

Running Head: IS THE ARMY LOWERING STANDARDS?

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When terrorists flew planes into the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, America was caught by surprise. The United States responded quickly, taking the fight to the terrorists on their home soil in Afghanistan. It took just a matter of weeks for a combination of conventional and unconventional Soldiers to rout the Taliban, but six years later we are still battling the asymmetric threat. In 2003, the United States military invaded Iraq to remove Sadaam Hussein from power and to stop him from using weapons of mass destruction. That war was supposed to be over quickly too; four years later, our troop levels have increased in Iraq, our military is stretched thin, and there is no end in sight. Soldiers are on their fourth or fifth deployment, deployment lengths have increased, and recruiting and retention has gotten tougher in this time of conflict. Department of Defense leadership and some in Congress say that our Army is too small to fight the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and have authorized an increase in the Army's end strength.

In 2007, Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey, Jr. announced his plan to grow the Army to an end strength of 547,000 Soldiers by 2010. It may sound good, or read well in the newspaper, but to Army Recruiters the mission most likely resembles Mt. Everest. As I traveled with the Sergeant Major of the Army in 2006-07 as his Public Affairs NCO, I heard from numerous Soldiers how "the Army is lowering standards to recruit more Soldiers". Those same Soldiers would say how the quality of the average Soldier has dropped and that the Army must be "scraping the bottom of the barrel". The old truism that says, "as long as a Soldier is complaining, he or she is doing OK" still rings true today. Currently, we have approximately 515,000 Soldiers on active duty,

another 350,000 in the Army National Guard and 200,000 in the Army Reserve, for a total of 1,065,000 Soldiers. Our Nation's population just hit 300 million citizens. Less than one percent of Americans serve in the United States Army in this time of persistent conflict, and Army Recruiters face hostile parents, apathetic young men and women, and a stable economy with low unemployment. How does the Army increase its end strength during a time of war without lowering standards? In this ethics thought paper, I will discuss how the Army is not lowering standards to increase the end strength of the force. To meet that ambitious goal of 547,000 Soldiers in uniform by 2010, the Army must focus on recruiting quality Soldiers, retaining our best and brightest, cutting back on basic training and first-term attrition, and the re-evaluation of Army standards.

Recruiting quality Soldiers for the all-volunteer force continues to be the Army's "bread and butter". Now that America has been at war for six years, how do Army Recruiters continue to make their yearly mission? Army Recruiters do not recruit from any one segment of society; they don't focus on poor families or ethnic minorities. When it comes to putting young Americans in boots, it's all about qualifications. Sergeant Major of the Army Kenneth O. Preston, during a briefing at the Sergeants Major Academy, stated that the 17 to 24 year old male category accounts for approximately half of all recruits during a given year. If you take 10 average young men from that age category, only three meet the standard qualifications to join the Army. SMA Preston said the other 7 are disqualified because they cannot pass the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test, for moral or medical reasons, or they don't have a high school diploma or an equivalent. Those three that qualify make up a population

nationwide of about 2 million to 3.5 million Americans. Half of the Army's mission of 80,000 recruits, about 40,000, comes from the 17 to 24 age male category.

With unemployment currently at a low 4.7%, the Army has stiff competition from the private sector, which actively recruits from this population as well. The Army also competes with colleges and universities and parents who don't want their child in the Army. Would bringing back the draft help grow the Army's end strength? Of course it would. But if you talk to a Vietnam War or Korean War veteran, they will tell you that the draft would destroy the professionalism of the Army. So how do we increase the number of qualified individuals? I would propose granting additional moral, medical or educational waivers on a case-by-case basis. Our senior leaders throughout U.S. Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) have many years of experience in determining if an individual is suitable for Army service. If a person has the drive and desire to join an Army at war, why not give them a chance to serve? It is up to our stellar noncommissioned officers to train that person in Basic and Advanced Individual Training, and at their first duty station. Soldiers throughout the Army's history have said, "today's Soldier isn't as good, they aren't as tough as we were". Nothing could be further from the truth. With hands-on, in your face leadership, I believe we can make good Soldiers out of almost any American citizen.

Retaining our best Soldiers is another key to increasing our end strength. The Army is making and exceeding its retention mission year after year. Critics say this is only due to the large reenlistment bonuses Soldiers receive while they are deployed. I would beg to differ. I believe that bonuses play a part in our retention success but I feel that Soldiers are staying in uniform because they feel like they are a part of something

bigger than themselves. Soldiers aren't dumb – they know that military service is an inherently dangerous profession. Soldiers know that we are fighting the terror networks on their home soil, keeping them away from their loved ones in America. Soldiers know that the camaraderie with fellow troopers cannot be duplicated in civilian life. Soldiers also know that one day, history will look back on the United States Army of the new millennium as the “Next Greatest Generation”. The reenlistment bonuses Soldiers are receiving today are but a pittance when you compare the quality of a Soldiers’ service to the amount they receive in their monthly paycheck. The bonus is just a down payment from America to maintain our all-volunteer force. Our Soldiers today are the most experienced troops our Nation has ever seen in uniform. For our Army to preserve its status as the world’s preeminent superpower, retention must remain high.

Initial entry training attrition has dropped steadily since 2001, which directly contributes to end strength. In May of 2005, initial entry training attrition was 18%; as of July 2007 it had dropped to 7.68%. This is due to additional emphasis from Training and Doctrine Command on rehabilitating physical training failures and providing extra counseling to trainees who are trying to adjust to Army life. Army basic training has moved away from the spit and polish, drill and ceremonies focused training of yesterday to the more relevant Warrior focus of today. This intense training has undoubtedly saved lives in combat and has delivered more seasoned Soldiers to units preparing to deploy or units already in combat. The Army must keep initial entry training attrition below 10% and ensure there is adequate investment in our trainees; this too will help to grow the end strength of the force.

Many political leaders, such as Congressman Charles Rangel of New York, have called for a reinstatement of the draft. Other senior leaders have suggested mandatory national service, including the Armed Forces as a national service option. The American people fully support the United States Army and the American Soldier, but the nation as a whole is not invested in the Global War on Terror in any way, shape or form. Americans see stories on the evening news or read a headline in a newspaper, but most have no connection to the Army or Armed Forces. This must change for our country to continue on as a world superpower. All facets of society must be represented in our all-volunteer force, and we must continue to re-evaluate our enlistment standards to give all Americans the opportunity to serve. The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review observed that the “central reality that success depends on the dedication, professionalism, and skills of the men and women in uniform – volunteers all”.

In conclusion, I believe that for our Army to increase its end strength, we must hit the personnel issues from three different fronts: recruiting, retention, and by reducing first-term attrition. This can be done by re-evaluating our enlistment standards, retaining our best Soldiers by offering robust bonuses, and by ensuring we give all Army recruits the opportunity to succeed during their first-term. Less than one percent of all Americans serve in the military today. Let’s give more patriots the opportunity to serve their Nation in a time of war. Our national security depends on it.