



May 5, 2008

**FUTURE DEFENSE DILEMMAS
SUMMARY REPORT
OF THE
“MAINTAINING QUALITY IN THE FORCE” SEMINAR**

by Ralph Wipfli

BACKGROUND

The “Future Defense Dilemmas” seminar series is a new partnership between the 21st Century Defense Initiative at the Brookings Institution and the U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute. Its goal is to bring together defense experts and policy leaders from academia, the military and defense community, other governmental organizations, and nongovernmental institutions for discussions on looming defense questions and dilemmas.

INTRODUCTION

On December 4, 2007, the 21st Century Defense Initiative and the Strategic Studies Institute held the second seminar of the Future Defense Dilemma series. The event, entitled “Maintaining Quality in the Force,” focused on how to preserve the U.S. Army’s status as the best and most powerful military in the world through recruitment, training, and retention of soldiers and officers. Although the U.S. military and its quality have come under pressure due to the current campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, the challenges of recruiting and retaining the right people will likely persist. Unless those challenges are addressed now, the readiness and effectiveness of the U.S. military will be severely diminished. Such a shortfall would take years, if not decades, to correct.

The seminar attracted more than 180 representatives from think tanks, government agencies, academic institutions, and the media. It was divided into two parts. First, General George William Casey, Jr., Chief of Staff of the United States Army, presented his vision for maintaining excellence in the Army during and beyond the service’s longest deployment since the Vietnam War. Mr. Strobe Talbott, President of Brookings, provided introductory remarks.

Following the briefing by General Casey, the 21st Century Defense Initiative and the Strategic Studies Institute invited a smaller group of 40 defense and

military experts to a panel discussion. This second part of the seminar was not-for-attribution to allow an open debate. Professor Douglas Lovelace, Director of the Strategic Studies Institute, and Dr. Peter W. Singer, Director of the 21st Century Defense Initiative, provided opening remarks, introduced panel speakers, and moderated the discussions.

What follows summarizes the speech by General Casey, as well as the presentations, arguments, and discussions of the lunch seminar at the general level and without attribution to any particular speaker or participant.

BRIEFING BY GENERAL GEORGE W. CASEY, JR.

In his speech on "Maintaining Quality in the Force," General Casey presented a thorough description of the conflict environment that the military will face in the 21st century. He then outlined the requirements that the new environment imposes on the nature and capabilities of the U.S. Army, and the challenges of manning and equipping the armed forces accordingly. A salient point throughout his presentation was the importance of recruitment, training, and retention. As the battlefields of tomorrow grow more complex, with nonstate actors operating in heavily populated (and often significantly impoverished) urban areas, the need for soldiers to have political acumen, cultural awareness, and principled leadership will become increasingly apparent.

General Casey argued that while the army is not "broken" by its 5-year involvement in Iraq, it is nevertheless "stressed" and "out of balance" as a result of the emphasis on counterinsurgency training, high operational tempo, and extended troop deployments. These factors have not only put a burden on the individual soldier, but have started to affect the Army as an organization, as well as with families. Consequently, while Casey commended the Army on its competence, resilience, and professionalism, he emphasized the need for further organizational and doctrinal change to meet the emerging challenges of the 21st century.

The war in Iraq has produced several cumulative pressures that have led to the Army's organizational imbalance. He was particularly concerned about the army's reliance on extended deployments to meet its troop requirements in Iraq. Casey cited the Army's extended use of equipment, in many cases many times the rate of peacetime averages, as another pressure point. While the equipment challenge can be met by allocating money through the normal appropriations process, current troop deployment rates and rotation schedules are not sustainable. Under current conditions, the shortened "down-time" between tours-of-duty doesn't allow soldiers to heal and reconnect with their families at home, reset their equipment, and train for "the full spectrum of training so they are ready to operate across the spectrum of conflict." Although troops receive sufficient training for their counterinsurgency missions, they don't receive

enough training in the areas of peacetime engagements and conventional warfare.

Casey pointed out that the future strategic environment will be marked by what he calls “persistent conflict.” The 21st century will feature protracted conflicts between a variety of state, nonstate, and individual actors. A series of political, environmental, technological, and demographic shifts that will encourage conflict and facilitate the recruitment efforts of global extremists aggravate this trend. Increasing urbanization, exponential population growth in developing regions, and continuing competition for basic resources are among the drivers of these shifts. Add to that, we find the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) technology, increasingly available in the open source market and off-the-shelf products. Also, the persistence or emergence of safe-havens will create a security environment conducive to extremism, complex nonstate actors, and prolonged ideological conflict.

Thus, conflict in the 21st century will be far more complicated. Traditional deterrence capabilities may not work against extremist nonstate actors who don’t feel bound by the laws of war. Urbanization and the ideological nature of the struggle against extremism and insurgencies lead to conflicts that are fought among the civilian population rather than around them. This will force a nation like the United States to be much more subtle in its projection and use of military power. While competing armies of the 20th century fought outside of populated areas with tank columns and artillery barrages, armies in the this century will have to work within indigenous populations, using nonmilitary aspects of power. Conversely, nonstate actors such as terrorists or insurgents will resort to asymmetrical means to negate the superiority of the U.S military. Their goal is not to defeat the military, but they seek to draw out the conflict, raise the costs of military engagement, and ultimately break the political will of the opponent to fight. Armies of the future will have to realize that battles of the 21st century will not be won simply by the application of superior military power and technology, but rather by the ability to effectively organize one’s own forces and gain the support of indigenous populations.

The complexity presented by these threats will require an army that must be what Casey describes as “leader intensive.” In order to fight battles against amorphous insurgent organizations in the midst of an indigenous population, one has to rely on leaders who are both technically competent and politically and culturally aware. Not only will mid-level officers have to be trained in a broad spectrum of military operations, but they will have to be held to a high standard of moral and ethical conduct. In order to deal with the conflicts of the 21st century, the military must focus heavily on retaining its mid-level officer corps, while at the same time ensuring that they have enough funds to properly “reset” and train between deployments. Additionally, the military must continue the organizational reforms it began during the first term of the Bush administration. Not only should it continue to increase recruitment for its active duty forces, but

it should also move its reserve forces away from the strategic support role they held during the Cold War, and toward a role that can be effective in the multitude of threats that will face our nation, both at home and abroad.

The questions during the presentation focused primarily on recruitment and the apparent disconnect between the military and society at large. Dr. Singer asked about the differences in the recruitment, training, and education of young officers in 2020 as opposed to today. General Casey replied that the training of the future must emphasize a broadening of skill-sets. While officers should be competent in their primary field, they should be able to respond to the variety of challenges presented by the new conflict environment. This can be achieved by providing windows for training and experience outside the military as part of an officer's regular career path, including fellowships at think tanks and educational institutions, and positions with other agencies of the U.S. Government.

PANEL DISCUSSION

After the presentation by General Casey, a group of experts from government, academia, and think tanks were invited to join a private, off-the-record panel discussion with Lieutenant General Michael Rochelle, Deputy Chief of Staff, G-1, United States Army; Lieutenant General Theodore Stroup (United States Army, Ret.), Vice President for Education, Association of the United States Army; and Dr. Lawrence Korb, Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress. The discussion was led by Dr. Singer. Professor Lovelace provided some preliminary remarks.

The presenters noted that the All-Volunteer Force can only be maintained if three conditions are met. First, there must be enough money to sustain it. An all-volunteer force is expensive, and Congress needs to appropriate the funds necessary. This goes beyond just salaries and bonuses. It includes benefit packages for soldiers and families, continued education, and other quality of life support.

Second, maintaining a highly trained recruiter corps with enough manpower is essential to the recruiting mission. Advertisement money also plays a key role in reaching out and attracting potential recruits. Experience has shown that when the number of recruiters and money for advertisement are cut, recruitment numbers will fall.

Third, the people serving in an all-volunteer force need to meet certain quality standards, not just at the officer level, but in the enlisted ranks. This means that the Army must retain its quality standards, including the requirement for high-school degrees or equivalent. Waivers of any kind should only be granted on an exceptional basis.

The success of these three endeavors to maintain a high-quality all-volunteer force depends on the economic conditions that prevail at any given time. The economy influences the propensity of people wanting to join the enlisted ranks.

If the economy is doing well and the unemployment rate is low, recruiters will find it harder to fill their recruiting quotas. Investment in the all-volunteer force must reflect economic realities.

One participant remarked that monetary incentives, the number of recruiters, and quality standards are all tactical elements in manning the force. A historical overview of the all-volunteer force reveals that with few exceptions, recruiting and retention crises have been solved by these tactical means. In fact, the Army has gone through six or seven all-volunteer forces, each one resulting from a recruitment crisis in the enlisted force. Each time the crisis has been resolved by either a policy decision of the serving administration or by congressional action.

The first all-volunteer force covered the period from 1973–1976, at the end of which the Army experienced problems with the way the recruiting goals and mission were designed. In order to resolve the crisis, the GI Bill from World War II and the Korea War were dropped in 1976, and Congress raised salaries on the enlisted side by 60 percent.

The second all-volunteer force lasted from 1976–1979. At the end of this period, the recruiting command missed the recruiting goal by 17,000 men and women. This time, to fix the problem, the Army increased the number of its recruiters.

The third all-volunteer force from 1979–1983 was the period during which quality standards were introduced. At the same time, salaries are raised again, and advertisement campaigns started to pay off. Despite resistance from the Army and the Reagan administration, Congress passes the Montgomery GI Bill. Retention and recruiting bonuses were used at a higher rate and scale than ever before, notable as a result of a study done by the RAND Corporation.

The period after 1983 until 1991 represents the fourth all-volunteer force, characterized by budget cuts, low-unemployment toward the end of the 1980s, and dramatic reductions in advertisement money for recruitment (about 80 percent). All these factors result in lower recruitment and retention rates. The Gulf War reversed this trend. On the one hand, Americans felt patriotic again and signed up for military service. On the other hand, there was also a realization that maintaining an all-volunteer force would cost money, as pay would increase, advertisement budgets would rise, and the recruitment force would grow. This period of the fifth all-volunteer force lasted until 1997.

Around 1996 and 1997, the Army started to experience recruiting difficulties again. This time it was a reaction to the fact the Army was drawing down its force by 300,000, which left Americans with the perception that the service doesn't need people. Why would one join, if the military was releasing soldiers? In addition, the American economy was doing well, and unemployment was low. All of these factors contributed to the recruiting crisis at the end of the fifth all-volunteer force.

From 1997 until September 11, 2001 (9/11), the period of the sixth force, more recruiters with more training were fielded, and 9/11 provided a patriotic spark

in the American population. In addition, the economy slowed down just enough to make business better for recruiters. Currently, the United States finds itself with the seventh all-volunteer force. The campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan have left Americans in doubt about the value of joining the military, a problem further exacerbated the nature and duration of the wars.

In order to still recruit enough men and women, the Army had already in previous decades started to change its quality standards, a trend that increased with the latest version of the all-volunteer force. The Army initially had adopted higher quality standards than prescribed by the Department of Defense (DoD) and Congress, but by the fifth all-volunteer force, standards had dropped to the levels mandated by DoD. All services now operate on the quality standards set by DoD and Congress.

Participants agreed that while important, the tactical adjustments to maintain the quality of the all-volunteer force are only part of a larger debate that needs to be taken about the value of military and public service in American society.

This strategic debate has implications beyond the military. It used to be, as General Weyand said, that when America's army goes to war, America goes to war; and when America turns against the war, the Army has to get out of the war. Many parents today are not going to send their sons and daughters to a war they no longer support. At the same time, America has not mobilized for the current wars. One participant mentioned that while American soldiers fight in Iraq and Afghanistan, the rest of America goes to the shopping mall.

The all-volunteer force was introduced after Vietnam. It may be that it is not possible to fight long wars such as the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan with an all-volunteer force, as suggested by General Abizaid. At the heart, the general's remarks indicated that for longer wars, the National Guard and Reserve would be the bridge to conscription. Currently, participants agreed, the United States is asking too much of its all-volunteer force, and the impact of fighting long wars using an all-volunteer force needs to be looked at more closely.

One presenter stated that it is remarkable that in a nation of 330 million, fewer than 1 percent are serving in uniform. Today, the responsibility to communicate patriotism and service has fallen to the military, when it should instead be the politicians and leaders in the community who inspire the youth, not just for military service but for civil service in general, including the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the rest of the State Department. These agencies play a crucial role in the struggle against extremism, and young people should be motivated to become public servants. President George W. Bush could have turned the patriotic sentiment of the immediate post-9/11 period, but his administration missed the opportunity to mobilize the country as a whole and ask for sacrifices.

The generation that currently could enter the military or choose public service is Generation Y. This generation exhibits the highest levels of volunteerism of

any previous generation, including the baby boomers. Of today's college freshmen, 66 percent think it is essential to help others in their daily lives. At the same time, however, their civic engagement is expressed in new ways and doesn't necessarily include military or civil service.

Indeed, the military is not viewed as a viable career option by this generation. Their sense of patriotism has declined steadily over the past 4 years, particularly within the African American community. As a result, their predisposition to join the armed forces has declined as well. At the outset of the war in Iraq, 26 percent said that it would be unlikely that they would join the military. By 2007, that percentage had reached 52 percent on average, with the African American and Hispanic communities at 67 and 66 percent, respectively.

Many youth have the perception that their parents wouldn't approve if they joined the military. This is significant because Generation Y loves its parents more than any other generation. When asked about who they admire most in the world, they are the first generation in history to respond with Mom and Dad. American leadership needs to find new ways to tap into the volunteerism of Generation Y, notably through campaigns that target the parents rather than the youth.

Quality standards themselves have larger strategic implications. Lower quality standards say more about America as a society than about the Army itself, because there are fewer and fewer individuals who meet the standards for military service—either they don't have a high school degree or equivalent, or they are overweight, or they have criminal records, all of which indicate tendencies that need national attention and a response by society as a whole. One participant argued that the U.S. Congress needs to be concerned that 50 percent of all minority students in high school will not graduate, that 70 percent of all poor kids will not graduate, and that 30 percent of all high school students will not graduate. This is a national issue and speaks not only to the future of the all-volunteer force, but also to the future of U.S. economic competitiveness in a global economy.

We also need to think about quality in new ways, without lowering the moral standards of our military. To what extent does volunteerism in an environment of war have an aspect of quality unto itself? We can measure many aspects of quality, but we have thus far neglected to measure the heart of a young person signing up for military service knowing full well that he/she will find themselves in harm's way.

A particular challenge will be to reach out to those individuals who come out of elite educational institutions. Those individuals will most likely be the political leaders of the future. The United States needs to find a way to entice them into at least temporary military service. If the country cannot do that, in 20 to 30 years the political leadership will have no military experience at all and will not be able to effectively communicate with the armed services. The potential disconnect between the political elite and the military also raised the larger question about

the connection between the U.S. Army and the general population. Participants agreed that throwing money at the recruiting problem may negatively affect the representative nature of the military and add the danger of a mercenary mentality.

The recruiting and retention challenges today come at a time when the Army and the Marine Corps have decided to increase their end strengths by a combined 92,000. Many think this is still not enough manpower and participants cautioned not to repeat the downsizing of the 1990s once the conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan are over, including those capabilities for post-conflict reconstruction in other agencies. It will take leadership at the national level to manage the post Iraq transition, both in the White House and Congress.

On top of that, the Army is undergoing a transformation from larger divisions to smaller more mobile brigade combat teams. This will require more captains and majors than currently available and will take years. The United States may move toward the right structure for the conflicts of the 21st century, but doesn't yet have the necessary recruiting and personnel processes in place to man the new force.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.