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Operations Economy of Forces

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Abstract

Personnel procurement and organization strength plays a vital role in the principal of war “Economy of Forces”. The Department of Defense in conjunction with Congress and many other entities mandate the management of the personnel strength for the Army. Their decisions have an effect on the effective employment of the “Economy of Forces” concept. This study discusses some of the effects of current measures and describes how our ability to manage the employment/deployment of Army personnel and equipment to multiple operations is somewhat limited. A brief review of our history will prove that our government is ineffective in managing our military strength as a measure to prepare for the unknown.

Operations Economy of Forces

“Every unnecessary expenditure of time, every unnecessary detour, is a waste of power and therefore contrary to the principles of strategy” (Clausewitz, 1873). The concept of economy of force is the use of all combat power most efficiently in an attempt to use minimum necessary assets in secondary efforts. The intent is to leave no force without a purpose. It requires the efficient employment and distribution of forces towards a primary objective. In the effective employment of economy of forces, “the allocation of available combat power to such tasks as limited attacks, defense, delays, deception, or even retrograde operations is measured in order to achieve mass at decisive points elsewhere on the battlefield” (Economy of Forces, ¶ 1). The employment of sources not only refers to equipment but more importantly the Soldiers who will employ that equipment and attempt to accomplish the mission assigned to them by the chain of command in support of protecting the freedoms afforded to us by our forefathers.

The Department of Defense manages the distribution of personnel strengths for each service. Traditionally the Army and its entities have tended to be the larger of the services. The overall strength discussed in this document encompasses the active Army, the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve. The use of revolving government policy can be detrimental on the effectiveness of our military. During the scope of this study, we will discuss the Department of Defense’s past and current personnel authorization portion of the economy of forces principal of war and how it has diminished the effectiveness of the Army to efficiently fulfill its role in the defense of the United States and its interests around the world. This argument includes such methods as discussing some of the Army’s recent deployment history, the increased operation tempo, the effects on the overall personnel strengths and equipment distribution and the changes in personnel procurement processes.

Manning the Forces – Past and Present

Pre-Desert Storm Strengths

“Following every major armed conflict in the twentieth century, the United States has dramatically reduced the size and combat effectiveness of its military forces in response to the nation’s desire for an expeditious harvesting of the anticipated peace dividend” (Wong and McNally, 2007). Many people view this act as a downfall of our government but it is merely a protective measure that is necessary to regain some financial balance after the extensive expense of a conflict. If we were to accurately assess the expense of maintaining our military most would agree that we can not afford to maintain the strength of an overly large military service and still forge forward in our defensive posture. We must ensure that our budgetary constraints allow for changes that encompass more than a large inventory of personnel.

The Army’s strength peaked at 1.57 million Soldiers during the Vietnam conflict so it stands to reason that our economy could not afford to maintain such a strength in peacetime; therefore, it only made sense to reduce our numbers to an end strength of 785,000 by the end of 1974. The Vietnam Conflict brought about many changes. Our leadership initiated the Total Force Policy after the Vietnam Conflict to capitalize on the availability of the reserve forces to ease the financial burden of war.

Our military forces have been involved in many conflicts since the Vietnam Conflict and their practices have not changed much in regards to the management of personnel after a conflict, so it was of little consequence when our government decided to reduce the force by 300,000 after the completion of Operations Desert Storm and Shield. They decided to take the active Army strength from approximately 770,000 to 470,000. This process would take place over several years and decrease the defense budget to allow for much needed progression.

The main method of acquiring recruits during the Vietnam Era was the draft. After the Vietnam Conflict, we embraced the concept of an all volunteer force. This process meant that Army recruiters had to produce a certain number of contracts per month. The standards for eligibility could be relaxed or stringent dependent upon the time in history. The desired recruit in most cases is an individual who has completed high school and attains a reasonably high score on the Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) exam.

Personnel Strength Struggles

The practice of downsizing in large numbers is not an easy feat. In many cases the service members do not desire to re-enlist and look for ways to leave the service early. While in other cases, it is necessary to provide financial incentives to lure people out of the service. When the Department of Defense decided to downsize after Desert Storm and Desert Shield they offered incentives such as the Voluntary Separation Incentive (VSI), the Special Separation Benefit (SSB) and the 15-year retirement. “The VSI calculated 2.5 percent of the member’s basic pay times their years of service. The SSB calculated 15 percent of the member’s pay times years of service” (VSI/SSB Program, ¶ 1). While the 15-year retirement offered a retirement option for individuals, who were at the 15-year mark and desired the opportunity to retire. Eligibility for these incentives began with at least six years in service. These incentives offered an opportunity for many to capitalize on their desire to leave the military service and receive a little financial gain.

People join the military for many reasons. Some join because of patriotism, some for the educational benefits while others join for the security of a steady income. Considering the many different reasons people decide to serve, the retention incentives have to be diverse enough to offer benefits to individuals within their window of reenlistment. Reenlistment bonuses, stations

of choice, and stabilizations are a few of the common reenlistment incentives that Soldiers have the option of choosing when reenlisting. In the past, the occupations that received the option of a reenlistment bonus was very limited. Selection of stations of choice is not as cut and dried as it sounds. This incentive may have restrictions dependent upon their occupation and the locations available for their occupation. Location stabilization is usually not a problem with reenlistment since most organizations desire to maintain a high strength.

The need to maintain unit strength, especially for units preparing to deploy, is critical. Given that the enlistment and reenlistment practices do not always work as a means to retain much needed personnel, the institution of stop loss/stop move programs are sometimes put in place to ensure deploying units have the service members required to meet their mission needs. Stop loss is a program that allows the service to temporarily halt all separations and retirement during times of war, deployments, or National Emergency. The Army issued a stop loss in conjunction with the War on Terrorism (MILPER Message Number 04-169). This message was as a blanket clause to eliminate the need to reissue one as the current campaigns continue. The message stops the execution of a Soldier's expiration term of service if they are in a unit that is within 90 days of deploying. This method ensures the deploying unit maintains the trained personnel assets throughout a deployment phase.

Personnel Challenges

In light of the massive drawdown we experienced after Desert Storm/Desert Shield it is no wonder the practice of recruiting has been called into question based upon the actions of a few. The standards for enlistment change dependent upon the need for recruits. A prime recruit for the Army is an individual that has at least graduated from high school and scores well on the ASVAB. The norm is not to allow individuals with extreme criminal records in or medical

conditions that can be aggravated by military service. At times, our superiors lower these standards to allow the entry of less qualified recruits in order to meet the demand for Soldiers. The aspect of recruiting that receives negative press is the lack of morals in practice by some recruiters. Recently the production of high school diplomas, the hiding of medical conditions, and the concealment of criminal records came under scrutiny in the realm of recruiting. Some would argue the increased demand on recruiting missions is to blame, while others would say the demand should not matter and that we should honor our personal beliefs and follow the Army values regardless of the situation in which we find ourselves. Despite the bad press received by recruiters reports say they attained their recruiting goal for FY07; therefore, there is no need to fear they will not make their mission next FY.

Retention practices have improved over the course of the recent campaigns. More Soldiers receive the options of bonuses and are able to capitalize on additional financial incentives available. The limited number of duty stations available to Soldiers and their family members now offer a chance for more stability. Therefore, the options of station stability and station of choice offer Soldiers and their families more of a chance to get rooted in a community and flourish. The options placed before Soldiers are much deserved incentives to help maintain the fighting force today and should not be viewed negatively.

The life of a Soldier revolves around change and challenges. These challenges increase as we move up in the ranks. Change is good and necessary for progression. Leaders should embrace and institute the changes our leaders thrust upon us. We may not agree with every decree placed upon us, but we have to look outside of our areas of comfort and try to grasp the strategic implications of the changes developed by our military leaders. Our Soldiers often respond to change in a manner similar to us. If we are positive, they are positive. In turn if we

are negative, they are negative. We have to teach our Soldiers that change is good and more importantly some change are necessary. Our leaders must to look toward the future to see where we should go. It is our responsibility as leaders to embrace the executive decisions made and ensure we do our part to ensure institute the directed changes and meet challenges head on.

Currently the Army is meeting its recruiting and retention goals. We are moving forward in the filling and training of new organizations. In short, we have risen to the challenge our leadership placed before us. We may not agree with all of the decisions made by our leadership but by virtue of our oath, we must support them and not be overly critical of them publicly.

As of June 2007, the strength of our active Army is approximately “436,108 with approximately 125,300 Soldiers deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and 19,100 deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom” (Military History, 2007). Given that we are meeting the recruiting and retention needs and experiencing success on different fronts in the War on Terror can we present a good argument that refutes the decisions to draw down our military after each major conflict is an error. If we were to give an honest assessment most would agree that our economy can not afford to maintain a military force with an excess number of Soldiers. The concept of doing more with less is necessary in order for us to continue to expand our military capabilities. Our senior leadership is innovative in incorporating measures to provide the combatant command with a working support system while placing boots on the ground in combat locations. Our challenge today is to recognize the need for change and embrace it.

Conclusion

“The quest for a functional political, economic, diplomatic and military strategy to assure the continued growth and safety of any nation has always been a most difficult task” (Morris,

1996, p. 384). “The Army’s ability to recruit and retain service members will directly affect its ability to maintain the force levels required to continue conducting operations in Iraq and Afghanistan while simultaneously converting to a new modular structure” (Holtz-Eakin, 2005). Recruiters would not have such a hard time if the bar was not raised so high for them. The numbers are steep because we are still trying to make up for the loss of Soldiers we lost due to the draw down in the early 90s after Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield. The government has made drastic reductions in service personnel at the end of every major campaign since the Vietnam Conflict. It appears our government makes its decisions under the assumption that we will experience a long period of peace following a conflict. Experiences have shown that we should not make any assumptions about potential conflicts especially when it comes to considering the effective employment of operations economy of forces. We all can agree that we are a military in transition. We can also agree that the transition is necessary in order for us to meet our potential future needs. Our government officials must figure out a way to balance our budgetary constraints with our need to maintain a strong fighting force. If a draw down is necessary, the numbers should not be drastic. Drastic decreases in force during peace would call for drastic increases during conflict that would place unnecessary stress on our military service as a whole. If we want to remain a well-trained force and continue to maintain our powerful military power, we must have consistency in our willingness to change and the personnel maintenance of our force. The practice of drawing down our force at the end of a conflict must stop. Reluctance to do so will keep us in a perpetual state of discord in relation to training, recruiting, retention and maintaining a high level of esprit de corps in our military service.

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