C
	Which states are still experiencing teacher hiring and training shortfalls?					T	C
	Which states are still experiencing shortages in daycares and workers?					T	C
	Where/why are colleges and universities opting out of college preparation requirements for admission?					T	C
	Where/how are colleges and states preparing and testing students for college admissions?					T	C
PIR 2 How are socioeconomic conditions affecting children's learning progress?	How are children in states with high food insecurity performing in math and reading?				T		T
	What resources do children in states with high costs of living and property require to close the learning gap?				T		T
	Where/why are high school graduation rates decreasing and drop out rates increasing?				T		T
PIR 3 How are children's increased vulnerabilities affecting future force readiness?	Where/how are military disqualification trends for the adolescent cohort (5-17) between 2022-2033?	T					C
	How effective are pre-basic training programs in providing the skills needed to curb first-term attrition?	T					C
	What service disqualifications are increasing in states that are representative or over representative to active-duty accessories?	T					C
	How are service disqualifications affecting the accessions of critical military occupational specialties?	T					C
	How can military recruiters increase their online presence and engagement to attract talent?	T					C
	What partnerships or work-incentives with industry private sector would improve the talent management and retention for the services?	T					C
	What resource/training gaps are missing in basic and advanced training for reinforcing the resilience of first-term servicemembers?	T	T				T
PIR 4 How are holistic health challenges affecting children's social cohesion and resilience?	Where/how did the social skills of children aged 5-17 develop the lease during the pandemic?		T				C
	Where/how were children's resilience to adversity affected the most from pandemic restrictions?		T				C
	Where/how are schools experiencing shortfalls in mental health and behavioral counseling for children aged 5-17?		T				
	Which states are not instituting access or physical education curriculum?		T			T	T
	How were children's harmful or risk-behaviors shaped in states with the longest pandemic restrictions?		T			T	T
	Which states are experiencing concerning increases in childhood comorbidities?		T			T	T
	Which states are experiencing concerning increases in childhood obesity?		T			T	T
	How are families supplementing their food needs after the end of pandemic SNAP benefits?				T		C
	Where/how are reductions in SNAP benefits affecting needy families and children?		T		T		T
PIR 5 How can online information spaces be better protected from foreign influences and misinformation?	Which information spaces are adversaries actively leveraging to influence young Americans aged 5-17?			T			C
	How are adversaries influencing young Americans aged 5-17 in information spaces?			T			C
		C = Capable		T = Tasked		R = Requested	

(Figure by author)

Figure 7. JIATF Priority Information Requirements and Capabilities Crosswalk

the proposed task organization of the JIATF. The diagram represents five working groups, each aligned with a requirement and cross-task organized with representation from external stakeholders. Of note are the Fusion and Advisory Cells, which play critical roles in the JIATF. The Fusion Cell, spearheaded by the Department of Energy, capitalizes on assistance from Google's online data analytics, Brookings Institution's research experience, and the National Institutes of Health's health expertise institute in fusing information from the working groups. The Advisory Cell serves to advise HHS on legal and fiscal considerations for the actions of the JIATF and ensure systems and processes are transparent and compliant with the law. The five working groups are assigned roles and responsibilities (figure 8), including:

- Working Group 1, Force Readiness: The lead is the U.S. Marine Corps based on its reputation and successful recruiting and retention strategies. The group includes liaisons from the primary branches and assistance from Meta, academia, and industry to identify new and effective marketing and public relations strategies to address shortfalls in recruiting. This also includes analyzing current recruiting trends to assist the JIATF in reassessing its approach.
- Working Group 2, Holistic Health: The lead is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention based on their comprehensive health knowledge and research conducted during the pandemic. The group includes leading medical and mental health organizations and the YMCA to identify new holistic strategies for increasing physical activity, mental health, and physical health initiatives in schools. This is partnered with YouTube to leverage its data analytics and ability to spread information to broad audiences.
- Working Group 3, Cyberspace Resilience: The lead is the Federal Communications Commission based on their authority over online platforms. This group includes assistance from MIT for their research and analytics focus in technology fields and the National Security Agency, with its authorities over signals and cyber intelligence capabilities, to research new strategies and technologies



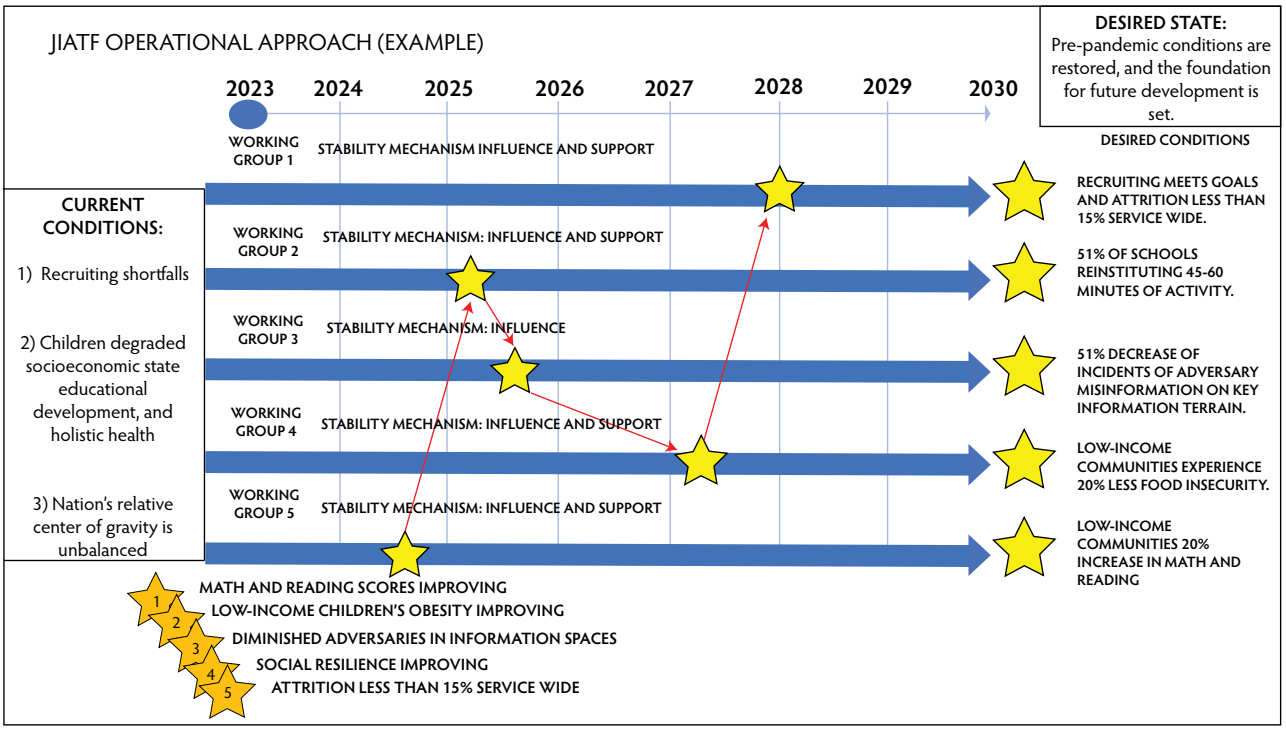
(Figure by author)

Figure 8. JIATF for Youth Resilience and Development

for safeguarding information spaces from foreign adversary influence.

- Working Group 4, Civic Engagement: The lead is the U.S. Department of Agriculture based on their community development and outreach experience and resources. This group includes AmeriCorps and the Red Cross's vast pool of volunteers and workers, and research analytics from academia to identify new strategies and initiatives for increasing community involvement and resilience planning. This is partnered with Instagram based on their analytics and ability to engage with and appeal to younger audiences.
- Working Group 5, Learning Development: The lead is the Department of Education based on their expertise on students' educational needs and policy formulation. This group includes Amazon, Microsoft, and Apple to generate a strategy and initiative for solving the educational disparities of low-income and minority families. This includes X (formerly Twitter) and academia data analytics and outreach to engage with the industry for producing and distributing the resources to children.

A broad approach for the JIATF. The JIATF must develop a broad approach to ensure the security and resilience of future generations by addressing the challenges and vulnerabilities of young Americans exacerbated by pandemic restrictions. Keeping the *National Security Strategy*'s guidance in mind, which states that the current decade is decisive toward setting the future tone of conflict and international affairs, allows the JIATF to align its plan with national priorities.[66] The joint planning process provides a way to develop an approach that allows the JIATF to leverage the five working groups and provides a foundation to backward plan from their desired end state to their current state.[67] Figure 9 displays an operational approach for the JIATF to achieve its mission and objectives by 2030 and set a foundation to build upon beyond it. Each working group composes a line of effort (LOE) with its desired condition to mutually support the other LOEs and achieve the desired end state.[68] To highlight one line of effort, the JIATF Force Readiness LOE desires to achieve conditions such as consistently achieving recruiting goals by meeting objectives such as reducing service-wide attrition to less than 15 percent by 2028.



(Figure by author)

Figure 9. Example of a JIATF Operational Approach

This is supported by other LOEs, such as events in the Civic Engagement and Learning Development Working Groups that complement efforts in space and time.

Challenges, risk, and mitigation. The success of the JIATF in achieving its mission depends on its ability to collaborate, communicate, and coordinate its efforts effectively in a challenging environment with competing and emerging requirements. The JIATF faces three primary challenges that risk its success. First, it requires robust systems and processes for sharing information and collaborating digitally. This challenge can be mitigated by integrating cloud capabilities from Google, Meta, and Amazon that allows flexibility in collaboration information. Second, the lack of consistent touchpoints may degrade its effectiveness. This challenge can be mitigated by leveraging remote work capabilities provided by Microsoft and Apple for daily activities and establishing dedicated liaisons from each working group to conduct monthly in-person meetings at the Pentagon to maintain oversight of their activities. Third, information and analysis saturation may impede timely and accurate information analysis to drive decision-making. This challenge can be mitigated by integrating academia into each working group to manage knowledge of the group's efforts and integrate their analysis into the Fusion Cell's cloud-based repository.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated the value and need for a coordinated interagency response to address the challenges arising from pandemic restrictions. The U.S. government is facing an unprecedented interagency challenge between 2022 and 2033, as pandemic restrictions exacerbate the vulnerabilities of young Americans, creating significant obstacles for military recruitment, potentially unbalancing the Nation's COG, and affecting the will of future Americans to support the government's national objectives. By leveraging the expertise and capabilities of various interagency, defense, intelligence, national organizations, academia, and private stakeholders, the JIATF can work collaboratively to address information gaps, develop effective strategies, and mitigate potential risks. Forming a joint interagency task force with a clear mission, vision, objectives, and task organization is critical to addressing these challenges. The U.S. government must take decisive action

to ensure future generations' resilience and preparedness of future generations and maintain the Nation's ability to pursue and achieve its national objectives. We can ensure the well-being and future potential of young Americans and the Nation through a comprehensive, cooperative approach. ■

Author's note: *The research in this abbreviated version of the original article highlights critical points for publication, whereas the full version dives into much greater detail of findings. Read the original paper at https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1B_bfN2HkRt2ISFJCOzh2vjQSIt0Yy36F?usp=sharing.*

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