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(Graphics courtesy of U.S. Army)

Modernizing Recruiting for the Great Power Competition

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Congressional Defense Fellowship Program

The 2015 *National Security Strategy* identified the need for the United States to understand their shared domains of cyber, space, air, and oceans with other countries of power. This concept reintroduced the Department of Defense (DOD) to the idea of the great power competition, expounded upon in the 2017 *National Security Strategy*, and reinforced with the 2018 *National Defense Strategy*, naming China and Russia as major players (Department of Defense, 2018; National Security Strategy, 2015; National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2017).

Contrary to popular belief, the competition for global power is not exclusively about weapons and technology. In fact, rifles, tanks, and aircraft would be useless without talented Soldiers to operate, innovate, and guide the U.S. into the future. According to Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen. James C. McConville, “Our Army’s people

are our greatest strength and our most important weapon system” (Department of the Army, 2019, para. 4). Realizing the importance of this, China, once known for a quantity over quality approach to military power, has also altered their focus to retaining the best and brightest talent. According to Elsa Kania and Emma Moore, “the People’s Liberation Army is prioritizing efforts to catch up in its ability to find, attract, and retain talented people” (Kania & Moore, 2019, para. 1). To keep pace with demand to fill and maintain the force, the Army must modernize the process and procedures in which it recruits to keep pace with the great power competition.

Recruitment of the Force

In 1973, the United States made the decision to move towards an all-volunteer force following the Vietnam War (Rostker, 2006). The move forced the DOD to com-

pete with academia and the private sector for the top American talent to fill its ranks.

As troop demand has increased during recent decades, the DOD dramatically increased incentives, quality of life initiatives, and pay increases/special duty pays to attract a larger pool of candidates to adequately compete with the civilian sector (Hoesk et al., 2018). Additionally, Congress funds the DOD's military healthcare system for troops and their families and offers a retirement system allowing troops to contribute and receive benefits after their service to the military is complete.

Recruiting Challenges for the Army

While troops may receive fair compensation for their service, the Army is struggling to find new candidates ready and eligible to serve. In 2018, the Army reported it would miss its recruiting goals by 8% for the first time in thirteen years – missing their goal by 6,500 recruits (Myers, 2018). One of the most significant factors driving the low recruitment was the country's strong economy during that period. This caused an abundance of high-paying jobs, which then subtracted high-level candidates from the available recruiting pool. Beth Asch, a senior economist at the Rand Corporation, said, "You have fewer people who can serve, they have more opportunities in the job market, and that makes it very hard on the Army" (Phillips, 2018, para. 3).

Another factor limiting the pool of eligible applicants is the physical ability of the young American population. A 2017 Pentagon report stated that approximately 27% of potential recruits aged 17-24 were ineligible to serve due



(U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Sarah Zaler taken June 12, 2020) U.S. Army Maj. Gen. John S. Kem, commandant, U.S. Army War College, delivers the Oath of Enlistment to 25 future Soldiers during a ceremony at the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, June 12, 2020.

to their physical condition (Spoehr & Handy, 2018). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention states that obesity rates in American children and adolescents have tripled since the 1970s ("Obesity," 2018). As obesity rates continue to increase in young Americans, it limits the available military recruiting pool.

Current Solution

The U.S. Army is currently in the midst of their "What's Your Warrior?" campaign, a marketing strategy focused on Generation Z (the newest generation of 17-24-year-olds), and filling more than just traditional combat roles such as biochemists or cyber operators (Brading, 2019). By highlighting the Army's need for talent in noncombat fields, the Army will be able to draw high-level recruits to man these fields and prepare itself for the technologically advanced future fight.

Solutions to Enhance Recruiting Efforts

The "What's Your Warrior?" campaign is a great step in the right direction for the U.S. Army, but there are also several other potential solutions that can be incorporated to make sure recruiting numbers are achieved.

Supplementing Recruiting Stations

Supplementing all recruiting stations, to include National Guard, with active duty non-commissioned officers to train recruits who do not yet meet the physical qualifications would greatly expand potential applicants for service. As recruits pass the requirements in the program, they can then be sent to the



U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Leeallan Magrata, a career counselor with the 4th Infantry Division, talks to Spc. Patrick Mclean, a combat engineer with 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th ID, about reenlisting, at Fort Carson, Colorado, Feb. 27, 2018. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Ange Desinor)

recruiters within each station and can begin their basic training assignments. This collaboration between recruiters and trainers would improve the likelihood those sent to basic training are successful and graduate.

Transition Programs

To keep pace with a strong economy and robust job market, the Army must expand its job training and placement programs to transitioning service members. The switch from being a Soldier to a civilian can be stressful, and is a new way of life for many transitioning Soldiers. Knowing military service can be helpful in the civilian sector and not a detriment, can help bring in recruits currently worrying that a military career is a dead-end and think they have to start over after military service (Keeling et al., 2017). Programs such as the DOD's Skillbridge program, offer great opportunities for transitioning service members to train in a variety of industries. Unfortunately, it's only available during a Soldier's last 180 days of active service and requires command approval for participation, which is not always feasible for units that are short-staffed or have a high operational tempo (Prather, 2020).

The Army should expand Soldier participation in the SkillBridge program and seek additional industry partners



(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Sarah Sangster taken June 30, 2020) Future U.S. Army Soldiers with the Hawaii Recruiting Company tour a CH-47 Chinook of the 25th Combat Aviation Brigade as part of Army National Hiring Days at Wheeler Army Airfield, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, June 30, 2020.

eager to take on trained employees with a background in military service. Studies show young adults currently enlisting were positively influenced by a veteran in their community (Phillipps & Arango, 2020). Investing in a positive transition for veterans also delivers talented young recruits.

Increase Local Recruiting Programs

Congress should also increase funding to expand DOD programs that enhance recruiting across the nation. This could include more Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps sites, and expanding the use of the Hometown Recruiter Assistance Program since positive peer-pressure can also encourage enlistment (Castel, 2019). Furthermore, an increase in federal

funding would expand JROTC participation on a national stage, to include competitions and summer camp experiences at DOD facilities across the globe.

Conclusion

China and Russia are quickly advancing their interests through economic and military means. To maintain a competitive edge, the U.S. must continue to invest in its most crucial military resource: its people. By modernizing its recruiting strategies, the U.S. can ensure that it's filling its ranks with the best qualified candidates. ■

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