



Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

STUDIES

Military Manpower for the Long Haul

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For more than half a century, the US military has been well known for developing and employing the most advanced weapon systems in the world. However, over the years, perhaps nothing has contributed more to the effectiveness of the US military than the quality of its personnel. Indeed, in order to be effective, the US military must have adequate numbers of high-quality military personnel, with the right experience, training and skills.

Military manpower requirements can be successfully met only if adequate resources are provided for recruitment and retention efforts, including appropriate types and levels of compensation. In addition, success depends on less easily quantifiable elements such as effective leadership and intangible but important factors including high morale and the relative success of ongoing military operations. It also requires effective long-term planning. First, because it takes considerable time to produce quality military personnel; and, second, because the military is a closed system that—with few exceptions—promotes only from within.

The US military faces a range of serious challenges to its ability to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of quality personnel both in the near term and over the long term. The most critical near-term challenge is related to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But these ongoing operations are not the only manpower-related problems confronting the US military. Among other things, those challenges include:

- Trends in various areas of military technology and concepts of operations that will, over time, likely require that the Services acquire and maintain an increasingly competent, well-trained and

well-educated workforce.

- Obstacles within the Services' traditional personnel and management cultures that may stand in the way of using the most cost-effective recruitment and retention tools, and creating a more flexible and effective personnel management and compensation system.
- High and growing budgetary costs associated with military personnel (including the cost of pay and, especially, healthcare and retiree benefits), and the danger that increasing personnel costs may crowd out needed investments in the development and procurement of new weapon systems.

Taken together, these and other trends and challenges make it imperative that the Services' personnel requirements be managed effectively in coming years. Doing so is likely to require both using traditional tools of personnel management (e.g., pay, bonuses and recruiting resources) more efficiently and adopting a mix of broader, and in some cases, new and innovative approaches (e.g., restructuring military compensation, and reorienting the military to focus more attention and resources on preparing for stability operations).