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Building Better Generals

By David Barno, Nora Bensahel, Katherine Kidder and Kelley Sayler



Center for a
New American
Security

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The U.S. military needs an adaptive and creative officer corps in order to address the complex challenges of the 21st century – where the demands of managing an increasingly volatile international security environment and massive defense enterprise will rapidly collide with the realities of declining defense budgets and constrained U.S. global military capabilities. Yet 12 years at war in the unconventional conflicts of Iraq and Afghanistan have distorted the skills of the officer corps and much reduced the time that has been available for professional military education and broadening assignments. Additionally, over a decade of irregular warfare may poorly prepare officers for what lies ahead. For this reason, the United States must redouble efforts to strengthen its current and future military leaders, starting with its corps of generals and admirals, and extending to all those rising to fill these positions. These officers will be responsible for leading a smaller, more austere force charged with fulfilling the nation's global security responsibilities. Improving flag officer assignment, education, selection and evaluation is a wise and necessary investment to ensure the nation maintains the senior leadership capable of preventing, and if necessary, winning the next war.

Several initiatives would significantly improve flag officer development and accountability in the years ahead. Tomorrow's flag officers would benefit from an assignment system that tracks them into one of two specialties: warfighting ("operational") and institutional ("enterprise") billets. Coding all two-, three- and four-star billets as either operational or enterprise, and assigning flag officers selected for two-star rank to one of these tracks, would enable officers to optimize their development and education for the responsibilities of their assignment. Increasing assignment tenure – to as long as five years – would additionally contribute to the deepening of expertise, learning and accountability. These longer assignments would also take better

advantage of longer career paths – to 40 years and beyond – that are becoming more commonplace among three- and four-star generals and admirals.

Flag officers will also need robust, tailored education to support their assigned track. Officers on the operational track should attend a new U.S. Higher Command and Staff Course that emphasizes strategic and political-military skills; enterprise officers should attend business schools and corporate and executive leadership programs, supplemented by military-specific courses.

Finally, officers will need a selection and evaluation process that establishes clear expectations for performance and enhances accountability throughout their careers, particularly at the three- and four-star level. This process should include performance reviews and written evaluations for *all* officers, which will additionally promote mentorship and continuous self-development. Today, this system abruptly stops when an officer is promoted to three-star rank.

While other aspects of officer management – including military culture and talent retention – will also contribute to the military's ability to navigate the immense strategic uncertainty of the future security environment as well as the growing complexity of the defense enterprise, they fall outside the scope of this paper. As the military begins to adjust to an environment of constrained resources supporting a global security strategy, it must implement reforms in officer assignment, education, selection and evaluation. Doing so is an essential investment in producing an adaptive officer corps that is well-prepared for a wide range of future challenges.

II. INTRODUCTION

In the years ahead, the U.S. military will confront a number of strategic challenges that will require innovative, forward thinking at the highest levels of uniformed leadership. Senior U.S. military officers will be charged with managing a massive and stunningly complex defense enterprise with reduced resources, while also being asked to provide operational leadership that will ensure that the U.S. military can dominate the battlefield in any potential conflict. Recent military experience may not be a useful guide for that future. For the past 12 years, the Department of Defense (DOD) has been growing, and its budgets have been increasing. Meanwhile, much of the U.S. military's leadership has been consumed with fighting two demanding counterinsurgency wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Now, by contrast, the United States faces an international security environment marked by increasing uncertainty and instability, even as U.S. defense resources face sustained downward pressure. The demand for effective military leadership that can maintain top-notch warfighting skills and make sound enterprise decisions will be unprecedented.

The current approach to the professional military education (PME) and growth of senior officers may not adequately prepare them to meet those coming challenges. During the past decade, many of the nation's most senior military leaders – its generals and admirals, and those about to take their places – have received fewer opportunities for full-time PME and broadening assignments to develop their strategic thinking than many of their predecessors did. And other than some adjustments to accommodate counterinsurgency doctrine, the PME provided by military institutions in the past decade has largely remained constant in spite of rapid changes in the world.¹ Moreover, for generals and admirals, the depth of senior-level PME tapers off dramatically, with courses measured in days or weeks rather than in the months or years often

invested in officers at lower ranks. Flag officers² are typically required to harken back to more intensive PME experiences in the first half of their careers to dredge up knowledge to apply to today's complex problems.³

If left unaddressed, the divergence between the leadership skills of current senior military officers and the demands of an uncertain future may result in a U.S. military led by generals and admirals who are prepared for neither the complexity of future warfare nor the efficient management of a hugely complex – and now resource-constrained – defense enterprise. As the United States exits the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and embarks on the latest military drawdown, it must seize the opportunities presented by fiscally constrained priorities to institute reforms in officer assignment, education, selection and evaluation that will strengthen the capabilities of the flag officer corps in the coming decade and beyond. Problems previously solved with infusions of more resources will now demand innovative thinking and creative management by senior uniformed leaders. Furthermore, standards of performance and personal accountability should be strengthened for the senior ranks. The need for a cohort of flexible and adaptable senior military leaders has never been greater than it is today, and the systems charged with producing these creative leaders simply must be improved.

Future flag officers will need three things to be adequately prepared for a series of increasingly difficult assignments. First, they will need better development opportunities. Flag officers should be categorized into separate operational and enterprise tracks, with longer assignment tenures, in order to deepen their expertise and exercise more effective leadership in their duties. Second, they will need a rigorous foundational flag-level education to prepare them to navigate the profound strategic uncertainty and complex enterprise challenges ahead. Third, they will need a selection and evaluation process that both

strengthens accountability and incentivizes performance and professional growth. Other factors – including talent management and retention, as well as cultivating a military culture that values intellectual curiosity and risk taking – will also be important to managing the challenges of the future security environment; however, they fall outside the scope of this paper. Getting these three things right will help to ensure that the nation will be led by the best, brightest and most adaptable military leaders. Getting them wrong may doom the U.S. military to failures in both battlefield innovation and creative management of the vast military bureaucracy.

Indeed, given the military's closed personnel system, today's battle-tested (but at times narrowly focused) officer corps – from newly minted officers all the way up to current two-star generals – will serve as the sole “bench” for tomorrow's three- and four-star officers; there are no opportunities for lateral entry from outside. The next four or five chiefs of each of the individual services and chairmen (or chairwomen) of the Joint Chiefs of Staff are already serving in uniform today. These future senior military leaders must become highly proficient at all forms of conflict, from “wars of silicon” and cyberwarfare to conventional conflicts with nation states to irregular conflicts fed by terrorism and transnational crime.⁴ Moreover, a substantial number of these future flag officers must also master the intricacies of managing a vast defense establishment that includes the largest and most complex personnel, acquisition and logistics systems in the world. And senior military officers must be more capable than ever at navigating the complex interagency and political environments of Washington, as civilian policymakers seek to leverage all elements of national power. This moment demands a careful reappraisal of how to build better generals and admirals to deal with a complicated and fast-changing future environment.

The Changing Environment

Since September 2001, the U.S. military has been consumed with fighting prolonged wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Indeed, over 50,000 U.S. troops continue to battle insurgents in Afghanistan today, even as the United States moves to withdraw all combat troops there by the end of 2014, effectively concluding the nation's longest war. Throughout the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, military planning focused on adapting as rapidly as possible from the relatively conventional opening battles against the Taliban and Saddam Hussein to the prolonged and ever-changing demands of counterinsurgency operations – wars the United States was manifestly unprepared to fight at the beginning of the last decade. Despite immense bravery and steady adaptation to the demands of each conflict, U.S. forces failed to achieve a decisive strategic victory in either theater. This reality – and some of the questions about U.S. generalship that it suggests⁵ – will shape both military thinking and aspects of the national security debate for years to come. Yet tomorrow's international security environment is likely to be much different from the experience of the past 12 years and may well present the U.S. military with significantly new challenges requiring new strategies, new weapons systems and new concepts of operations.

This future security environment will be characterized by the proliferation of potential sources of conflict and the increasing sophistication of technologies and weapons systems. Traditional nation-state competitors will continue to acquire and improve conventional weapons systems and anti-access/area denial capabilities, while non-state actors and individuals will pose additional threats. As the National Intelligence Council concluded in its assessment of global trends, “individuals and small groups will have greater access to lethal and disruptive technologies (particularly precision-strike capabilities, cyber instruments and bioterror weaponry), enabling

them to perpetrate large-scale violence – a capability formerly the monopoly of states.”⁶ Meanwhile, demographic pressures, including rapid urbanization and unstable youth bulges, could increase the potential for explosive conflicts in urban environments.⁷ All of these factors underscore the need for a flexible and adaptive flag officer corps.

The coming years will see a difficult convergence of largely unchanged U.S. global security responsibilities, increasing regional instability and shrinking defense resources. The senior levels of the U.S. military are likely to be tested in unprecedented ways. Beyond the skills required to manage security risks, military leaders will need to possess matchless proficiency with all elements of modern warfare, as well as the ability to take on vast institutional management responsibilities that are in many ways unrelated to more traditional combat skills. This broad diversity of skills defies obvious parallels with other large-scale contemporary endeavors.

Therefore, future flag officers will need to be extraordinarily multitasking, highly adaptive and capable of managing immense strategic and institutional complexity. History shows that military leaders are unlikely to get the next war exactly right.⁸ Yet if these leaders can be educated to be adaptive in peace, they will be far better prepared than the enemy to recognize and correct inevitable mistakes when the next war erupts.⁹ If the nation’s leadership fails to invest in the very best processes to optimize the assignment, education, selection and evaluation of these officers, it risks being left with a military that is ill-prepared to prevail in the fraught security environment that the United States will almost inevitably face.

Opportunities Presented by Extended Career Lengths

Fortunately, a combination of factors is providing prospects for much longer flag officer careers. The potential advantages of retaining the best and most experienced officers for longer service at the peak

of their professional abilities cannot be overstated. Although current law requires that one- and two-star officers retire after 30 and 35 years of service, respectively (or after five years in grade, whichever occurs later), three- and four-star officers can have career spans that extend to 40 years and beyond.¹⁰ As a result, the roughly 190 senior-most U.S. flag officers now have far greater opportunities for longer assignments and deeper professional development. These officers hold immensely consequential leadership positions across the U.S. military. Allowing them to serve longer, hold positions for extended tenures and be afforded more comprehensive developmental options offers a much higher potential payoff on this major human capital investment.

The prospects for longer and more productive careers for senior flag officers are likely to increase in the years ahead for two reasons. First, life expectancy continues to improve – with an increase of nearly two years in just the past decade – as do health and nutrition, thus enabling highly productive years of good health well into individuals’ sixth decades.¹¹ Second, significant disincentives for delaying retirement have been removed within the military personnel system in an effort to encourage senior officers to serve longer.¹² Championed by then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, changes in the 2007 National Defense Authorization Act removed long-standing restrictions on retirement pay, which had been capped at 75 percent of base pay for those personnel with 30 years or more of service. Instead, service members retiring after January 1, 2007, are compensated for every year after 30 with an additional 2.5 percent retirement rate. Therefore, individuals remaining in the military past year 40 – the point at which the retirement rate would equal 100 percent – would earn more in retirement than on active duty; a flag officer retiring with 42 years of service would receive 105 percent of the average of his or her last three years of service. Although few flag officers

The average career of senior flag officers is likely to continue to lengthen in the years to come, with service to 40 years and beyond becoming more commonplace.

decide when to retire primarily on the basis of financial calculations, these changes do create incentives for longer service.

For these reasons, the average career of senior flag officers is likely to continue to lengthen in the years to come, with service to 40 years and beyond becoming more commonplace.¹³ This, in turn, presents possibilities for longer tenure in assignments, thereby fostering longer horizons of strategic thinking, smarter risk taking and more experienced problem solving – which would all help America’s flag officer corps manage the complexities of the 21st-century defense establishment. Moreover, this extended career timeline will provide more time to invest in the broadening assignments, education and development, and evaluation and feedback that officers will need in order to prepare for and subsequently manage these complex challenges.

III. THE ROLE OF ASSIGNMENTS

The promotion from colonel to brigadier (or one-star) general is one of the largest psychological leaps an officer can take. It is richly symbolic: The promoted officer removes from his or her collar the insignia of [his or her] branch ... and puts on a single star. As brigadier generals [or rear admirals], the newly promoted officers ... no longer represent a part of [their service], but now are the stewards of the entire service ... as members of the ... select few, they are expected to control and coordinate different branches ... that is, to become generalists.¹⁴

This passage from Tom Ricks' *The Generals* captures a fundamental tension that exists at the flag officer level. Traditionally, an officer promoted to flag rank becomes a "general" who can take on diverse responsibilities with success. But specific individuals are unlikely to be equally proficient at all skills. Mastery of warfighting differs substantially from effective leadership of a multi-faceted business enterprise. Today's global security environment and business climate mean that skilled leaders with specialized talent and experience need to arrive on assignment as masters of their portfolios. Neither steep learning curves on the battlefield (with costs measured in combat casualties) nor poor business decisions in the Pentagon are acceptable future outcomes. Yet today's system in many ways perpetuates suboptimal performance in both domains.

Over the past 12 years of war, the operational tempo of repeat combat deployments has precluded both schooling and broadening assignments for many officers, especially in the Army, Marines and special operations forces.¹⁵ The pre-war expectation of periodic resident schooling and broadening assignments gave way to a wartime emphasis on a recurrent cycle of combat deployments. Furthermore, the already brief length of time individuals spent in a position – typically around two

years – was further truncated by one-year combat tours and even shorter placements focused exclusively on tasks related to combat deployment.¹⁶

Yet the skills that flag officers actually require may poorly align with the strong tendency to promote successful warfighters, or "operators," to flag rank.¹⁷ For example, a landmark study by the Army's Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis found that approximately 65 percent of one-star billets, 80 percent of two-star billets, 82 percent of three-star billets and 92 percent of four-star billets are nonoperational enterprise-management positions. Each service has a different distribution of these positions, with the lowest percentage of flag-level enterprise positions in the Marine Corps.¹⁸ Across the services, these jobs align closely with common corporate management responsibilities, such as human relations, public affairs, global supply chain management and information technology.

However, officers selected for promotion to one-star general still tend to be predominately operators who have spent decades leading combat formations.¹⁹ In the Army alone, approximately 50 percent of one-star, 70 percent of two-star, 80 percent of three-star and 85 percent of four-star generals have been promoted from the operational career fields.²⁰ Given the widespread lack of enterprise background among those selected for flag rank, many flag officers risk being ill-prepared for the demands of the enterprise-management billets to which they are likely to be assigned.

"Tracking" Flag Officers into Operational and Enterprise Career Paths

Service cultures will continue to reward and promote warfighters because the military's most essential task is to fight and win the nation's wars when called upon to do so. No adjustments to the military's assignment, education, selection or evaluation systems should ever place this warrior ethos at risk. For this very reason, most officers selected

for their first star are operational standouts, heavily steeped in tactics and fighting, yet often lacking exposure to the very different demands surrounding the corporate management of a massive defense establishment. As these officers advance to two-star rank and beyond, the upper echelons of the military are inevitably populated with operational leaders who are not as well prepared for their complex management responsibilities. Too often, the U.S. military treats these flag officers as interchangeable parts, a practice that both produces suboptimal results and departs from military tradition.²¹

Yet successful military operations do not occur in a vacuum. They require exceptional logistical planning, acquisition and fielding of the right weaponry, recruitment and retention of the right individuals, and effective information management, among other things. Superior enterprise management is a necessary and vital component of combat capability. Incentivizing and rewarding exceptional performance in nonoperational skills is vital, and there should be clear paths for development and promotion in fields such as acquisitions, logistics and personnel management.²² Given the large number of flag officer billets that require enterprise skills, the military also must seriously evaluate when and how it chooses, develops and tracks flag officers who can excel in these demanding institutional leadership roles at the pinnacle of the organization.

Any development path for senior leadership should thus select individuals who collectively can populate the senior ranks with the requisite skills needed to not only deliver operational success but also provide effective enterprise leadership. One clear solution to this long-standing mismatch is to divide the flag officer population into two tracks – operational and enterprise – at the selection point for two-star rank.²³ Every flag officer billet would be coded as either operational or enterprise. This process would definitively identify the type of leader needed for every job, making it easier to find the right flag officer with the right skills to fit the billet. Across the

four services, approximately 60 officers are selected for promotion to two-star rank each year. Following their selection, this cohort would be evaluated by a service-led qualification board to make recommendations to each service chief on the tracking of the new selectees. The specific numbers required for operational or enterprise billets would vary each year according to the evolving needs of the service.²⁴ Figure 1 provides some examples of flag officer assignments that would fall in each category.

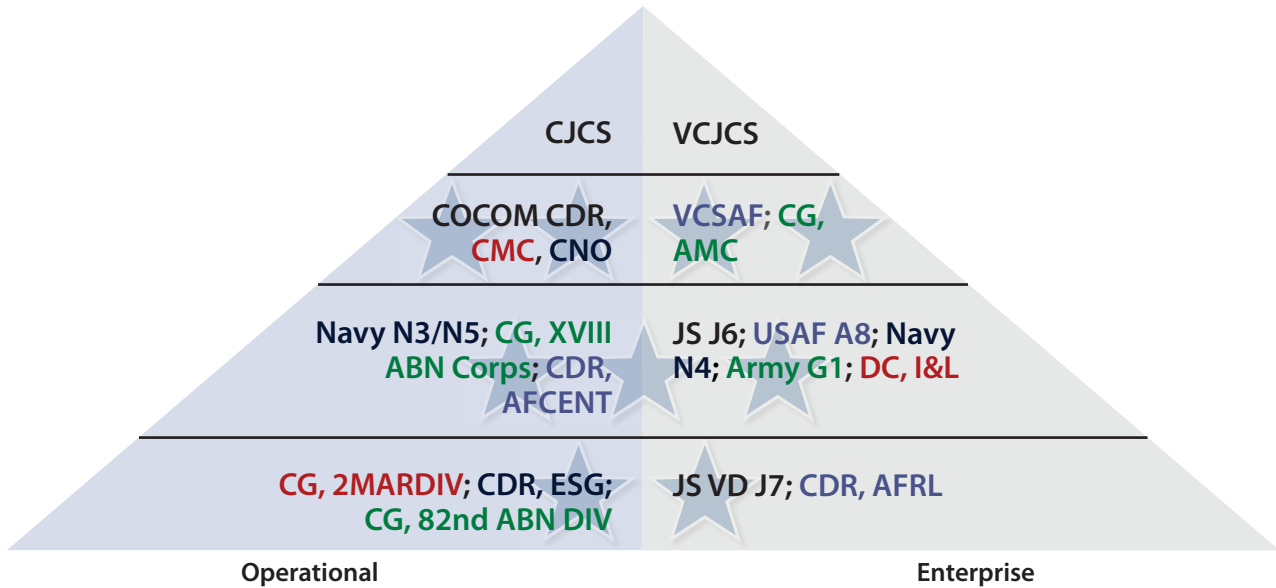
Too often, the U.S. military treats these flag officers as interchangeable parts, a practice that both produces suboptimal results and departs from military tradition.

Such an approach would also encourage substantial growth of vital expertise in each track and enable repeat assignments of increasing length to most effectively utilize this carefully groomed talent. No longer would a service routinely rotate officers at two-star rank and above after as little as two years on the job, nor would it be necessary to regularly assign flag officers with little previous experience to senior enterprise billets. Expertise would grow; relevant experience would accrue and be re-used; and continuity between leaders would increase as turbulence and “discovery learning” for senior leaders on the job became a thing of the past.

Assignment Length: Growing Continuity and Expertise

The length of time that flag officers spend in an assignment is one of the key factors that determines their success at the enterprise level.²⁵ Ideally,

FIGURE 1: FLAG OFFICER TRACKING EXAMPLES



RANK	MARINE CORPS	AIR FORCE	NAVY	ARMY	JOINT
4 Star	Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC)	Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force (VCSAF)	Chief of Naval Operations (CNO)	Commander, Army Material Command (CG, AMC)	Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS); Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (VCJCS); Combatant Commander (COCOM CDR)
3 Star	Deputy Commandant, Installations & Logistics (DC, I&L)	Commander, Air Forces Central (CDR AFCENT); U.S. Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Programs (USAF A8)	Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Information, Plans and Strategy (N3/N5); Director for Material Readiness & Logistics (N4)	Commanding General, 18th Airborne Corps (CG, XVIII ABN Corps), Army Deputy Chief of Staff, G1 (Army G1)	Director for Command, Control, Communications and Computers/ Cyber, Joint Staff (JS J6)
2 Star	Commanding General, 2nd Marine Division (CG 2MARDIV)	Commander, Air Force Research Lab (CDR, AFRL)	Commander, Expeditionary Strike Group (CDR, ESG)	Commanding General, 82nd Airborne Division (CG, 82nd ABN DIV)	Vice Director, Joint Force Development, Joint Staff J7 (JS VD J7)

each senior leader would be allotted the optimal “time span of discretion” – the amount of time necessary to learn, understand, take risks, adjust and build on their hard-won experience. According to a 2011 study by the Defense Science Board, “the commercial world often enjoys longevity in leadership that DOD does not ... case studies agree that five to seven years are needed to achieve cultural change.”²⁶

The U.S. military has successfully increased assignment lengths in the past, particularly for positions that demanded innovation. Three prime examples include the assignment tenures of General Curtis LeMay as commander of the Strategic Air Command (SAC), Admiral Hyman Rickover as director of naval reactors (DNR) and Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal as commander of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC).

When the United States established SAC in 1946, it was unlike anything that had come before it. Tasked with command and control of the nation’s burgeoning nuclear arsenal, SAC relied on innovation and continuous learning to reinforce deterrence against the Soviet Union. LeMay, SAC’s most transformative commander, held command from 1948 until 1957. This nine-year command tour allowed LeMay to dramatically reshape SAC into a massive but highly disciplined organization capable of delivering nuclear weaponry around the world.

Similarly, Rickover’s unprecedented tenure as DNR from 1949 to 1982 enabled the development of nuclear propulsion for naval warships and submarines. Innovation under his command greatly increased the Navy’s stealth, reach and capabilities. Upon Rickover’s retirement in 1982, President Ronald Reagan – recognizing the importance of tenure in the assignment – issued an executive order, later signed into law, stipulating that the DNR serve an eight-year term.²⁷

More recently, in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, McChrystal’s five-year tenure as commander of JSOC allowed innovative leadership at both the enterprise and operational levels. Over the course of his extended command, McChrystal reinvigorated JSOC’s relationship with the CIA and other intelligence organizations. According to one observer, this resulted in “several successes like the capture of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and the killing of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, in 2006. Under McChrystal, JSOC became a terrorist-hunting operation conducting thousands of missions and ratcheting up its proficiency and lethality.”²⁸

Because of their assignment tenures, these senior leaders were empowered both to take risks and to fail – two elements of the learning process that are essential to developing critical and innovative thinking.²⁹ Although some current billets do enable longer command and learning opportunities, they tend to be the exception rather than the rule.

The disparity between these cases and the average tour lengths of today’s flag officers is striking. For example, in the Army, four-star officers may spend as little as 15 months in an assignment.³⁰ Such short assignments can hinder innovation, as there is little incentive to invest in changes that may only benefit a senior leader’s successor – or, equally frustrating, be reversed by their replacement in a matter of months. Additionally, short tenure can discourage smart risk taking. Risks inherently pose the possibility of failure; with such short assignments, there is no time to learn from failures and make corrections. An extended tenure enables “double-loop learning,” providing time for risk taking, assessment and adjustment. It also allows individuals to both deepen their expertise and be fully accountable for their decisions over time.³¹

Senior leaders can take a more strategic, long-term approach if they know that their tenure will be extended. They rapidly understand that they must live with the prolonged consequences of decisions

made early in an assignment.³² This is rarely the case today, and short-term gains tend to be incentivized. For this reason, the military should extend assignments for all three- and four-star officers to a minimum of three years, with a goal of moving toward five-year assignments. In addition, the first year of each senior flag officer assignment should be regarded as probationary, permitting transfers without penalty for officers found to be poor fits in their assignments. This approach should be expanded to select one- and two-star officers where feasible and beneficial.

An examination of the role of assignments, expertise and tenure in today's flag officer ranks leads to several suggestions for change. Implementing these ideas would deepen expert knowledge, significantly increase continuity, decrease disruption and permit today's flag officer population to be purposefully managed by effectively matching the right person with the right skills to the right job.

Recommendations

The secretary of defense should direct the service secretaries to:

- Code all flag officer billets at the two-, three- and four-star levels as either operational or enterprise to facilitate correct placement of officers with relevant skills and experience. (Joint billets of the same rank would be coded by the joint staff.)
- Formally designate all flag officers selected for two-star rank as members of either the operational or enterprise track, and maintain assignment continuity in each of these tracks for the remainder of the officers' careers,³³ thereby deepening skills, experience and education in each category.
- Extend assignments for all three- and four-star flag officers to a minimum of three years (moving toward a goal of five years) to enable double-loop learning. (Joint three- and four-star assignments would follow identical rules.)

Corporate Best Practices

Although the corporate sector and the U.S. military have unique cultures and ultimately seek to achieve different ends, corporations nevertheless provide a number of best practices that may serve as models for the development of senior military leaders. Corporations have a vested interest – measured by profit – in aligning the right talents and skill sets with the demands of available positions. In order to prepare and equip high performers for senior leadership positions, corporations invest resources in developing and educating their workforce. In order to maintain a competitive advantage in the market, they engage in rigorous evaluation processes to ensure that top performance is incentivized at all levels. As the military considers how best to capitalize on the lengthening tenure of its senior leaders, it may learn valuable lessons from the corporate sector.

DEVELOPMENT

Corporations, like the military, recognize the value of experiential development in cultivating core capabilities. Senior executives at General Electric (GE) participate in “leadership explorations”: two- to three-day immersive experiences, often in third-world countries, intended to move participants outside of their comfort zone. In turn, these experiences promote reflection and self-awareness.³⁴ Similarly, junior managers at Hindustan Unilever participate in a six- to eight-week training program in which they live and work in rural Indian villages as a means of fostering creativity and cultural sensitivity.³⁵

Successful development processes encourage open dialogue about successes *and* failures. This helps develop innovative thinking, as it models healthy risk taking and the ability to recover and learn from failure. At the GE Crotonville campus, senior leaders all the way up to the CEO share such experiences with subordinates.³⁶

CEOs of high-performing companies spend a significant portion of their time – at least 25 percent – developing subordinate leaders; industry giants GE and Proctor & Gamble say that their CEOs spend 40 percent of their time developing other leaders.³⁷

EDUCATION

Education is critical for developing corporate leaders. Unlike academic universities, which seek to teach students *how to think*, corporate universities seek to teach students *what to apply*.³⁸ At its Crotonville campus, GE utilizes experiential learning and peer-based discussion courses to both instill functional knowledge and foster creative critical thinking among students. GE spends approximately \$1 billion annually on such training and education.³⁹ Remarkably, GE continued its plans to invest more resources in education – and even made education a higher corporate priority – during the economic downturn of 2008.⁴⁰ This lesson should be particularly salient for the Department of Defense in the coming period of fiscal constraint.

SELECTION AND EVALUATION

Corporations such as GE, Hindustan Unilever, Verizon, Honeywell, Good-year and Proctor & Gamble value

skill differentiation and meritocracy as essential elements for corporate success.⁴¹ Since success requires matching the right employee to the right position, each of these companies has established rigorous evaluation systems. Effective evaluations provide feedback to individual employees on further ways to develop, while also providing each company with robust data on available talent. As employees advance to leadership positions, the evaluation process becomes more rigorous and individualized, to include at the most senior levels.⁴² Because these successful corporations aptly differentiate between the skill sets of their employees, they are able to optimize the performance of their human capital.

OUTCOMES OF SUCCESSFUL CORPORATIONS

Although not all corporations display the same level of commitment – measured in either time or resources – to developing talent as those discussed above, such investments do produce performance dividends in recognizable metrics. As the Hay Group’s “Best Companies for Leadership” survey concluded, these approaches are frequently correlated with organizational success and the cultivation of strong and innovative leaders.⁴³ Although military performance is judged by different standards, corporate best practices seem to be outpacing the military in developing senior leaders – an area in which comparisons may be particularly productive.

IV. EDUCATING FUTURE FLAG OFFICERS

The Current PME System

Professional military education has always been a critical component of developing U.S. military leaders. It is based on two key principles: *train for certainty*, so that military personnel gain and master the skills needed for known tasks, and *educate for uncertainty*, so that they have the broad base of knowledge and critical thinking skills needed to handle unanticipated and unpredictable situations.⁴⁴ Historically, PME has remained a high priority even when budgets and force structure have declined. Perhaps most notably, the Army significantly increased its investment in education during the challenging years after World War I, which was one of the critical reasons that it could rapidly expand and prevail during World War II (see text box on page 21). Indeed, “between 1919 and 1941, officers routinely spent a half to two-thirds of their careers as students or instructors at West Point, in ROTC detachments, in branch schools, or at Leavenworth and Carlisle Barracks.”⁴⁵ This created a deep “bench” of talent from which Army Chief of Staff George Marshall could pick the best officers to ascend to critical command and staff positions as the Army rapidly expanded.

Today, the U.S. military has perhaps the most well-developed PME system in the world for its officers. As Table 1 shows, by the time an officer reaches flag rank, he or she has usually spent several years attending PME courses, although requirements differ among the services.⁴⁶ These courses focus more on tactical training than education, but the curriculum does include both. At the rank of major or lieutenant commander, top-performing serving officers may be competitively selected to attend intermediate-level PME (such as the Army’s Command and General Staff College, or CGSC),⁴⁷ which seeks to bridge the tactical and operational levels of war. The programs last approximately 10 months for those who are in residence (a

distance-learning option is also available). The balance of the curriculum shifts more toward education because field-grade responsibilities usually involve more complexity and uncertainty than earlier, more tactical levels of command. At the rank of lieutenant colonel or colonel, or Navy commander or captain, up to about 10 percent of serving officers are selected to spend 10 months at senior-level PME (a service war college or an equivalent program),⁴⁸ which is designed to help officers bridge the operational and strategic levels as they prepare to command or move on to higher-level staff positions. A distance-learning option is offered here as well, although it generally takes more time to complete.

Yet the past decade at war has diminished the salience and importance of PME, particularly in the ground services, which have been badly stretched. Army, Marine and special operations troops and their leaders have spent much of the past 12 years consumed in counterinsurgency warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many leaders at all levels found themselves on back-to-back deployments to the combat zone, with little time at home beyond preparing for the next long deployment. All services were affected by the implacable demands of the wartime theaters for officers to serve in forward-deployed headquarters and units.⁴⁹

During this time, military PME continued, but particularly at the intermediate and senior levels, a number of officers chose to defer schooling, took courses through distance learning or received constructive credit for their combat experience. As many of the best officers prioritized combat duty over taking as much as a year out to attend school, the number of students from the combat arms gradually declined at some of these institutions. For example, during the 2009-2010 academic year at the Army War College, “out of a class of 338 U.S. students, there were only 3 armor officers and 13 infantry officers. These numbers mean that there were not enough ground maneuver officers to allocate one for each of the 20 seminars.”⁵⁰

TABLE 1. ILLUSTRATIVE PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION PROFILES FOR EACH SERVICE

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE		
RANK	TIME	EDUCATION
Lieutenant	1.5 months	Air and Space Basic Course*
	10 months	Undergraduate Pilot Training/Specialty Course
Captain	2 months	Squadron Officer School
Major	10 months	Air Command and Staff College
Lieutenant Colonel	10 months	Air War College
Colonel		
Brigadier General	3 weeks	Capstone (Joint)**
	1 week	USAF General Officer Training Course
Major General	1 week	Joint Force Air Component Commander
Lieutenant General	1 week	Pinnacle (Joint)

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS		
RANK	TIME	EDUCATION
Lieutenant	6 months	The Basic School
Captain	9 months	Expeditionary Warfare School
Major	10 months	Command and Staff College
Lieutenant Colonel	10 months	Marine Corps War College
Colonel		
Brigadier General	1 week	Brigadier General Select Orientation Course
	1 week	General Officer Warfighting Program
	3 weeks	Capstone (Joint)**
Major General	2 weeks	Joint Flag Officer Warfighting Course
	1 week	Joint Force Land Component Commander***
Lieutenant General	1 week	Pinnacle (Joint)

* Recently cancelled due to budget cuts; the USAF now has no single entry level course for new lieutenants beyond technical (e.g., pilot or intelligence) training.

** Capstone will expand from three to five weeks in January 2014.

*** Available for the grades of brigadier through lieutenant general.

UNITED STATES ARMY		
RANK	TIME	EDUCATION
Lieutenant	4.5 months	Basic Officer Leadership Course II
Captain	6 months	Captains' Career Course
Major	10 months	Command and General Staff College
Lieutenant Colonel	5-7 weeks	School for Command Preparation
Colonel	10 months	Army War College
Brigadier General	3 weeks	Capstone (Joint)**
Major General	2 weeks	Joint Flag Officer Warfighting Course
	1 week	Joint Force Land Component Commander
Lieutenant General	1 week	Pinnacle (Joint)

UNITED STATES NAVY		
RANK	TIME	EDUCATION
Ensign/Lieutenant Junior Grade	18 months	Warfare Community/Technical Training
Lieutenant		
Lieutenant Commander	10 months	Joint Professional Military Education I/ Naval War College
Commander		
Captain	9 days	Navy Senior Leader Seminar
	10 months	Joint Professional Military Education II/ Naval War College
Rear Admiral Lower Half	1 week	New Flag and Senior Executive Training Symposium
	6 days	Joint Force Maritime Component Commander
	4 days	Leading Innovation
	5.5 days	Strategic Thinking
	3 weeks	Capstone (Joint)**
Rear Admiral Upper Half	4 x 1 day	Tailored Support Course
Vice Admiral	1 week	Pinnacle (Joint)

The end of the war in Iraq and the continued draw-down in Afghanistan are gradually restoring the time and importance accorded by the services to attending intermediate and senior schools. In addition, the Army has recently returned to its pre-9/11 model of competitive selection for CGSC, after a decade-long experiment in which every major was directed to attend.⁵¹ Overall, the importance of attending resident PME during the first decades of an officer's career is slowly returning to what it was before 9/11.

However, even in a reinvigorated educational system, PME opportunities for long-term study largely end at the rank of colonel after the war college. For those few top officers selected, resident attendance at the war college remains the final protracted educational opportunity in their careers. Because officers usually attend the war college between 18 and 22 years of service, many future flag officers will have *no extended educational opportunities during the entire second half of their careers* – a remarkable education gap during a period when their responsibilities grow increasingly complex, and the world continues to change.

Once an officer is promoted to flag rank, the PME system shifts toward a series of short, functional courses – ostensibly due to “lack of time” for flag-level leaders. Newly selected one-star officers are typically required to attend a one-week course run by their service and a three-week joint course called Capstone.⁵² Each service offers further “a la carte” PME programs, ranging from one-week courses at civilian universities on business accounting to short military functional courses on how to serve as an air, naval or land component joint commander. Yet these opportunities are ad hoc at best and certainly do not offer the time for deep reflection and critical thinking that these officers may need to successfully address the complex challenges that they face.

Most courses at the flag level could be described as lacking academic rigor and focusing more on

Many future flag officers will have no extended educational opportunities during the entire second half of their careers.

networking than on providing a serious educational experience. One retired general officer has described Capstone, for example, as “a lost opportunity,” because it does not focus on teaching strategic leadership, requires little to no reading, does not provide discussion opportunities and relies too heavily on daily mentoring by long-retired four-star generals. She concludes that “the course gives new general officers impressive political exposure, but it lacks intellectual content ... [it] should offer a richer, more challenging learning environment for America's next generation of senior military leaders.”⁵³ Other military programs at this level tend to be similarly undemanding, often lacking evaluated reading, writing or speaking requirements.

Today, most services mandate lengthy, in-depth tactical and operational PME courses for their best majors, commanders or colonels, many of whom will never serve at the highest levels. Yet the development programs offered to flag officers charged with immensely complicated duties (that often may have little in common with their previous experiences) are mere snapshots measured in brief days or weeks of instruction. Because the services clearly believe that education is an important part of an officer's development, investing more in growing and honing the skills of flag officers – whose problems and responsibilities will be among the most complex imaginable – seems indisputably valuable.

The limitations of the current system have already been recognized by the Army, for example, which is currently developing a four-week course for selected brigadier generals that will start in early 2014. Its

The Power of Education During the Interwar Period

In the years following World War I, the U.S. Army plunged from a wartime end strength of over 4 million, with an officer corps of 200,000, to a Depression-era active duty force of around 200,000, with 19,000 officers.⁵⁵ Yet as the storm clouds began to gather again over Europe, the Army rapidly expanded to a premobilization force of 1.5 million before Pearl Harbor, rising to a wartime peak force of over 8 million. It was this force that ultimately engaged in the global conflict of World War II and contributed substantially to the nation's victory in both the European and Pacific theaters. This success was a remarkable accomplishment for an Army that had existed only in skeletal form a few years prior.

How did the Army nurture its officer corps during the painfully austere peacetime setting of the 1920s and 1930s such that it was capable of leading a massive wartime force in a conflict of unprecedented magnitude just a few years later? Some analysts suggest that one reason may be the Army's embrace of intensive officer education during the interwar years.⁵⁶

Given the dearth of operational command and staff opportunities

between the wars, most Army officers spent extensive periods of time in school – both as students and, often, as teachers. Among those instrumental to the allied victory in World War II, George Marshall served as an instructor at the Army War College and the Infantry School, as well as in the Illinois National Guard. In addition, Marshall, Omar Bradley, Dwight Eisenhower and George Patton all attended the Army's then-standard two-year Command and General Staff College (CGSC) at Fort Leavenworth, with Eisenhower graduating number one in his class.

Educational programs for Army officers during the interwar years, most notably CGSC, were rigorous with prolific reading assignments, difficult practical exercises and demanding writing requirements. Wives (all officers were male) were warned that their husbands would be putting in long hours of study and would require quiet conditions insulated from family disturbances. Likewise, students recognized that their future careers depended on competitive performance at these schools and thus devoted immense energy to doing well. Grades were hard fought, and excellent marks were awarded sparingly, highly coveted by the competitive student

body. Many officers at the time described their experiences at CGSC as being among the most difficult of their careers.⁵⁷

During this period, scholarly achievement was integral to career advancement, and military intellectualism (although not called such) was prized. Even when not in formal educational programs, officers valued learning, and they read and thought about warfighting and strategic leadership. The cumulative effect was a culture of education and development within the U.S. Army – one that was vital in intellectually preparing officers for the global responsibilities and profound challenges of World War II.

As the military once again enters a period of complex security challenges, significant resource constraints and a smaller force structure, it should consider restoring a culture that heavily prioritizes and invests in teaching and long-term civilian and military schooling, as the Army did in the 1930s. These forms of intensive officer education are no less vital today to ensure that officers will be adequately prepared to navigate the complex security and budgetary environments that lie ahead.

curriculum will include communications skills, reading and discussions, as well as a requirement to write and publish.⁵⁴ This course is certainly one important step toward filling the senior-level education gap, although it will only be available to small numbers of officers. Yet

even an intensive one-month course is not enough to provide students with a truly transformational educational experience – and longer career paths now provide an opportunity for additional education without sacrificing other requirements and assignments.

After flag officers have been selected for either the operational or enterprise-management career tracks, they need a new program of tracked PME courses that focus on the specific challenges that they will face during the rest of their careers. Anything less is unlikely to help fully prepare them for their new responsibilities.

PME for the Operational Track

All flag officers selected for the operational track will already have deep expertise in tactics and operations. Yet they have not necessarily learned how to operate effectively in a strategic political-military context, which is one of the key skills that distinguishes command at the two-, three- and four-star levels. Their expertise, in part, also reflects the fact that during the last three decades, the U.S. military has heavily emphasized mastering operations rather than strategy in applying military force.⁵⁸ Yet these rising flag officers must understand, in the words of Admiral James Stavridis, former NATO Supreme Allied Commander, “strategic and operations planning, international and diplomatic interaction, and interagency representation”⁵⁹ – including providing unbiased military advice to civilian leaders. Skills at this level require understanding the relationship between strategic effects and political outcomes in the places where wars are fought, as well as the ability to manage the civil-military relationship at the highest levels of U.S. policymaking. Some analysts have argued that the failure to effectively understand and manage these key political-military relationships has been a shortfall in U.S. generalship over the last 12 years at war.⁶⁰

These flag officers need a rigorous PME course as they prepare for these new responsibilities. The course should be loosely modeled on the British Higher Command and Staff Course (HCSC), which is attended by the equivalent of U.S. colonels and brigadier generals. The HCSC lasts for three months and exposes its students to a wide range of strategic, political, organizational and command issues. Most

Just as intermediate PME helps officers bridge the tactical and operational levels of war and senior PME helps officers bridge the operational and strategic levels of war, the U.S. version of the HCSC would help officers bridge the strategic and the grand strategic levels of war and national policy.

notably, participants are carefully selected based on their future leadership potential. The U.K. course description explicitly states: “Students represent the top 2% of their profession and are likely to reach the highest rank in their Service or parent organization. For example, all of the heads of the UK Armed Forces are graduates of the HCSC.”⁶¹ The HCSC also explicitly seeks to build a community of future leaders, stressing that “the unwritten product of the HCSC is a trusted peer group likely to assume leading roles in future crises.”⁶²

The U.S. military should create a similar course, also lasting about three months, for the two-star flag officers from all four services who have been selected for the operational track. Given the sizable demands for flag officers with enterprise skills and the fact that, as noted earlier, only about 60 officers from all the services are promoted to two-star rank, the numbers attending this course would be quite small – perhaps no more than 20 or 30 per year. Just as intermediate PME helps officers bridge the tactical and operational levels of war and senior PME helps officers bridge the operational and

strategic levels of war, the U.S. version of the HCSC would help officers bridge the strategic and the grand strategic levels of war and national policy.

This course could be taught at the National Defense University in Washington, leveraging its existing staff, faculty and infrastructure. This location would also allow extensive access to the broader policy, defense and academic communities in the national capital region. The additional cost of this program would be modest, perhaps \$2 to \$3 million per course each year.⁶³ Its curriculum should include the following topics:

- **The nature of American democracy and civil-military relations.** Military officers often want civilians to provide clear, unambiguous objectives for military operations, but democracy is a chaotic political process that can result in vague and incomplete guidance. Flag officers need to understand this reality and learn how to provide a useful range of military options in this context, along with potential costs and benefits. Attendees also need to learn how to ask key questions of high-level civilian leaders – up to and including the president – as part of a healthy civil-military dialogue. Understanding the constitutional role of the U.S. military in American democracy, as well as the statutory roles of the executive and legislative branches, would also be a key objective.
- **Case studies in strategy and war.** Officers need a thorough grounding in the interrelationship between policy, strategy and war. They must have a strong understanding as well in classic theorists of war, including Clausewitz and Sun Tzu. Understanding the nature of conflict and politics through the venue of selected historical case studies will sharpen officers' knowledge and encourage comparisons with contemporary national security challenges. Flag officers must be comfortable drawing upon historical lessons to help counter today's evolving threats.
- **Global trends in the 21st century.** Many new and complex trends will shape the future international environment, including (but not limited to) instabilities in the global economic order, increasingly empowered individuals, shifting demographics, resource competition and the potential for increased conflict and regional instability.⁶⁴ Flag officers will need to understand these trends and their effects in order to operate effectively in this environment.
- **The changing character of warfare.** The wars of the 21st century are likely to involve three overlapping types of conflict: wars of silicon, involving adversaries with transformational technologies and advanced capabilities; wars of iron, involving threats from states and increasingly characterized by hybrid warfare; and wars in the shadows, involving a global fight against unconventional threats using drones, special operations forces and intelligence activities.⁶⁵ Flag officers will be responsible for preparing their individual services and the U.S. military as a whole for these overlapping and complicated forms of warfare.
- **Innovation and change management.** DOD will continue to face extraordinary management challenges for the next decade and beyond, including but not limited to the consequences of sequestration, rapidly escalating internal costs and difficult tradeoffs among force structure, readiness and modernization. DOD's senior military leaders will need to master operations and strategy in this setting. They must understand how to nurture and reward innovation and creative problem solving, particularly from the lower levels of their organizations, within a necessarily hierarchical command structure. They will also face the difficult challenge of promoting creative thought and change within large, often inflexible bureaucracies that have strong incentives to maintain the status quo, especially as budgets and resources decline.

PME for the Enterprise Track

By definition, nearly all officers who are promoted to one-star rank have excelled at some level of operational responsibilities. With the current up-or-out promotion system, a Marine captain who cannot effectively command a company will not be promoted to major; a Navy commander who cannot effectively command a ship or squadron will not be promoted to captain. But as noted earlier, many flag officer billets, both within the individual services and in the joint community, demand not operational skills, but the rather different talents required to manage a massive and complex defense bureaucracy. Many of the officers who serve in such positions simply do not have the educational background or practical experience necessary to effectively manage the highest levels of the defense enterprise and the sometimes peculiar economics involved.⁶⁶

In some ways, developing an effective PME program to help flag officers selected for the enterprise track become world-class enterprise leaders is less difficult than developing the operational PME program described above. Most DOD enterprise-management tasks have analogs in the corporate sector, such as human resources and personnel management, financial management and controller oversight, and facilities and installation management. The analogy to business is imperfect because DOD's mission is to fight and win the nation's wars and not to maximize profit; yet many enterprise-management issues remain comparable. Thus, DOD can rely heavily on the extensive educational opportunities provided by universities, business schools and corporate and executive leadership programs, while supplementing them with shorter programs highlighting the unique features of the defense enterprise. Indeed, the military services leverage some of these programs today, but often without deliberately planning the types of education each flag officer will need over the full course of his or her future assignments.

Those generals selected for the enterprise track need to invest in developing the corporate management skills that they may not have gained in their previous (often operational) assignments. Given a possible 40-year career, they would be able to take advantage of additional developmental time to invest in longer, in-depth enterprise-specific courses. In certain fields, these officers could also participate in annual professional recertification refreshers.⁶⁷

Given the corporate demand for executive education in the United States, numerous opportunities for world-class enterprise-management leadership programs are available. Leveraging such existing efforts will immensely benefit future flag officers on the enterprise track.

Each military service currently participates in executive education programs centered around a number of civilian universities that specialize in various enterprise skills. For example, the Air Force sends selected colonels, one- and two-star officers and senior civilians to a one-week Air Force Enterprise Leadership Seminar at the Darden School of Business at the University of Virginia to focus on “financial management, strategic thinking, decision-making, communication, human capital, change management and inclusive

leadership skills.”⁶⁸ The Marine Corps has sent selected flag officers to Singularity University in Silicon Valley to better understand rapidly changing global trends.⁶⁹ Given the corporate demand for executive education in the United States, numerous opportunities for world-class enterprise-management leadership programs are available. Leveraging such existing efforts will immensely benefit future flag officers on the enterprise track.

None of these options are deliberate features of today’s disparate ad hoc system of courses for flag officers. By contrast, these courses could be designed to form an educational blueprint that extends throughout an enterprise flag officer’s career, rather than being used simply as a quick-fix response to a looming assignment in which the officer has no previous experience – not an uncommon event in each service today. This approach invests in developing a deep bench of enterprise talent – up to and including four-star enterprise leaders.⁷⁰

Recommendations

The secretary of defense should:

- Direct the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to establish a U.S. Higher Command and Staff Course at the National Defense University, structured to inculcate strategic and political-military skills at the highest levels.
- Direct the service secretaries to require all flag officers selected for the operational track to attend the new HCSC, and include current service and joint functional warfighting courses in these officers’ career development to augment the HCSC.⁷¹
- Direct the service secretaries to establish a robust PME program for flag officers on the enterprise track that leverages civilian graduate education, sabbaticals to train in industry, and the short functional and leadership courses that are currently available. They should also establish mandatory core programs and require annual recertification or refresher training for technical specialties such as financial management and information systems.
- Direct the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to establish policies to restore the importance and prestige accorded to duty as both a service school instructor and a student of resident PME programs. As an incentive, seek congressional approval to add all intermediate and senior service college instructors to the Joint Duty Assignment List.⁷²
- Direct the service secretaries and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to examine all current flag officer PME programs to ensure that course rigor is commensurate with the opportunity cost of sending flag officers to the program. All courses should have graded writing and speaking requirements with results reported to an attendee’s service and immediate current supervisory chain. Levels of student performance must be assessed and documented to ensure accountability for outcomes and should be an important input for future decisions about promotion and assignments.

V. FLAG OFFICER SELECTION AND EVALUATION

While assignments and education are cornerstones of developing senior military talent, the services' selection and evaluation processes together form the mechanisms by which future flag officers are identified. Two principal statutes govern all officer promotions in the U.S. military: Title 10 of the U.S. Code and the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act of 1980 (DOPMA). These legislative strictures outline the legal requirements for the selection and promotion of officers from second lieutenant to four-star general, and they have remained largely unchanged for nearly 35 years.

Title 10, Chapter 36, of the U.S. Code outlines the overarching laws governing promotion, separation and involuntary retirement of officers on the active duty list. DOPMA expanded on this legislation by enacting a single standardized personnel management system across the U.S. armed forces, including detailed guidance covering promotions, retirements and separations from service for all officers. DOPMA also established ceilings on the number of officers by grade at the rank of major through colonel and outlined target selection rates for promotion boards considering officers for each rank. The system is designed to be "up or out," structured in such a way that officers must continue to be selected for promotion in order to remain in service.⁷³

Evaluations

Fitness or evaluation reports form the basis for every service's selection and development process. An officer's career rises or falls almost entirely on the basis of what words and numbers are written on his or her annual fitness report.⁷⁴ Both immediate supervisors and their bosses have important input to this report, and nearly all officers take their evaluation responsibilities very seriously, knowing that their words and numeric scores will affect the long-term careers of their subordinates.

The mandatory annual fitness report is one point where an officer can always expect to receive (at least written) feedback on his or her performance and gain some insights as to how he or she stacks up relative to his or her peers.

While evaluation reports trigger a yearly opportunity for counseling and feedback, each service also encourages more frequent coaching and feedback above and beyond the annual requirement. The Army, for example, requires a face-to-face counseling and goal-setting process with counseling throughout the rating period. This effort begins when an officer starts a new job and involves a detailed discussion with his or her new boss about the specific job description and goals for the new billet. This dialogue is required to be updated throughout the year with feedback and coaching sessions, culminating in a final counseling session that covers the full rating period in concert with the annual fitness report.⁷⁵ In theory, this process sets expectations early on, updates those expectations regularly with performance feedback and culminates in a written annual report that fully documents an officer's performance and potential – key findings for the next promotion board.

This iterative establishment of duties, goal setting and continuous feedback is a model of best practices that exists in some fashion in every service. Unfortunately, although annual evaluations have continued during the past decade, wartime requirements and high operational demands have considerably eroded the practice of counseling and coaching in some organizations.⁷⁶ Yet even after over a decade of combat, the evaluation report process has held up, maintaining a standard of expectations that holds every officer accountable for his or her performance in writing, on at least an annual basis. As peacetime processes of counseling and coaching are now restored, the military's evaluation and coaching system continues to offer a powerful means to effectively develop and expand military talent.

Promotion Boards

Annual fitness reports provide the grist required to evaluate performance and potential during service promotion boards. Promotion boards are statutorily constituted in each service to consider officers by year of service entry (“year group”⁷⁷) for promotion to the next grade.⁷⁸ These boards formally guide the selection of all officers for promotion, from captain or Navy lieutenant (O-3) to major general or rear admiral (upper half) (O-8). The boards are convened by the service secretary and employ a rigorous and structured methodology carefully governed by law. The service secretary provides each promotion board with written guidance that is the sole determinant outlining the needs of the service for that particular board; this guidance is publicly released following the board’s conclusion.

Selection to One- and Two-Star Rank

For promotion to these first flag ranks, selection is far tougher than any previous “cut.” On average, DOPMA targets suggest that 50 percent of lieutenant colonels should be selected for colonel, yet far fewer than 5 percent of colonels are ultimately selected for one-star rank.⁷⁹ In the Marines, for example, approximately 450 colonels typically compete annually for no more than 10 one-star promotions.⁸⁰ The services each typically select between 10 and 35 colonels to pin on their first star in any given year.⁸¹ And only a portion of those who are promoted to one-star will go on to serve at the two-star rank or above.⁸²

The flag officer pyramid continues to tighten at each succeeding step. In the Army, for example, about 150 brigadier generals compete for around 100 major general positions, and those 100, in turn, compete for about 45 lieutenant general billets. The final cut is also the most hard-fought: 45 three-star positions are winnowed to only about 10 four-star generals.⁸³ Not only is selection staggeringly competitive, but making a “wrong” choice – or placing an officer in a job for which he or she is ill-suited

– can have a tremendous effect on decisions at the strategic and national levels.

Selection to Three- and Four-Star Rank

Formal promotion boards end at the two-star level. Nomination to three- and four-star flag ranks comes not from the outcome of a structured promotion board carefully governed by law and policy but principally from the service chief and his fellow four-star generals.⁸⁴ Each service performs its own internal checks and balances to guide this process, ranging from (newly initiated) selective 360-degree evaluations in the Army to peer-wise comparisons among four-star officers of their service’s three-star populations.⁸⁵ But the ultimate decision on whom to nominate for three- or four-star rank rests with the service chief and must be approved by the service secretary.⁸⁶ In turn, these nominations are then sent to the secretary of defense and the White House for approval, before release to the Senate for the confirmation process.⁸⁷

At the three- and four-star level, the previous processes that characterize each service’s promotion system disappear: There are no formally convened promotion boards, no fitness reports reviewed by a statutorily chartered group and no written selection guidance issued by the service secretary. Unlike the relatively transparent and intensely structured officer promotion process up to two-star rank, this system is far less open to public scrutiny. This is the also point with the greatest risk of “ducks pick[ing] ducks”⁸⁸ – officers tending to pick successors in their own image – and arguably the need for rigor and fidelity is most important here. Yet this relatively closed system is the sole source of the senior military leaders whose decisions and advice most impact the trajectory of the nation’s security.

Accountability

The opaque selection and evaluation process also inadvertently causes an even more troubling issue: a lack of formal accountability for three- and four-star officers.

All officers in ranks through major general are held accountable in writing for their performance through an annual fitness report. Every officer across these grades knows that he or she is being held to a standard as represented by the factors listed on the fitness report and (typically) on a set of expectations, verbal or written, outlined at the beginning of a duty tour with the officer's rater. Moreover, every officer can generally expect personal feedback from his or her rater at the end of the rating period. Although imperfect, this structured process enables decades of progressive feedback during a career and promotes at least some degree of self-awareness among the officer corps. It is central to the continued professional growth and successive evaluation of military officers and also inherently encourages mentorship and iterative self-development.

Once an officer is appointed to three-star rank, he or she will never pass before another promotion board, will never receive another written performance evaluation and will rarely engage in setting formal expectations or goals with his or her boss in a new position.

Yet this very effective accountability system evaporates at the three- and four-star level. Once an officer is appointed to three-star rank, he or she will never pass before another promotion board, will never receive another written

performance evaluation and will rarely engage in setting formal expectations or goals with his or her boss in a new position. Most will receive little if any coaching and performance counseling on their effectiveness as a senior general; none of the services require this for senior leaders. In reality, the standards for performance for many of these senior generals' jobs may be vague, frequently unwritten and at times entirely unclear beyond "doing your job."

Accountability between senior generals and their civilian leaders may suffer when no written expectations are set between rater and rated officer. Effectiveness can be compromised when performance goals and objectives are not discussed and mutually understood. And continued self-development can stagnate when the lack of any written evaluations eliminates the key driver of periodic performance coaching and counseling. In fact, senior generals may receive less coaching and mentoring than officers at any other rank.⁸⁹

Three- and four-star officers occupy the very positions in the U.S. military in which the challenges are the most profound, the issues the most difficult, and the problems the most complex and "wicked." But the lack of a structured system of goal-setting, evaluation, feedback and formal selection at the three- and four-star levels in the U.S. military upends the career-long system of officer development and evaluation. This is a substantial weakness of the current system, and one that may contribute to ongoing issues surrounding the accountability and credibility of the military's senior leadership.⁹⁰ Of note, corporate best practices strongly emphasize goal-setting, performance coaching, and accountability at the most senior levels of organizational leadership.⁹¹

Given the outsize impact of strategic decisionmaking at the three- and four-star levels of the U.S. military, comprehensive policies are needed to

ensure that the best officers advance to these levels, are held to high standards and continue to grow. Reforms are needed to refine the selection, assignment, development and accountability systems that govern these senior flag ranks. As the numbers of three- and four-star positions inevitably shrink in the ongoing drawdown, it will be even more critical to choose the very best people for these positions and to hold their performance fully accountable to the American people.

Recommendations

The secretary of defense should:

- Extend the written evaluation report system to all three- and four-star officers, developing a separate evaluation form for each track and rank. Reports should be completed annually and made part of an officer's record when being considered for future appointments. At the four-star level, they could be brief and handwritten by military and civilian superiors, if desired.
- Mandate expectation-setting sessions for all three- and four-star officers with their immediate supervisor (military or civilian) prior to assuming new duties. These should explicitly define in writing the flag officer's job description and chart out initial mutually agreed-upon goals and expectations. As an option, senior flag officers could draft their own job descriptions and performance metrics after 30 days in position to catalyze the same supervisor-rated officer conversation.
- Require, at a minimum, semi-annual face-to-face performance reviews between three- and four-star generals and their immediate superiors to discuss organizational and individual performance, provide feedback and coaching, and update and adjust goals. Measurable targets for individual and organizational performance should be set, with subsequent face-to-face sessions planned in advance.
- Issue written guidance for each joint four-star vacancy (such as combatant commander) to outline desired individual traits and characteristics. This guidance should also include broad directional objectives about the ways in which the organization should be led.⁹² For service three- and four-star leaders, the service secretary should provide similar written guidance to the service chief outlining the essential characteristics of these duty positions.

VI. CONCLUSION

The United States faces a rapidly changing and increasingly fraught global security environment in the years ahead. The nation expects to sustain its global responsibilities but will be challenged to do so with fewer defense resources. Coming out of two long, expensive and inconclusive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. military is entering a drawdown period that will be marked by austere budgets and likely reductions in force structure and capabilities. Personnel, readiness and future modernization accounts will all be in fierce competition for scarce dollars. Within this otherwise dark picture, the U.S. military must prioritize, protect and reform the processes by which it develops its senior-most leaders – the generals and admirals who will lead this force.

During the past 12 years, the development of rising senior military leaders has been distorted in many ways by the prolonged operational demands of two wars. Many officers have lacked opportunities for broadening experiences in diverse assignments outside the combat zone. Others have had their military or civilian schooling cancelled, delayed or truncated. This rising cohort may be much less prepared for the complex security and enterprise-management challenges of the next decade than their immediate predecessors were, simply because they have lacked so many of the military's standard peacetime developmental opportunities. Seizing and creating opportunities in the coming years to accelerate the broader development of this cohort is clearly essential.

Yet these officers also inhabit a system of education, development, selection and evaluation that in many ways remains an artifact of the 20th century. Much of the Cold War military lingers on in the U.S. armed forces today, particularly in their personnel systems. Both the complex national security challenges of the 21st century and the need to efficiently manage the massive defense enterprise during

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a drawdown now present almost unprecedented demands on rising senior military leaders. At this critical juncture, today's legacy systems that produce American flag officers require examination and reform.

Reforms of the current system should be aimed at three primary objectives: dividing flag officer development and assignments at the two-star rank and above to develop specialization and expertise while recognizing the different demands of operational and enterprise billets and responsibilities; investing in expanded education and lengthened assignment tenures for flag officers to reflect untapped opportunities provided by a 40-year career path for senior flag officers; and re-establishing clear accountability for performance at the three- and four-star levels.

In the face of substantial changes across nearly all domains of senior military leadership, developing the very best innovative and creative military leaders will be a paramount responsibility during the coming years. Failing to seize this moment to revitalize the assignment, development, education and selection of these officers would be a missed opportunity to make long-term and necessary changes. Tomorrow's military leaders must effectively lead the defense enterprise and be able to fight and win the nation's future wars. This unalterable standard demands the very best system to select, develop and educate today's officer corps.

ENDNOTES

1. *Another Crossroads? Professional Military Education Twenty Years after the Goldwater-Nichols Act and the Skelton Panel*, hearing of the Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight, Armed Services Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, May 20, 2009, <http://democrats.armedservices.house.gov/index.cfm/2009/5/oversight-and-investigations-subcommittee-another-crossroads-professional-military-education-twenty-years-after-the-goldwater-nichols-act-and-the-skelton-panel>.
2. For simplicity, we use the term flag officers throughout the report to describe all generals and admirals (grades O-7 to O-10).
3. Author interviews with senior U.S. military officials.
4. David W. Barno, "Silicon, Iron, and Shadow," *ForeignPolicy.com*, March 19, 2013, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/03/19/silicon_iron_and_shadow.
5. See, for example, Paul Yingling, "A Failure of Generalship," *Armed Forces Journal*, May 2007; and Thomas E. Ricks, *The Generals* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012).
6. National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds*, NIC 2012-001 (December 2012), iii.
7. *Ibid.*
8. As former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates observed, "our record of predicting where we will use military force since Vietnam is perfect. We have never once gotten it right." See "Remarks by Secretary Gates to the American Enterprise Institute" (American Enterprise Institute, Washington, May 24, 2011), <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4827>.
9. Preparing flag officers to manage uncertainty and be adaptive will improve their ability to analyze a situation and identify and correct mistakes, providing what could prove to be the decisive edge in a conflict. We thank Tom Ricks for this insight.
10. Three- and four-star officers must retire after 38 and 40 years in service, respectively. In addition, three- and four-star positions can be extended for up to five years with presidential approval; one- and two-star positions can be extended by up to five years by the service secretary. See 10 U.S.C. § 635, "Retirement for Years of Service: Regular Brigadier Generals and Rear Admirals (Lower Half)"; 10 U.S.C. § 636, "Retirement for Years of Service: Regular Officers in Grades above Brigadier General and Rear Admiral (Lower Half)"; and 10 U.S.C. § 637, "Selection of Regular Officers for Continuation on Active Duty."
11. The World Bank, "Health Data Set," <http://data.worldbank.org/topic/health>. The mandatory retirement age for one- and two-star officers is now 64. Three- and four-star officers may serve until age 66 with the approval of the secretary of defense, or until age 68 with the approval of the president. See 10 U.S.C. § 1253, "Age 64: Regular Commissioned Officers in General and Flag Officer Grades; Exception."
12. Tom Vanden Brook, "Retired Pay for O-10s Spiked with Rule Changes," *USA Today*, February 27, 2012.
13. Jim Tice, "Officer Drawdown: Retirement Options for Colonels," *Army Times*, April 15, 2013, <http://www.armytimes.com/article/20130408/CAREERS/304080029/Officer-drawdown-Retirement-options-colonels>.
14. Ricks, *The Generals*, 9.
15. Each of the services has different expectations about resident schooling. The Army and Air Force traditionally have had the strongest large-scale system of resident schooling for their top officers. The Marines select small numbers of top officers for resident PME but also rely more on nonresident instruction. The Navy culture wholly de-emphasizes resident PME at any level.
16. For example, individual augmentees to headquarters in theater. These typically one-year assignments increased turbulence in flag officer ranks as officers were rotated out of other key jobs to fill these requirements.
17. Each service defines "operators" differently: in the Air Force, they are "rated" (pilot) officers; in the Navy, they are unrestricted line or warfare community officers; in the Marine Corps, they are aviators and ground officers; and in the Army, they are officers from the Operations Career Field.
18. This is partly because some of the enterprise support for the Marine Corps is provided by the Navy.
19. David Barno, "How one general interprets the Army's selection of new one-stars: Too much infantry, and way too many exec assts," *The Best Defense* blog on *ForeignPolicy.com*, June 9, 2011, http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/09/how_one_general_interprets_the_army_s_selection_of_new_one_stars_too_much_infantry.
20. This is despite the near inversion of actual flag officer jobs to these skill sets. Michael J. Colarusso and David S. Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management: Fostering Institutional Adaptability*, U.S. Army Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis (January 2013), 19.
21. For example, during World War II, General George C. Marshall spent much time ensuring that military requirements and the talents of individual officers were aligned. After considering "the unique challenges of being the supreme commander of a multinational force in a globe-spanning war" and surveying the skills of hundreds of candidates, Marshall chose a relatively junior Dwight Eisenhower to command the November 1942 allied invasion of North Africa, and eventually to serve as the Supreme Allied Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force. Quoted in Ricks, *The Generals*, 40.
22. The authors recognize that several of these career fields have well-developed paths to flag rank, owing to their technical complexity (e.g., acquisition). However, flag officers with limited previous background or relevant experience continue to be assigned key jobs in many of these fields.

23. The authors chose this selection point assuming that most one-star (and selected two-star) positions would continue to be viewed as “developmental” or growth assignments for promising flag officers rising through the system.
24. An alternative solution would be to select more enterprise-management officers at the one-star level. Our analysis suggests that an unintended consequence of matching one-star selections to the large numbers of enterprise positions across all the flag ranks would be a corps of senior military leaders in which operators would be only a small minority. This imbalance would not serve the needs of the nation or the military well, since military leaders must ultimately be capable of fighting and winning the nation’s wars. We thank Phillip Carter for suggesting this alternative.
25. Defense Science Board, *Enhancing Adaptability of U.S. Military Forces, Part A. Main Report* (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, January 2011), 9.
26. Ibid.; and Colarusso and Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management*, 104.
27. Admiral F.L. “Skip” Bowman, Director of the Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program, testimony before the Committee on Science, U.S. House of Representatives, October 29, 2003, <http://www.navy.mil/navydata/testimony/safety/bowman031029.txt>.
28. Jim Frederick, “The Special Ops Era, 10 Years Later: How Mavericks Reinvented the Military,” *Time*.com, November 4, 2011, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2098755,00.html>.
29. Defense Science Board, *Enhancing Adaptability of U.S. Military Forces*; and Colarusso and Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management*, 105.
30. Colarusso and Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management*, 107. This includes joint and Army billets (excluding the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff).
31. Ibid., 104, 106–107.
32. Author’s experience serving in an open-ended senior combat command tour in Afghanistan, 2003 to 2005.
33. Subject to the needs of the service, officers could be assigned outside their tracks with the approval of their service secretary. Such exceptions would be reported to the secretary of defense.
34. Author interviews at GE Crotonville, July 2013.
35. Rekha Balu, “Strategic Innovation: Hindustan Lever Ltd.,” *Fast Company*, June 2001, <http://www.fastcompany.com/43028/strategic-innovation-hindustan-lever-ltd>.
36. Author interviews at GE Crotonville, July 2013.
37. Bill Conaty and Ram Charan, *The Talent Masters: Why Smart Leaders Put People Before Numbers* (New York: Crown Business, 2010), 18.
38. Author interviews at GE Crotonville, July 2013.
39. “How GE Builds Global Leaders: A Conversation with Chief Learning Officer Susan Peters,” Knowledge@Wharton, November 2, 2010, <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=2488>.
40. Author interviews at GE Crotonville, July 2013.
41. Conaty and Charan, *The Talent Masters*, 18.
42. Author interviews at GE Crotonville, July 2013.
43. Hay Group, “Top 20 Best Companies for Leadership,” Haygroup.com, http://www.haygroup.com/downloads/MicroSites/BCL/Best_Companies_for_Leadership_2005-2013.pdf.
44. According to Thomas E. Ricks, this principle was emphasized by General William DePuy, the first commander of the Army’s Training and Doctrine Center. See Ricks, *The Generals*, 346.
45. Colarusso and Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management*, xi.
46. As noted earlier, each service values PME differently. The Navy famously heavily discounts the value of PME attendance, whereas each of the other services expects its officers to attend multiple sequential PME courses over the span of a full career.
47. Percentages selected vary by service for resident attendance. Most U.S. military officers attend the staff college run by their own service.
48. Some officers attend the war colleges of other services, although they can also attend a joint program. Examples include the National War College and the Dwight D. Eisenhower School for National Security and Resource Strategy (formerly known as the Industrial College of the Armed Forces), which are both located at the National Defense University in Washington. A smaller percentage participate in equivalent fellowships at universities or think tanks.
49. For example, six of 12 U.S.-led Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan were commanded by U.S. Navy officers in 2006; the other six, by U.S. Air Force officers. See Lt. Trey Brown, “CNO Meets with PRT Commanders Headed to Afghanistan,” April 15, 2006, http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=23184.
50. Charles D. Allen, “Redress of Professional Military Education: The Clarion Call,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, 59 no. 4 (October 2010), 94–100.
51. This “full attendance” model devalued the importance of the experience in the eyes of many officers. Moreover, Army leaders told the authors that over the past decade, eliminating the competitive selection process meant that CGSC gradually changed from a select program that the top 50 percent of officers attended in residence to a program where disproportionate numbers of the bottom 50 percent of officers attended by default. That has now been reversed; the top approximately 55 percent of officers in each year group will be competitively selected to attend the 10-month resident program.
52. Capstone will be expanded to five weeks starting in January 2014. We thank George Topic for this information.
53. Paula G. Thornhill, “Improving Capstone,” *Armed Forces Journal* (April 2010).

54. Author interviews with senior U.S. Army officers, July 2013.

55. Richard A. Rinaldi, *The US Army in World War I - Orders of Battle* (Takoma Park, MD: General Data LLC, 2004); and Richard W. Stewart, ed., *American Military History Volume II: The United States Army in a Global Era, 1917–2003* (Washington: Center of Military History, 2005).

56. German Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt is reported to have remarked: “We cannot understand the difference in your leadership in the last war and in this. We could understand it if you had produced one superior corps commander, but now we find all your corps commanders good and of equal superiority.” Analyst Peter Schifferle attributes this transformation to the interwar emphasis on education. See Peter J. Schifferle, *America’s School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 195.

57. *Ibid.*, 137.

58. For an excellent analysis of this trend in the U.S. Army, see Justin Kelly and Mike Brennan, *Alien: How Operational Art Devoured Strategy* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009).

59. Author interview with Admiral James Stavridis, U.S. Navy (Ret.), October 2013.

60. Author interviews with senior U.S. military and civilian officials. See also Ricks, *The Generals*; and Yingling, “A Failure of Generalship.”

61. Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, “Higher Command and Staff Course – HCSC,” <http://www.da.mod.uk/prospectus/jscsc/hcsc>.

62. The course description also notes: “Notwithstanding the high-grade facilitation that takes place during the formal programme, much benefit is gained in the margins of the curriculum during social interaction and team-building. This helps create alumni who consider themselves a close-knit ‘Band of Brothers’ ready to take leading roles in the international and national security communities.” *Ibid.*

63. This figure is a conservative estimate based on the current costs per student of comparable NDU programs, based on actual expenditures during Fiscal Year (FY) 2011. The Dwight D. Eisenhower School of National Security and Resource Strategy cost \$9,522,000 for 316 students, or approximately \$30,132 per student. Capstone/Pinnacle/Keystone cost \$3,199,000 for 115 students, or approximately \$27,817 per student. Using the highest cost per student (\$30,132) for the largest number of students suggested (30), the approximate cost for the new course would equal \$903,960; \$2 million in funding would ensure that necessary infrastructure and startup costs are accounted for. See National Defense University, *Fiscal Year 2013 Budget Estimates* (February 2012), NDU-626 and NDU-632, http://comptroller.defense.gov/defbudget/fy2013/budget_justification/pdfs/01_Operation_and_Maintenance/O_M_VOL_1_PARTS/O_M_VOL_1_BASE_PARTS/NDU_OP-5.pdf.

64. These are some of the trends identified in National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030*.

65. Barno, “Silicon, Iron, and Shadow.”

66. Officers who attend the Dwight D. Eisenhower School for National Security and Resource Strategy (formerly the Industrial College of the Armed Forces) are a notable exception; they complete a curriculum that emphasizes resource management, acquisition, logistics and other management functions.

67. Some services do require personnel in particular career fields or occupational specialties to maintain professional certifications. For example, acquisition professionals in the Air Force complete certification programs in systems planning, research, development and engineering systems. Yet few of these requirements continue once officers are promoted to flag rank.

68. University of Virginia Darden School of Business, “The U.S. Military,” <http://www.darden.virginia.edu/web/Executive-Education/Partnership-Programs/US-Military-Partnership/Home/>.

69. Interviews with staff of the U.S. Marine Corps Senior Leadership Management branch, June 2013.

70. Examples of these might include the following positions: commander of the U.S. Transportation Command, commander of the Air Force Materiel Command and commander of the Army Materiel Command.

71. These would include, for example, the land, air and maritime functional component commander (JFLCC, JFACC and JFMCC) courses.

72. The addition of service and joint middle- and senior-level instructors to the Joint Duty Assignment List would encourage highly competitive officers seeking joint duty assignments to consider teaching in service staff and war colleges. By law, officers ranked in the top 50 percent must fill these joint billets; thus, this would ensure high-quality serving-military faculty. No such instructor incentives or quality metrics across intermediate or senior service and joint schools exist today.

73. Officers twice not selected for captain or major generally must exit the service; at ranks of major and beyond, most are allowed to stay until the minimum retirement term of 20 years. By law, lieutenant colonels and commanders must retire at 28 years of service, and colonels must retire at 30 years of service. See 10 U.S.C. § 632-634.

74. All services require at least one fitness report per year. If an officer changes jobs during that year, this often triggers an additional reporting requirement. All “rated time” in jobs is fully accounted for by written evaluation reports at grades from lieutenant to major general. This establishes very strong accountability for performance in these grades.

75. Although the initial and final counseling sessions are generally completed, the periodic coaching sessions throughout the remainder of the year are often much more informal and sometimes do not occur at all.

76. The lack of counseling and coaching has further led to concerns of ratings inflation and the “no major left behind” outlook over last 10 years. See Mark Mazzetti, “Army’s Rising Promotion Rate Called Ominous,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 30, 2006, <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/jan/30/nation/na-officers30>.

77. For example, all officers commissioned in FY 2005 would be the “Year Group 2005” cohort of officers and would be managed for promotion throughout their careers in this grouping.

78. See 10 U.S.C. § 611, “Convening of Selection Boards.” For example, the selection rate from colonel to brigadier general in the Army is less than 2 percent.

79. DOPMA caps the number of officers at each grade based upon the respective service’s end-strength, as specified by that year’s National Defense Authorization Act. See also *Department of Defense Active Duty Military Personnel by Rank/Grade*, January 31, 2013.

80. Information provided by the U.S. Marine Corps Senior Leadership Management branch.

81. See *Active Duty Military Personnel*, January 31, 2013. Currently, the Army has 136 O-7s, the Navy 115 O-7s, and the Air Force 144 O-7s, who remain in rank for up to five years before either being promoted to O-8 or retiring.

82. This varies by service; nearly two-thirds of Army one-star generals are ultimately selected for two-star rank, a much higher rate than any other service. In contrast, only 36 percent of Marine one-star generals will be selected for two-star rank in FY 2014; 28 percent were selected in FY 2013. Information provided by the U.S. Marine Corps. See also *Active Duty Military Personnel*, January 31, 2013.

83. Similarly, there are currently 45 three-star generals and 11 four-star generals in the Air Force. Ibid.

84. Each service has a specific office that manages issues related to its flag officer corps; these offices play a major administrative role in identifying flag officers with the requisite background and potential to the service chief and his four-star counterparts for consideration for three- and four-star vacancies.

85. Author personal experience and interviews with senior U.S. Army officials, July 2013.

86. Three- and four-star ranks are also distinctive in that each rank at this level is temporary; the final “permanent” rank for every flag officer is the two-star level. Advancement beyond two-star rank is an “appointment” to a position and rank, rather than a promotion. Rank is attached to the officer’s specific duty billet (such as commander of the 7th Fleet) and expires 60 days after the occupant has vacated that position. After vacating the billet, an officer reverts back to two-star rank unless re-appointed or retired. In practice, the military manages this nuance carefully to ensure that three- and four-star officers are nominated and confirmed for their next jobs prior to the expiration of previous appointments or are approved for retirement in their serving grade.

87. Rarely, the Senate will return a nomination without action. For example, Major General Charles M. Gurganus of the U.S. Marine Corps was nominated in 2013 for his third star, but was asked by the Commandant of the Marine Corps to retire later in the year following an inquiry about failing to provide adequate base security at Camp Bastion in Afghanistan. See Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “Two Marine generals fired for security lapses in Afghanistan,” *The Washington Post*, September 30, 2013.

88. Admiral Michael Mullen coined this phrase while serving as the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. See Michael Mullen, “Joint Chiefs of Staff Speech

to the Naval War College” (Naval War College, Newport, RI, January 8, 2010), <http://www.jcs.mil/speech.aspx?id=1312>.

89. Author experience and interviews with current and former senior U.S. military leaders.

90. See Thom Shanker, “Concern Grows Over Top Military Officers’ Ethics,” *NYTimes.com*, November 12, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/13/us/petraeus-resignation-highlights-concern-over-military-officers-ethics.html>.

91. Author interviews at GE Crotonville, July 2013. See also the text box on page 16.

92. Organizations on a growth trajectory require very different skills from senior leaders than do organizations about to be closed, or ones navigating a significant change of direction. Today’s selection processes often fail to fully take into account, much less clearly articulate, the senior civilian guidance for the direction of large organizations undergoing a change of flag officer leadership. Chartering a specific role for both service secretaries and the secretary of defense in outlining requirements for three- and four-star officers and their organizations will serve to much strengthen the fundamental cornerstones of civilian oversight of the U.S. military. Enacting the written standards of evaluation and fitness reporting will also re-establish written performance accountability for these most senior officers.



Appendix

SUMMARY OF REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

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APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS	ACTION FOR SECRETARY OF DEFENSE	ACTION FOR SERVICE SECRETARIES	ACTION FOR JOINT STAFF AND CHAIRMAN
ASSIGNMENTS			
Code all service and joint flag officer billets at the two-, three- and four-star level as either operational or enterprise.	X		X
Formally designate all flag officers selected for two-star rank as members of either the operational or enterprise track; maintain assignment continuity in each of these tracks for the remainder of the officers' careers.	X		
Extend assignments for all service and joint three- and four-star flag officers to three-year minimums, moving toward five years.	X		X
EDUCATION			
Establish a U.S. Higher Command and Staff Course (HCSC).			X
Require all flag officers selected for the operational track to attend the new HCSC.		X	
Establish a robust PME program for flag officers on the enterprise track.		X	
Establish policies to restore the importance and prestige accorded to duty as both a service school instructor and a student of resident PME programs.			X
Examine all current flag officer PME programs to ensure that course rigor is commensurate with the opportunity cost of sending flag officers to the program.		X	X
SELECTION AND EVALUATION			
Extend the written evaluation report system to all three- and four-star officers, developing a separate evaluation form for each track and rank.	X		
Mandate expectation-setting sessions for all three- and four-star positions with the immediate supervisor (military or civilian) prior to assuming new duties.	X		
Require, at a minimum, semi-annual face-to-face performance reviews between three- and four-star generals and their immediate superiors.	X		
Issue written guidance outlining the specific characteristics and attributes desired of each open position at the three- and four-star levels. The secretary of defense should issue guidance for each joint four-star vacancy; in the case of service four-star leaders, the service secretary should provide guidance.	X	X	

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