ARMY OFFICER RETENTION: HOW TO RETAIN THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST

by

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The United States Army officer corps attracts some of the most talented, motivated, and dedicated young men and women from all parts of American society. Even after 17 years of constant deployments in support of the Global War on Terrorism, it is highly competitive to gain a place in the Army officer corps through the three traditional commissioning paths: the United States Military Academy at West Point, the Reserve Officer Training Corps at various colleges and universities, and the Officer Candidate School Program for those men and women already possessing a college degree. Although the Army can attract talented aspiring future leaders, it has historically had a problem in retaining the best and brightest to stay in the Army for a full career. This policy proposal offers that the Army can retain these top performers through the use of incentives as well as early promotions. These two components of the policy will identify and reward the top performers, but in a broader sense, establish a stronger culture of meritocracy within the Army officer corps.

Advisor: Professor Paul Weinstein
### Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action Forcing Event</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History and Background</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Proposal</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Analysis</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Analysis</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Vitae</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Cumulative Continuation Rates for Men and Women in the Army, FY2000 – FY 2008</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>United States Army End Strength 1954-2014</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Share of YG1996 Officer Cohort Remaining on Active Duty</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Army Basic Branches and Functional Areas</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Officer Career Timeline – Growing Leaders</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>FY2019 Approved Authorizations by Rank and Branch</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Infantry (AOC 11A) Active Component Model</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>Key and Developmental (KD) Assignment Timeline</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>Existing Army Officer Incentive Programs</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>FY 2008-2010 Manning Priority Categories and Standards</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11</td>
<td>Percentage of Competitive Category Officers Remaining</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
on Active Duty Through 8 Years of Service

List of Figures Continued

Figure 12: Political Analysis of Key Stakeholders and Positions 44

Figure 13: Confidence in the US Military 50
MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY, MARK ESPER  
FROM: Thomas Koh  
SUBJECT: Army Officer Retention: How to Retain the Best and Brightest  
DATE: March 19, 2018

**Action Forcing Event**

In May of 2017, Former Secretary of Defense, Ashton Carter, published an article in Harvard Business Review titled: “What I Learned from Transforming the U.S. Military’s Approach to Talent.”\(^1\) Carter discussed the challenges with recruiting and retaining the most talented people for the US military. The problem with talent retention among the US Army officer corps has been developing since 9/11 when constant deployments and failed personnel policies started to drive away some of the best and brightest officers. This problem has come to a critical point and must be addressed if the Army of the future is to have the right people in positions of senior responsibility.

**Statement of the Problem**

On September 11, 2001, a series of coordinated attacks by the Islamic extremist terrorist organization al-Qaeda fundamentally changed the course of history. The attacks resulted in the loss of 3,000 American lives and stunned the United States and the rest of the world. From that point until today, the United States Army has been an army at war. What happens to an organization like the United States Army after it sends its men and women in harm’s way for 17 consecutive years? Although the US Army is a vibrant and resilient organization, 17 years of deployments, casualties, missed births and birthdays,

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and other immeasurable stress have caused a number of problems. One specific problem
is the failure of the Army to retain the best and brightest officers in all 3 components of
the total Army: the active component, the US Army Reserve, and the US Army National
Guard. The dissolution of talent among the Captains and Majors in the US Army has
been gradual over the last 17 years but it has come to a critical point. In May of 2017,
Former Secretary of Defense, Ashton Carter, published an article in Harvard Business
Review titled: “What I Learned from Transforming the U.S. Military’s Approach to
Talent.” Carter discussed the challenges with recruiting and retaining the most talented
people for the US military and admitted it was a problem of critical importance.2 For the
Army specifically, constant deployments have been a catalyst but are not the underlying
cause for the conflagration of officers leaving the Army. Failed personnel policies and
career management issues have driven officers to leave the Army for organizations that
will give them a better balance between work and life, as well as provide an environment
where they can succeed in a more egalitarian environment.

Many studies and articles have been published that illustrate the problem with
Army officer retention. In 2010, the US Army War college reported that “Since the late
1980s … prospects for the Officer Corps’ future have been darkened by … plummeting
company-grade officer retention rates. Significantly, this leakage includes a large share of
high-performing officers.”3 As previously stated, those serving can give the best insight
as to who is leaving and why: a survey of 250 West Point graduates from the classes of

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2 Ibid.

3 Tim Kane, “Why Our Best Officers Are Leaving,” The Atlantic, January 2011,
1989 through 2004 showed that 93% of respondents felt that the best officers are leaving the military early instead of serving a full career. This trend is not just among the cohort of officers that went to West Point. A different survey of active duty service-members showed that 82% felt the same about the best officers leaving early. That survey started to drive to the root cause of why this is happening: 30% believed that the military does a good job in promoting the right officers to General officer rank, and only 7% believed that the military does a good job of retaining the best leaders.4

A 2010 article by the Military Leadership Diversity Commission illustrated officer retention among all services, genders, and ethnicities, from 2000 to 2008.5 This article shows the same data for the other 3 services, which highlights the problem of officer retention which is particularly worse with the Army. The chart shows the retention rate for officers with 4 years of service in the Army at approximately 70% for females and 80% for males. For comparison, the Navy and Marine Corps were at 80% to 90% for the same cohort, while the Air Force was at 80% to 85%.

4 Ibid.

It is difficult for people outside of this problem and the military to understand its seriousness based on a complex set of rules for service obligations, promotions, assignments, and career fields for Army officers. Additionally, only those serving can have a true feel for how many talented officers are leaving the Army. That being said, there are many events and incidents that highlight the Army’s attempts to stop the best and bright from leaving. In 2007, the US Army offered a “menu of incentives” for all mid-career officers, i.e. those at the rank of Captain. The program included officers from year group (YG) 1999 to 2005 which means officers that had approximately 2 to 8 years of service. YGs are one of the two ways the Army groups officers for the purposes of promotion, special selections, and assignments. The other is an officer’s job specialty.

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which for most officers is their basic branch: i.e. Infantry, Army, Artillery, Signal, Logistics, Medical Service, etc. There are other special branches known as functional areas, and there are also separate groups for Army lawyers, doctors, and chaplains. The Army groups officers in “cohorts” based on their YG and their branch. It important to understand how the Army looks at officers because personnel and career management issues are at the root of why talented officers leave.

The menu of incentives was unprecedented in the 232-year history of the US Army. Most of the targeted officers were still serving their initial service commitment, also known as Active Duty Service Obligation (ADSO). They were offered a series of options ranging from cash up to $35,000, choice of posting, or choice of special school, for a 3 years extension to their ADSO. The Army was so desperate to retain officers, that it offered these incentives to almost every officer holding the rank of Captain. For context, after Desert Storm in the 1990s, the Army was paying officers to leave active duty early before their ADSO was completed.7 Moving forward 4 years to 2011, let’s look at John Nagl and an Atlantic article that specifically addresses the loss of the best and brightest from the Army officer corps. Nagl was a West Point graduate, Rhodes Scholar, and innovative military strategist that helped General David Petraeus write the Army’s new counterinsurgency doctrine. Despite this, he left active duty before achieving the rank of Colonel. The article goes on to explain how Nagl’s story is common and highlights a fundamental flaw in the Army’s talent management strategy. The Army’s promotion and selection systems fail to recognize and reward the best

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leaders. Furthermore, draconian policies for post and position assignments further demotivate the best performers from staying in to “wait out” the Army’s bureaucracy.

This problem directly affects the entire US Army, specifically those soldiers and officers serving at battalion level or lower. When the most talented officers leave the Army, the units they leave not only deal with the transition to a new leader, but can become frustrated or disillusioned with the Army as a whole. Most officers have an initial ADSO of 3 to 5 years, depending on their commissioning source. For that time period, almost all officers will have been in the same battalion serving in small unit leadership and staff roles. The RAND Corporation recently published an extensive study on the current state of affairs in the Army. Many problems were cited by soldiers with one of the top complaints being “Lack of proper guidance or sponsorship” at 33% of those polled. The survey involved all ranks and units and is an extremely comprehensive picture of what the Army is feeling as a whole.8 Good officers provide clear guidance, mentorship, and support to the units they lead. The high percentage of complaints about a lack of guidance and good leadership is one indicator that the best leaders are not staying in the Army.

This problem has even more grave second and third order effects which can take years to manifest. When the most talented officers leave, the remaining officers in their cohort continue through the ranks to positions of senior leadership. If the cohort has suffered from a loss of talent, some lesser qualified and talented officers will end up being promoted to senior ranks and will take positions of leadership at the battalion,

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brigade, and general officer level. Battalion command is considered a capstone command for many officers and is a gateway to Colonel and the general officer ranks. While it is thought that all battalion commanders represent the very best in leadership and strategic thinking, this standard becomes hard to fulfill if the cohort has already lost its most talented leaders.

**History/Background**

The history of officer retention in the Army starts with the transition from a draft Army to an all-volunteer force in the post-Vietnam War years of the 1970s. Transitioning from a draft Army to an all-volunteer force meant that the Army had to actively recruit young men and women to serve. As a corollary to that, the Army had to figure out a way to motivate its best qualified officers to continue to serve past their initial commitment, or initial ADSO. Understanding the mechanics behind officer retention requires an understanding of total Army force management, officer accessions, and promotion and retention policies. Officer retention has multiple layers; the base layer is a force management function based on the authorized end strength of the Army. Changes in the authorized strength can create wildly different situations as previously discussed. In the post-Desert Storm years, the Army needed to shrink and was letting officers leave the Army before serving their ADSO. The post 9/11 Army has mostly been the complete opposite with the Army struggling to meet its end strength authorizations and attempting to retain almost every eligible officer.

To illustrate changes in Army force management, historical data on end strength can be analyzed from 1973 to present day. In 1973, the active duty Army had a total of 800,973 members serving; that number did not fluctuate much through the 1980s and the
height of the Cold War. In 1985, the Army’s active end strength was 780,787. In the post-Desert Storm era, President Clinton significantly reduced the size of the Army and in 1993 the active end strength was down to 572,423. That reduction continued until 9/11 with an end strength of 482,170 in September 2000. The 9/11 attacks marked the beginning of the Global War on Terrorism and a steady buildup in the size and manpower requirements in the Army. The size of the Army grew to its 10 year high of 566,045 in 2010 and at that point started a gradual decline to 515,888 at the end of 2014.9

Unfortunately, in this critical time where the Army was growing and needed more junior officers to stay, officers were leaving in mass numbers.

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These changes in manning requirements provide context, but actually the problem of talent retention within the Army officer ranks dates prior to 9/11. In 1998, Senator Trent Lott of Mississippi stated that:

“In an all-volunteer force, people choose to enter and whether or not to remain in the military…. Today, this country is not attracting and retaining enough people of the kinds needed to staff an increasingly higher-skilled force, even though the force size is smaller today than it was before World War II.”

A 2002 paper conducted at the Naval Postgraduate School identified three themes behind officer retention that hold true today: a strong economy providing ample opportunity outside of the military, organizational factors of officer dissatisfaction, and personal demographics unique to the current generation of junior officers. The 2002 study looked at officers that entered the military between 1985 and 1995 and analyzed their decision to stay in the military at the conclusion of their initial ADSO, and then again at the 10-year anniversary of their service. It is extremely important note that these officers served in a “peace time” Army and their decisions to stay or get out of the Army were not complicated by the constant deployments of the Post 9/11 Army.

The study found that for officers at the end of their initial ADSO, West Point and ROTC scholarship officers were more likely to leave compared to non-ROTC scholarship and OCS officers. While commissioning source does not directly translate to talent and performance, these two programs are the most competitive pathways for becoming an

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11 Ibid.
Army officer. Another 2010 study conducted at the Strategic Studies Institute found similar trends as shown in the below graph. These tables analyze those officers that entered the Army in 1996 and show that West Point and 4-year ROTC scholarship officers had the lowest retention rates.\footnote{12 Michael Colarusso, David Lyle, and Casey Wardynski, “Towards A US Army Officer Corps Strategy For Success: Retaining Talent,” Strategic Studies Institute (2010), https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB965.pdf.}

All of this analysis was done prior to 9/11 and shows that the problem with officer retention existed in peacetime and before the strains of constant deployments. Moving forward to the post 9/11 timeframe, the problem of officer retention and specifically talent retention has become critical. Since 9/11, the Army has been constantly deployed with some of the worst operational tempo occurring between the Invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the drawdown in Iraq in 2011. For this time period, many Army officers were
literally gone every other year in Iraq and Afghanistan. I commissioned in 2004 deployed once to Iraq and 3 times to Afghanistan; this is not uncommon for officers in the time periods listed above. To expand on the pre-9/11 analysis of West Point and ROTC scholarship officers, in 2015 the Undersecretary of the Army, Brad R. Carson, addressed an audience specifically about talent retention and force shaping. He cited that for officers that the Army spends the most in developing, i.e. West Point and ROTC scholarship winners, the retention rates are the poorest: For 2004 West Point graduates, only 38% remain on active duty and for 4 year ROTC scholarship officers commissioned in the same year, the retention is 43%.\(^\text{13}\) This illustrates the critical issue of officer retention in the junior officer ranks for the current post 9/11 era of the US Army.

In a 2007 NPR article, then Chief of the Staff of the Army, General Casey, and other senior leaders addressed the issue with growing the Army by 3,000 Captains all while losing junior officers in unprecedented numbers. Major General Robert Scales who ran the US Army War College commented that: “They're [Army retention] is in uncharted territory. The concern is the loss of captains will spike next year...”\(^\text{14}\) Colonel Paul Aswell was the Pentagon force management officer in charge of officer retention for the Army in 2007. He admitted that “It's not a miracle that they're [junior officers] getting out, the ones that do leave. It's a miracle that they stay...”\(^\text{15}\)

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\(^{15}\) Ibid.
Previous attempts to fix the problem have been disjointed and mostly unsuccessful. As previously discussed, the Army offered a menu of incentives in 2007 to stop the mass exodus of junior officers from leaving the Army. This incentive was unprecedented in the Army’s history and was the most significant action taken by the Army to retain junior officer past their initial ADSO. Although over half of eligible officers took the bonuses, the way that the incentives were structured, they failed on two fronts. They failed to actual increase retention due to the fact that all those that took the bonuses were already planning to stay past their ADSO. More importantly for talent retention, the menu of incentives reinforced the problem of the Army failing to recognize and reward the top performers. The incentives were given to the widest possible audience which means that the most talented officers were given the same incentives to stay in the Army as the lowest performing officers. This theme of the Army failing to distinguish the most talented and best performing officers when it comes to personnel actions is one of the root causes for talent retention.

In November of 2007, at the height of both of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, NPR correspondent Tom Bowman spent months in Iraq talking with officers about the issue of officer retention. Everyone acknowledged that constant deployments were the main reason for the mass exodus but as previously stated, talent retention existed prior to 9/11. Bowman touches on several issues with talent retention: “So many [junior officers] are either getting out or those who love the Army or at least trying to do something different, maybe get a job teaching ROTC at a college just to get away from Iraq. Unfortunately, those jobs are few or far between.”\(^\text{16}\) This is the first theme of the


problem with the blanket menu of incentives: officers that love the Army but wanted a break from constant deployments looked to spend a few years away from the operational Army. However, the draconian assignment policies at the time assigned officers solely based on operational requirements; both the best and worst officers were sent to whatever unit was next in line to deploy. Obviously, the Army must send units overseas at full strength or as close to it as possible, but no thought was given to reward or safeguard the top performers with a break from deployments with a non-operational assignment. The second issue Bowman addresses is at the core of the talent retention issue at a macro level:

Well, they're dangling a $35,000 bonus to keep captains in for another three years. And thousands are taking it and quite a few others are on the fence. General George Casey, the Army's top officer, met with Congress a couple of weeks back. He said he's very, very concerned about it. But so far the people I talk with in the Army say a lot of the captains are taking the bonus. However, one colonel in Iraq told me his best captains are leaving and the middling ones are taking the bonus.17

Here lies the problem with talent retention and the Army’s menu of incentives: the best officers left the Army while the average and lower performing officers happily accepted the bonus. From my personal experience, not a single one of my peers stayed in the Army solely based on the menu of incentives; those that took the bonuses were already planning to stay past their initial ADSO. These two issues combined, which will be discussed in depth in the analysis, explain the issue with talent retention: the best officers aren’t motivated to stay in the Army because the Army doesn’t recognize and distinguish them as the most talented. This combined with the post 9/11 deployments

17 Ibid.
created a situation where the most talented performers realized that regardless of what they did, they would be deployed and assigned based on the needs of the Army just like the lowest performers. This pushed so many officers that loved the Army and service out in search of better opportunities in the civilian world.

Currently, the Army has stabilized the problem of junior and middle grade officer retention without the use of incentives or large-scale bonuses. This is mostly due to a significant decrease in deployments as well as a reduction in the overall size of the Army. However, this is related but not the same as the problem at hand which is the retention of the best and most talented officers. The Army has taken the initial steps in the first part of solving this problem which is finding a way to formally distinguish and recognize the best performers in the junior officer ranks. As of 2014, the Army went away from a one size fits all Officer Evaluation Report (OER) and now has 4 different OERs based on the rank of the officer rated. Every officer is rated annually with the OER and it is the primary mechanism to rank officers for the purposes of promotions and assignments. Historically however, the OERs for junior officers were masked and didn’t have any bearing on their careers. Traditionally, OERs first become relevant when officers are Captains and can compete for promotion to Major around their 8th and 9th year of service. However, Captain OERs did not previously have a quantitative mechanism to rank officers. As of 2014, all officers will receive two quantitative ratings which can be used to statistically rank all officers in a group. In the new OER system, the officer’s rater and senior rater will assign a “block rating” of which only 49% can receive the “top

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block.” This means if I am a Captain and I am rating 4 Lieutenants, I can only assign 1 of the 4 the “top block” to keep my profile within regulation. This system of regulated “block ratings” historically has been for only Majors and above.

In addition to understanding how the Army evaluates officers, a broader understanding of how Army officers are assigned to branches and functional areas is required. Below is a diagram from the Army’s Human Resource Command webpage that shows the different basic branches and functional areas.19

![Army Basic Branches and Functional Areas](image)

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The officers in these groups are those that will be affected by this policy. In general, branches and functional areas either follow a pyramid rank structure, or less commonly, a structure that is like a diamond. In a pyramid rank structure, there are significantly less authorizations for each higher rank, i.e. half as many Major authorizations than Captain authorizations. In a diamond rank structure, there are a smaller number of Lieutenant authorizations than Captain authorizations due to the nature of the branch and skillset required. In this diamond structure, the progression goes back to normal from Captain (CPT) to Major (MAJ). Understanding these rank structures and authorizations allows for a better understanding of one part of this policy, early promotion, will affect the Army. Most of the troop heavy branches, i.e. branches that have a high soldier to officer ratio, have a pyramid rank structure. These include the traditional combat arms branches such as Infantry, Armor, and Field Artillery. Most of the combat support and sustainment branches have a diamond structure, such as Signal, Military Intelligence, and Cyber. These force structure attributes are important to understanding how the policy must be implemented and will be discussed later in the proposal and analysis sections.

**Policy Proposal**

This policy proposal involves a 2-pronged approach that aims directly at recognizing and rewarding the top performing mid-career officers with the intent to retain them for continued service as Army officers. The first part of the policy will involve a modification to the officer promotion system for the ranks of Captain and Major. The second part of the policy involves a new Department of the Army (DA) centralized board that will occur every year that will identify and reward the top performing Captains in the
Army with the option for graduate school, choice of assignment, or career broadening opportunities. Officers that are selected and take the incentive will incur a 3-year non-concurrent ADSO. This means that the 3-year additional service obligation is tacked on to any existing service obligation. The initial ADSO for Army officers is as follows: 5 years for West Point officers, 4 years for ROTC scholarship officers, and 3 years for most other officers. This policy proposal will raise the retention rate of the officers in each year group to 50% in two categories: all officers that have an aggregate 51% or higher “top block” ratings on all of their evaluation reports to date, and all those officers that were commissioned via West Point or 4-year ROTC scholarship.

The following diagram is a generalized timeline for Army officer promotion and development from the DA Pamphlet 600-3, Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management. This diagram has been modified to show the context in which this policy will be implemented. The policy’s implementation will be accomplished by a modification to existing promotion policies, as well as the creation of

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a new DA centralized board, which are shown by the purple and gold stars in the diagram. The modified promotions boards will happen at the 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 8\textsuperscript{th} year of an officer’s career, while the “Follow Me” boards (FMB) will occur each year starting with an officer’s 4\textsuperscript{th} year of service and ending with their 9\textsuperscript{th} year of service.

All Army promotions are conducted as per Army regulations and administrated by the DA G-1 (Personnel) Directorate. The promotion portion of this policy will be implemented by a revision to existing policy which will be published via the DA G-1 Military Personnel messaging system (MILPER), the official system by which the Army announces promotion and selection boards.\textsuperscript{21} For context, it should be noted that under the current system of officer management, officers are promoted to Captain around their 4\textsuperscript{th} year of service with this board having no “below the zone” or “BZ” opportunity. “Below the zone” is the term used for officers that are promoted 1 year early and historically does not exceed 5\% of a cohort of officers. Currently, since there is no BZ opportunity for the promotion to Captain, all officers are promoted at or around their 4\textsuperscript{th} year regardless of their performance to date. The promotion board for Major is the first board that involves a BZ component. In general, most officers that are selected for Major will be promoted in their 10\textsuperscript{th} year of service, with a small number of officers being promoted to Major 1 year early, or BZ.

The promotion component of this policy proposal will modify the promotion boards for both Captain and Major. Currently there is no BZ provision for Captain but under this policy, the Captain promotion board will be just like the Major board and will

have a BZ component. One important distinction will be that unlike previous Army regulations that limit those selected for BZ to 5%, this board will allow up to 10%. This is an important change because 5% is too narrow of an aperture to truly capture the best and brightest of any cohort of officers. As such, the promotion board may select up to 10% of First Lieutenants for early promotion to Captain, which would result in them being promoted at or around their 3rd year of service.

For Majors, the larger net of 10% will be achieved by slightly different means. The possible 10% of early promotions will come from no more than 5% one year early, and 5% two years early. For example, if the primary zone for Major is those officers that are at their 10th year, 5% of those at their 9th year may be selected, and 5% of those at their 8th year may be selected. It should be noted that both the Captain and Major policies are actually a revival of policies that were enacted in the height of the Global War on Terrorism during which the Army was desperate to groom mid-grade officers. These previous policies will be discussed in depth in the analysis portion of this policy proposal. The promotion portion of this policy will actually cost the Army very little.

Based on December 31, 2017 active duty Army strength by grade, the number of First Lieutenants that may be promoted early would not exceed 617; the number of Captains promoted early to Major would not exceed 579. Taking current the January 1, 2018 effective DOD pay scales in to account, these early promotions would be the difference of $2.7 million and $3.6 million respectively.

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The second part of this policy proposal creates a new officer selection board that will be named the “Follow Me” board. “Follow Me” is the motto of the US Army Infantry and is a phrase that aligns with the officers that will be targeted in this board: those officers that are leading the pack and should be followed and emulated by others. The “Follow Me” Board (FMB) will be loosely similar to the Menu of Incentives boards previously discussed: every officer that is a Captain will have the option to compete for a series of reward or carrots: graduate school funded by the Army, choice of next assignment location, or selection of a series of broadening assignments. All three of these options already exist within the Army policy personnel management system in one form or fashion, but all three will be brought under this DA centralized board. This is a critical facet of this policy proposal because all officers will receive an equal and fair opportunity to advance regardless of their current branch, assignment, or career progression. Officers who “opt in” to the board will have their files reviewed in the exact same manner and process that exists for promotion boards. Senior officers will review each officer’s file and will use their OERs as their primary criteria for rank ordering the candidates. Those officers selected will have the option of selecting an incentive for a 3-year ADSO commitment which effectively improves retention among these top performing officers. Most Army officers that stay to 10 years of service end up staying for a 20 year career; this concept and its connection to this policy will be flushed out in the policy analysis section. One main reason for this is that financially, they are already half way to retirement and can start receiving a full pension in their 40s or 50s. As such, the FMB will attempt to identify and motivate the top performing officers to stay through this key milestone.
The FMB will select no more than the 1.6% of applicants in each YG of Captains, and will offer them the choice of the aforementioned benefits. As of December 31, 2017, there were 28,974 Captains in the active duty Army. This means that under this new policy, approximately 463 officers could be selected by the FMB each year. This may seem like a small number but an officer will be able to compete for the board for 6 consecutive years, i.e. the general length they are a Captain. This results in an effective selection rate of 10%. For cost estimation, it should be noted that all of the existing benefits that the board will award those selected already exist in some form or fashion. This board simply consolidates them under a single process that is fair and universal for all Captains. Additionally, not all of the officers that opt in to and are selected by FMB will take the incentives. Lastly, once an officer is selected for an FMB and receives the benefit, that officer is no longer eligible to compete for the FMB again. Based on slight changes in numbers of those attending graduate school as well as new or broadening assignments, this part of the policy should be allocated $4.6 million annually. This is an extremely conservative estimate that factors approximately $10,000 for each officer selected in the FMB annually. This is conservative based on the fact that the Army is already budgeting and spending money for graduate school, new assignments, and broadening assignments.

This policy, just like all changes within the US Army personnel management system, will take time to implement. It will be announced via the Army’s Military Personnel messaging system (MILPER) and will be implemented via existing online human resource management portals. The policy will be drafted and announced in the summer of FY2018 with the actual implementation occurring in FY2019 and beyond.
While this may seem like a short timeline, these policies do not require any new legislation and are actually slight modification of previous personnel policies that the Army G-1 (Directorate for Personnel) has previously implemented.

While Army promotions fall under 10 USC 619, the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) and Reserve Officer Personnel Management Act (ROPMA), those policies may be modified by Service Secretaries for the purposes of time in grade for the ranks of O-3 (Captain) to O-5 (Lieutenant Colonel).24 This was the legal justification by which during the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army implemented promotion to Captain in 3 years, as well as the “double BZ” boards for Major. As such, the legal authorization tool is not a revision to the US Code or a new law, but instead a DA G-1 MILPER message that will be authorized by the Secretary of the Army.

Policy Analysis

The analysis of this policy involves understanding the distinct but related 2 policy components and then an overall analysis of the combined effects of the policies. As previously discussed, both the early promotion system as well as the incentives and broadening programs have been implemented in the recent history of Army officer management. This is actually a key benefit or pro to this policy as a whole in that it validates that the Army can feasibly, administratively, and legally implement the policy. As far as costs, the menu of incentives that was offered in 2006 and 2007 had a total cost

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of approximately $500 million which is a fraction of the billions of dollars that the Army spends on personnel management. 25 Unlike the previous program which was offered to everyone, this policy proposal will specifically target the top 5% to 10% of performers and offer them an incentive in exchange for an extension of their service. Each component of the policy will be discussed but the overall theme for this analysis is that the programs cost the Army very little, and are designed so that those dollars spent will target and retain only the best officers for extended service.

*Below The Zone Promotion to Captain and Major*

To understand exactly how early promotions to Captain and Major will affect the Army, a detailed understanding of an officer’s career progression is needed. This policy will apply to basic branch and functional area officers, which excludes specialty branches such as Army doctors, nurses, JAG officers, and Chaplains. Those officers have their own special personnel and promotion management systems. As previously explained in the background section, different branches of the Army have either a pyramid or diamond rank structure. Understanding the early promotion to CPT or MAJ requires a detailed analysis of the number of CPT and MAJ authorizations in all of the groups of offices affected. The below table shows the number of authorizations by rank for various branches and then the Army as whole.26

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As shown in the table below, early promotion to CPT from 1LT will actually dovetail in to the manning structure of the Army due to the fact that there are so many more CPT authorizations than 1LT authorizations. From a force management analysis perspective, the promotion of 5% of 1LT to CPT one year early has a very small effect disturbing the number of officers available at either rank. Although there are 9803 1LT authorizations, only a third to a quarter of these officers would be eligible to be promoted early, so at most this policy would affect 5% of that group, or an effective group size of 163 officers. That equates to 1.6% of force disturbance within the 1LT ranks and 0.7% force disturbance within the CPT ranks. For this very small cost, the Army will establish a new tenant that if you are a top performer, you will be recognized and rewarded as early on as 3 years in to your career. The value for this small force management cost is significant in that it is one brick in the foundation of establishing a new culture of performance-based retention.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Infantry</th>
<th>Armor</th>
<th>Field Artillery</th>
<th>Logistics</th>
<th>Signal</th>
<th>MI</th>
<th>Cyber</th>
<th>Total Army</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COL/O6</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTC/O5</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>8262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAJ/O4</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>1046</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>13716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPT/O3</td>
<td>1216</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>1013</td>
<td>2304</td>
<td>1085</td>
<td>1422</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>29668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTL/O2</td>
<td>1691</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td>1878</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9803</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On potential negative part of early promotion to either CPT or MAJ is that an officer that is promoted early has less time in the lower grade to perform “key and developmental” (KD) assignments. This is an important part of understanding the analysis of early promotion because the Army is designed so that each officer has enough time in a rank to serve in a KD job and to be evaluated in that role. For Lieutenants, KD jobs are very similar for most branches and involve assignments such as platoon leader,
company executive officer, and battalion staff officer. Most officers and certainly the top performers will complete these assignments within 3 years and will “branch qualified” for their grade and their branch. In the case for BZ promotion to MAJ, the time in grade requirements are more than adequate to allow for the top 5% from the senior two YG to be promoted early. For these top performers, they will have completed the KD assignments are will be ready for positions of increased responsibility. The KD timeline aspect of the analysis will be discussed in depth shortly. It should be noted that early promotion for top performers also has the positive net effect of speeding up their career progression which will ultimately help retain them.

While the BZ promotion to CPT can be accomplished with little disturbance to the Army officer force management system, the BZ promotion to MAJ may have more of an impact. This is due to the fact that for all branches and Army wide, there are significantly less MAJ authorizations than CPT authorizations. By promoting CPT early, it could exacerbate an existing problem of draining the Army of CPTs when they are in short supply. However, to fully understand the effects of this part of the policy proposal, the entire population of CPTs must be analyzed by year group. Although there are 1216 CPT authorizations in the Infantry branch, those CPT are generally distributed among 6 year groups (YGs). For example, right now in 2018, Infantry officers commissioned in YG2009 through YG2014 are all Captains. So if this part of the policy is implemented, only those officers in YG2009 and YG2010, or the senior two YGs, would be considered by the early promotion or BZ board. Those CPTs have approximately 8 to 9 years of service and 4 to 5 years of time in the Army at the rank of Captain. The intent of this part of the policy is to recognize and provide a faster pathway to positions of increased
responsibility for up to 5% of those two YGs. Although any officers selected for early promotion will result in a net reduction in the overall population of Captains, this early promotion will actually be better for both the promoted officer and the Army.

The above diagram shows the career progression map for Infantry officers. The 1216 total number of Infantry CPTs includes officers that are between their 4th and 10th year of service. Only the top two YGs would be eligible for promotion either one or two years early under this policy. As such, in any given board, only 20 total Infantry CPTs would be promoted early to MAJ. This is a relatively small number but will have a series of positive effects.

First, if an officer is selected for early promotion, it means that the promotion board identified them as a top performer and a potential future senior leader. Those

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27 Ibid, DA 600-3.
officers will have already completed their KD jobs as CPTs with distinction. As such, it is beneficial for those officers to move on to MAJ so they can attend the requisite schooling and move to positions of increased responsibility. The rest of the CPT population and the rest of the Army benefit as well because the departure of these officers from the CPT population allows a small amount of mobility for the rest of the group. As shown in the diagram, the primary KD job for most Army officers is company command, also known as troop or battery command depending on the branch. Many CPTs may wait for years for a company command slot to open up; this is partially due to the fact that top performing captains can be offered a second command by senior officers that see it as a reward. Staying with our Infantry branch example, if 20 Infantry CPTs are promoted early to MAJ, that will free up some KD slots and will allow for other officers to take command. Realistically, all 20 of those selected for promotion will not be in a company command position at the time of their promotion, and there is a delay between the time an officer is selected for promotion and when they actually pin on the next rank. Additionally, there is a delay between the time an officer is promoted and when they move on to their next assignment which is generally schooling for the next rank. However, if an officer is selected BZ for MAJ, that officer’s chain of command will most likely not offer that CPT an additional command and will begin the steps to transition that officer to the next rank.

The largest benefit of this part of the policy proposal is that it will achieve the goals of retaining the most talented officers in an efficient, effective, and legal way. It accomplishes this because only the top 5% to 10% of performers will be promoted early. This falls within the DOPMA legal and regulatory requirements previously stated, and is
highly efficient because promotions are standard processes within the Army so existing systems need only be modified slightly. The effectiveness of this part of the policy can be realized when understanding the type of Americans that are joining the Army today and will be the junior officers of tomorrow. One of the realities of the future Army officer corps is that it will be composed of a generation of Americans that view the world differently than every previous generation: millennials. An Atlantic article that analyzes the problem with talent retention precisely aligns with this part of the policy:

“[Millennials] want a bigger say in their career paths and their future, and value higher education. They see themselves as likely to leave jobs, companies, and career fields at a much higher rate than their predecessors. They believe in merit-driven upward mobility, and are convinced they should be able to compete for any job in their reach.”

Self-determination of career progression based on talent and performance is exactly what this generation of junior officers want to see before they commit the bulk of their 20s and 30s to the Army. These officers are willing to take the risks of leaving a secure career situation in search of a merit-driven culture where upward mobility is solely based on each individual’s performance and potential. By promoting officers 1 or even 2 years early based on merit, the Army will demonstrate that rules and bureaucracy will not dictate their careers.

The cons to this part of the policy proposal involve maturity and force management issues. The force management issues were previously discussed; although early promotion causes some disturbance in the ranks, the shift of 5% to 10% of a group

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will have a net positive effect on the qualitative improvement of officer talent retention. The issue of maturity is one that should be discussed and analyzed more. Some senior officers may feel that 3 years as a Lieutenant and 4 years as a CPT is not enough time for officers to mature and develop. The promotion system was designed so that officers spent a mix of their career in command leadership positions, and staff time in non-command leadership positions. This system ostensibly creates a balanced officer that has a blend of experience leading troops and in staff positions where they conduct operational planning, logistics operations, and personnel management. This negative aspect of the early promotion policy involves less time for officers to become more skilled in non-leadership roles. This negative aspect of early promotion is relatively minor after taking an in depth look at the mix of KD and non-KD assignments. Going back to the Army personnel management doctrine, the following diagram shows the time each officer should spend in KD positions at the 1LT and CPT ranks:29

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29 Ibid, DA PAM 600-3.
The average officer should have 12 to 18 months of platoon leader time as a Lieutenant, and 12 to 18 months of company command or equivalent KD time as a CPT. If an officer follows this standard model, under the current promotion system, they will have 18 to 24 months of staff time as a Lieutenant and 54 to 60 months of staff time as a CPT. So, under the current system, most officers will spent twice as much time in staff positions than in leadership positions. Most Army officers would comment on this imbalance with emotions ranging from annoyance to serious frustration. The system is designed so that all officers, regardless of their individual performance and potential, spend a majority of their time in non-leadership staff positions. This policy is such that even those officers promoted early will spend half of their Lieutenant and Captain time in non-command staff positions. Additionally, those few officers selected for early
promotion will have demonstrated that they do not need the additional months and years of non-leadership time to develop and hone their staff skills. Being selected for BZ promotion means that they are head and shoulders above their peers in all assignments and roles. Although a loss of staff time and development is a negative part of this policy, the benefits justify the costs and the costs are very low.

*Follow Me Boards*

The FMB board component of this policy has the same level of efficiency, equality, and administrative capacity than the promotion portion. All of the components of the FMB currently exist in the Army’s personnel management system via different processes, which makes this part of the policy feasible and legal. This policy seeks to significantly increase the efficiency and administrative effectiveness of all of these processes for the targeted audience: the top performing mid-grade officers. The three incentives within the FMB are: attendance to graduate school, choice of next assignment location or PCS, and participation in a broadening program. This chart is a summary of these three processes as they currently are executed within the Army.\(^\text{30}\)

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\(^{30}\) “DA HRC Officer Advanced Education Programs, Officer Personnel Management Directorate,” United States Army, accessed March 10, 2018, [https://www.hrc.army.mil/content/Officer%20Advanced%20Education%20Programs](https://www.hrc.army.mil/content/Officer%20Advanced%20Education%20Programs).
Currently, there are 3 main programs that allow for officers to attend graduate school, with advanced civil schooling being the largest component. The problem with the current policy and many other human resource functions is that there is no DA centralized selection board that awards this incentive based on an overall order of merit list. DA centralized boards put all officers on an even footing and are the most fair and egalitarian way the Army selects officers for any promotion or incentive. All promotion boards are DA centralized, as are command boards for the Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel level.

This policy proposal will consolidate access to graduate school opportunities for eligible officers in to a focal point, the FMB. One data point that provides validity to this part of the policy is the performance based graduate school incentive program (PB-GSIP). The PB-GSIP was started in 2015 and was specifically designed by the Chief of
Staff of the Army to award the top 10% of officers in each career division or branch. This program was a previous attempt by the Army to do exactly what this policy seeks to do: target and reward the best officers so as to shape the future senior ranks. The PB-GSIP has proven to be effective in that it targeted the top performers and committed them to serve past their existing commitments. This additional commitment has shown to have a long-term retention increase from 47% without incentives to 66% with incentives.

Using this previous policy as a baseline, the proposed policy will extend the methodology to all graduate school opportunities.

The consolidation into a single process and board for graduate school will have multiple powerful benefits. First and foremost, it specifically addresses the current mid-grade officers’ concerns about controlling their own destiny and fairness in career progression. Every single officer regardless of branch can compete based on their individual performance. This has some negative administrative side-effects due to the fact that the Army must distribute graduate slots roughly equally based on each branch’s size and strength. This con is mostly accounted for in that the FMB will follow the same order of merit grouped by branch process that promotion boards use. This means if the Infantry branch has 1000 officers and the Cyber branch has 100, using the 1.6% selection per YG target, only 16 Infantry officers would be selected, and only 2 Cyber officers would be selected.


The second pro of this policy is that it is highly efficient and reduces the administrative burden of the Army career management and personnel systems as a whole. The consolidation of these multiple processes into a single board will be much more efficient than having 30 or so different branch and career managers screen and assign graduate school slots to their respective populations. While there haven’t been previous attempts to consolidate this specific Army personnel function, a centralized selection board process is used for promotions and command selection and are used because they are efficient and fair. Lastly, the subjective assignment of graduate school by individual branches will be replaced by a merit-based DA centralized process that ensures fairness and openness.

For cost and cost-effectiveness, this policy would attempt to keep the overall number of graduate school scholarships at the same number and at the same tuition rates. Currently there are 3 brackets of funding for Army officers to attend graduate school under the Advanced Civil Schooling program: $0 to $26,000 for “low cost schools,” $26,001 to $43,000 for “medium,” and $43,001 to $55,000 for “high.” This policy proposal does not seek to change these brackets or the number of authorizations per bracket. It should also be noted that all Army officers that participate in graduate school are to do so at reduced tuition rates based on negotiated agreements between the Army and individual schools. This is somewhat of a safeguard to the unstoppable rise in tuition and graduate school costs that are endemic to US based universities. As far as tuition costs to the Army, one con of the policy is that it is impossible to predict how many officers selected by the FMB would choose the graduate school option over the choice of
assignment or broadening opportunity. This is addressed by the way the FMB awards those ranked high enough to be offered an incentive and will be discussed shortly.

_Permanent Change of Station_

Currently, PCS moves are decided by individual branch managers based on the needs of the Army first, and the officer’s preferences second. This component of the policy proposal is relatively simple in that PCS moves occur on a regular basis and this policy simply rearranges the equation for the very few officers selected by the FMB that choose the PCS option. For those officers, the officer’s preferences will come first instead of the needs of the Army. Based on the last menu of incentives offered in 2008, very few officers will choose this option. In 2008, only 2.1% of officers that selected one of the various incentives chose the PCS option. However, this is an important incentive to offer due to the fact that some officers have strong desire to go to places like Germany, Hawaii, or Colorado. This tool costs the Army nothing additional but will provide an additional net that can capture the best and brightest officers. One con of this policy is that the officers that choose this option may desire to go to an assignment that is in contradiction with Department of the Army manning guidance. Army manning guidance is a directive from the DA G-1 that tells assignment officers where transfer should go and in what priority. In the height of the Global War on Terrorism, this guidance was followed with almost no exception which means officers were going from deploying unit,

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to schooling for the next rank, and then right back to another deploying unit. Below is a chart from the FY2008 Army manning guidance memorandum published by DA G-1.\textsuperscript{34}

\begin{center}
(1) FY 2008-2010 Manning Priority Categories and Standards:
\end{center}

The “Deployers” are exactly what it sounds like: units that are deploying and should be filled at or above 100%. These units that provide the manpower for the combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, which includes special operations units such as the 75\textsuperscript{th} Ranger Regiment, Green Berets (Special Forces), and other special mission units. Once all of these are filled, assignment officers can assign people to the “Priority Missions” which are a mix of operational units not directly involved in Iraq and Afghanistan, and then the force generating units such as basic training units that churn out recruits. It goes without saying that many of the best and brightest officers decided to leave the Army after their first and second deployments due to the fact that there was no escape to this cycle. When the Army was desperate to retain Captains in 2005, the Army

Research Institute conducted a survey of officers leaving the Army at their ADSO. The top two reasons for departure were too many deployments (17.7%) and too much time away from their families (14.5%). No military planner will doubt that the priority for assignments should go to units that are deploying, but there is a cost to having little to no room in the policy. The FMB would circumvent Army manning guidance which could have political and organizational second order effects. This con is relatively low for two main reasons: the current operational tempo of the Army is significantly lower than it was in 2008 when this memorandum was published. Second, the small number of officers that select the PCS option of the FMB will be a drop in the bucket of officer assignments to the fighting formations of the US Army.

Broadening Opportunities

Currently there are 15 different broadening opportunities that range from Congressional and White House Fellowships, to degree producing scholarships at Harvard and Purdue University. These are highly sought-after programs and the Army already does a fairly good job in screening candidates to select the best and brightest. The issue with the current system is that each of these programs has their own individual application and selection process; additionally, not all of the selection processes are DA centralized. This part of the policy will augment but not completely replace the existing system by providing a single conduit for talented officers to apply.

The reason why the FMB cannot fully replace the existing system is because each program has specific requirements such as component (active duty, Army Reserve,

National Guard, etc.), branch, time in service, etc. For example, the Congressional Fellowship is open to CPTs, MAJs, and non-commissioned officers, i.e. First Sergeants and Master Sergeants. In that respect, the FMB has an inherent con in that it actually complicates the final selection process for all of these different broadening assignments by adding a layer of bureaucracy. The FMB will supplement the existing programs to feed them mid-career Captains. For the Congressional Fellowship, the FMB would only recommend a certain number of Captains to the existing process based on existing quotas for that specific rank. With so many broadening programs, this increase in administrative burden is the largest negative aspect to the FMB. It is possible that this specific incentive within the FMB may have to be modified or even abandoned due to feasibility and efficiency issues. However, this portion of the FMB provides a very large portion of the overall policy’s equality and liberty. Many of the top officers will jump at the change to be selected for one of the broadening programs, especially if they know that they are competing against their peers in a fair and transparent process. Some of these officers may have already received a graduate degree on their own, and this portion of the FMB will motivate them to stay in the Army.

Feasibility

The overall policy’s feasibility and cost-effectiveness is high based on the way the policy will be implemented. The FMB will produce an order of merit (OML) list just like DA centralized promotion boards. Since all of these processes will be centralized, the DA G-1 personnel directorate will set the number and quantity available for each of the incentives offered: e.g. for FY19 there are 1000 graduate school spots, 100 PCS slots, and 350 broadening assignments. Each officer will submit a ranked list of their desired
incentive in the case that they are selected by the FMB. So, when the list is published the
top officer will get their top preference and that incentive quota will be reduced by one.
In the case that the number of incentive slots are greater than the officers selected, this
policy offers the flexibility for DA G-1 to extend the selection zone as high as they deem
fit. As previously stated, the number of officer selected by the FMB may be less than
500 each FY. Since the goal of this policy is to target the very best in each group, this
policy also allows the flexibility to return any unfilled quotas back to their original owner
and process. This policy is not regulated by a specific statute such as DOMPA and as
such, the Army can use its internal administrative decision making to extend or shrink the
zone of selection for the FMB. In that respect, the FMB portion of this policy allows for
a high degree of flexibility.

Effectiveness

The FMB is actually more effective than the BZ promotion policy in that
accepting a FMB incentive will incur an additional service commitment of 3 years. Both
the early or BZ promotion and FMB incentive have the same goals of motivating the very
best officers to stay; the BZ promotion policy does this indirectly by establishing a new
culture of talent recognition and rewards, while the FMB incentive does this directly by
extending the service commitment of these top performers. The FMB portion targets the
most talented officers and binds them in to staying to the tipping point where it is
financially and logistically smarter for them to stay in the Army for 20 years. Both the
BZ promotion and FMB will first identify and secure the top performers to stay in the
Army past the first retention obstacle of their initial ADSO. The effectiveness of this
policy as a whole is that it targets the best officers, and then motivates and entices them
to stay in the Army until they are close to the magical 10th year of service. Historical data shows that officers that approach 10 years of service remain on active duty until retirement at a rate of 80%.36 The effects of this policy will take years to measure but as each year goes by, more and more of these top performers will be promoted early or take an incentive and thus increase the quality of the senior officer population as a whole.

The graduate school option of the FMB is the most effective and powerful component in talent retention for mid-grade Army officers. The FMB will be offered to all CPTs and for an example, we will take an extremely talented officer that is in the middle of their CPT time. This officer has been in the Army for approximately 7 years and is selected by the FMB to attend graduate school. The lag time for application to a graduate school and physically transferring to the school will put the start time of schooling at the 8th year of service. Using a standard 18 to 24 months planning factor for graduate school, the officer will graduate and will be back to the regular Army at 10 years of service. The 3 year ADSO from the FMB is non-concurrent and starts at this point when the officer has completed school and is back to serving the Army in a normal assignment. By the time the ADSO is complete, the officer is at 13 years of total service and is well past the 10 year tipping point for most officers. A 2010 Strategic Studies Institute study cites that officers that reach 15 years of service are retained at a rate of 96%.37 As such, if an extremely talented officer is identified and selected by the FMB, and that officer selects graduate school, there is a very high probability that the Army will

retain this officer for a full 20 year career. This makes the graduate portion of the FMB
the most effective tool in this entire policy for talent retention.

This is also supported by data offered in the 2010 SSI study that analyzed
retention rates among officers that participated in a program known as the Officer Career
Satisfaction Program (OCSP). This program was offered to officers in 2006 before they
entered the Army and guaranteed them their choice of post, branch, or graduate school in
return for an additional 3 year ADSO. This program is similar to other incentive
programs but was significantly different in that it was offered to all officers prior to their
commissioning. It should be noted that this, just like the menu of incentives, was
designed to retain officers, not retain the best officers.

The below chart shows the retention difference between officers that served an
additional 3 year ADSO compared to those that do not.38

38 Ibid.
For the officers that had the additional ADSO which brought them to 7 to 8 total years of service, they were projected to stay in the Army at 60% to 69%. This was significantly higher than the 47% retention trend of those that did not have the additional ADSO. This is an important data point that provides insight to the effectiveness of the policy proposed. Unlike the OCSP and the previous menu of incentives, the BZ promotions and the FMB will only be available to the top performers. It is reasonable to assume that these top performers will be retained at a rate at or above 60%, which is significantly better than the historic 30% to 40%. This 20% to 30% increase in retention of the best and brightest will cost the Army some administrative burden, and initially $10 million. Both of these will diminish as the Army works out the administrative details as well as calibrates the aperture and size of the FMB. Even so, $10 million is a drop in the

**Political Analysis**

The key stakeholders for this policy include several groups of people within the US Army and DOD, Congressional leaders that provide oversight for the DOD, and the American people. As previously stated, in the height of the Global War on Terrorism, all of the elements in this policy proposal existed in some form or fashion. As such, data exists on the position of these stakeholders as far as early promotions and incentive programs for retention. In general, most stakeholders will have a positive feeling about this policy in that it will increase the quality of officers that are retained and promoted to senior ranks with a minimal increase in cost to the taxpayer. The key stakeholders that may not agree with this policy are senior officers, i.e. Major and higher, that are too senior for this policy and were groomed in an Army that did not have these types of policies in place. Below is a summary of the key stakeholders and their positions:
Future Army Officers

This group of stakeholders involves high school graduates that are considering joining the Army as an officer through the 3 primary accession routes: US Military Academy at West Point, ROTC, and OCS. It is of critical importance to understand this group’s position on the policy because it is impossible to retain the most talented individuals if they never join the Army in the first place. As such, we go back to an understanding of the demographics of who is in this group of future Army officers. As of this policy proposal, the average future Army officer is a Millennial that deeply desires the ability to control his or her future through his or her performance on the job. The Atlantic article highlights a junior military intelligence officer that by every metric was a rising star: the exact “top performer” that this policy aims to retain. Captain Jost “loved his job” but “His future path as an intelligence officer was clearly laid out for him, and largely out of his control. He began to think about getting out.” The article goes on to

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41 Barno and Bensahel, “Can the US Military Halt Its Brain Drain?”
explain the Millennial generation, those born between 1980 and 2000, value and feel strongly about the ability to gain higher education, merit-driven upward mobility, and control in their career path. Millennials “are convinced they should be able to compete for any job in their reach.” 42 These views were also found in a 2017 RAND Corporation study that analyzed how Army recruits felt about education and education related benefits the Army will provide. The study conducted sixteen 45-minute focus groups with recruits for all 4 services all over the country. One of the most common benefits that the recruits talked about were the education benefits that the military provides. The recruits wanted to avoid racking up large amounts of college debt and some of the recruits actually had left their college path knowing that the military provided programs such as the Post 9/11 GI Bill which can pay for an entire degree. 43

Existing Mid-Grade Army Officers

The second group of stakeholders for analysis are those Army junior and mid-career officers that this policy will affect immediately. These officers are also Millennials and will have a positive view of the policy for the reasons previously listed. Additional data is available that can provide additional insight as to how the top performing officers in this group will feel about this type of policy. A March 2011 John F. Kennedy School of Government policy analysis conducted at Harvard University had some exit polling data that addresses the exact issues at the heart of this policy proposal. The study polled 250 former junior military officers that served between 2001 and 2010

42 Ibid.

and 80% of those polled stated that the best officers had left the military before serving a full career. The top two reasons why these top performers left were organizational flexibility and a lack of commitment to innovation. The BZ or early promotion portion of this policy will promote the top 5% to 10% of officers early to CPT and MAJ. This study found that approximately 82% “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that the best officers would have stayed in if the military promoted them more quickly. Additionally, 78% “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that the best officers would stay in the military if they were given more options to attend schools for professional development.\(^{44}\) The FMB’s graduate school and broadening opportunities address this polling data directly. This study and these polls offer a powerful political perspective for the most important of all of the stakeholders in this analysis: the mid-grade top performing officers that the policy aims at retaining.

_Senior Army Officers_

This group of stakeholders may provide some resistance to the policy for several reasons. In a 2011 Foreign Policy Online article, 4 senior officers from each of the services respond to the Kane article as well as the proposition that the best and brightest aren’t being retained. They offer that Kane’s methodology was flawed and they reject “the notion that best and brightest are leaving because ‘the system’ has kept them down.”\(^{45}\) The rightly cite that Kane’s study, and other studies, fail to capture and analyze

\(^{44}\) Sayce Falk and Sasha Rogers, “Junior Military Officer Retention: Challenges & Opportunities, Officer Retention” (Policy Exercise, Harvard University, 2011), 4-6.

the quantitative data of the performance and evaluation records of those junior and mid-grade officers leaving active duty. The senior officers also question the statistic that Kane used in his article that 93% of officers polled believe that the best officers are leaving the service as soon as possible. The survey was based on the opinion of each respondent as to what they felt defined the “best” characteristics, competencies, and abilities of an officer. The senior officers highlight that each service has their own culture and the concept of “best” could vary from the “sharpest” to the “fastest” or even “funniest” or “kindest” officer. This goes back to the lack of objective quantitative data for assessing and evaluating officers that leave the Army against officers that stay for a career.

To combat this political challenge, the Army must first conduct the aforementioned research so that they can prove to the existing senior leadership that talent retention is a true problem. While the performance reports of Army officers leaving active duty is sensitive, DA G-1 could compile reports to be seen internally at the most senior levels of the Army. These reports would breakdown the performance data for officers that departed the Army in between the expiration of their service commitment to the magical 10-year retention mark. This data would then be compared to rest of the cohort of officers for each year group, i.e. those officers that decided to stay in the Army. This study could provide valuable insight in quantitative form that would convince officers like the 4 senior officers previously discussed that talent retention is indeed an issue for the Army.

*Congressional Leadership*
The House Arms Services Committee (HASC) and Senate Arms Services Committee (SASC) both provide oversight of the DOD and the US Army by managing defense budgets, oversight of operations, and oversight of personnel management. The HASC and SASC have the responsibility to oversee senior leaders from the Secretary of the Army on down to ensure that they are well and faithfully executing programs to keep the force healthy and with the highest levels of talent. One of their key responsibilities that has made national news in recent years involves the oversight of senior officer misconduct. Between 2013 and 2017, there were over 500 cases of flag officer (general or admiral rank) misconduct that both the HASC and SASC have tried to understand. Frequently, these violations by the US military’s most senior leaders have had some sort of sexual harassment or sexual misconduct component. Senator Kristen Gillibrand, a New York Democrat and member of the SASC, told USA Today that a DOD investigation on this phenomenon that ended inconclusively after 2 years is “top (Pentagon) officials refusing to demand accountability and sweeping major ethical problems from commanders under the rug to the detriment of the men and women who serve admirably under them.”46 In recent years, the most well-known example of senior officer misconduct was by Army General David Petraeus who fell from the national spotlight after pleading guilty to providing classified information to his biographer who he was having an affair with.

All of this provides the impetus for Congress to support any policy tool that will increase the quality of the officers rising to the most senior ranks. The early promotion

and FMB will target the top midgrade Army officers and set them up for a fast track to positions of increased responsibility at the Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel level. This should lead to a decline in senior officer misconduct as most top performing Army officers are ranked highly by their superiors based on not only their top performance, but also their high moral character. A large part of the Army officer evaluation report focuses on the rated officer’s performance and potential. There is also a part that talks about the officer’s moral character. This policy should gain Congressional support in that it helps address a hot topic as far as the macro level oversight issues that the SASC and HASC are assigned to address.

*American Public*

While the specifics of the Army’s personnel policies rarely make it to public discussion, the public’s opinion of the US Army and the US military is constantly being polled. The US Military has been regarded as the best institution within the federal government for decades – a 2017 Business Insider article that released poll data about issues from gun control to marijuana showed that 50% of the American public has a “great deal” in confidence in the US military. This contrasts to 23% for the US Supreme Court, 11% for the Executive Branch, and a dismal 5% for Congress.47

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Hand in hand with the confidence the American public has had with the military is a gap widening between the military and the ordinary American citizen. A 2015 LA Times article highlighted many examples where Americans are thankful that there are people who will serve in uniform but are mostly uninterested and disconnected from those people and that service. The article cites a 2011 Pew Research study titled "The Military-Civilian Gap" that only 25% of Americans with no family ties to the military followed the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan closely. Moreover, 50% of Americans believed that these wars made any difference in their lives and that they were not worth fighting.\footnote{David Zucchino and David S. Cloud, “US military and civilians are increasingly divided,” LA Times Online, May 24, 2015, http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-warrior-main-20150524-story.html.} All of this reinforces historical trends that the American people will be supportive but mostly uninterested in specific Army policies such as the early promotion
and FMB. The American people will take this policy at face value and will trust that these policies will indeed raise the level of talent in the senior officer corps.

**Recommendation**

It is impossible to measure the true value of a highly competent, deeply motivated, and morally sound senior Army officer corps. What happens when the wrong officers are promoted to positions of increased responsibility, or when the overall level of performance in a group of officers falls too low? In an article titled “General Failure,” the *Atlantic* addresses exactly this issue and starts with a story from World War II. In June 1944, US forces had established a footing in France but were far from pushing the Germans back to Berlin. The 90th Infantry Division was part of this force and were being decimated by seasoned first rate German formations. One infantry company in the 90th started a day in July with 142 men and ended the day with 32. What was the leader of the 90th Division doing to guide his unit through this horrible combat? Brigadier General Jay MacKelvie, the 90th Division Commander, was found by his deputy, Brigadier General Sam Williams, hiding from enemy fire in a ditch. BG Williams yelled at BG McKelvie: “Goddamn it, General, you can’t lead this division hiding in that goddamn hole. Go back to the [command post]. Get the hell out of that hole and go to your vehicle. Walk to it, or you’ll have this goddamn division wading in the English Channel.”

McKelvie, along with many other senior officers in World War II, was relieved of command and dismissed in disgrace. The article highlights how today, decades after World War II, general officers are rarely fired and have arguably mismanaged the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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since 9/11. Many soldiers and junior officers that bore the brunt of these two wars will agree with this quote from the article: “To a shocking degree, the Army’s leadership ranks have become populated by mediocre officers, placed in positions where they are likely to fail. Success goes unrewarded, and everything but the most extreme failure goes unpunished, creating a perverse incentive system that drives leaders toward a risk-averse middle where they are more likely to find stalemate than victory.”  

I recommend this policy be implemented as an important step in fixing this widely acknowledged issue of mediocrity where the Army and the nation needs excellence the most. The policy has two components, both of which are specifically designed to leave the mediocre officers and to lift up the top performing officers. The BZ or early promotion to Captain and Major will have the direct effect of moving the best officers up at a faster rate than everyone else, but more importantly will set a new culture of meritocracy within the Army officer corps. The FMB will give powerful incentives such as fully funded graduate school to the top performing officers which will commit them to stay in the Army longer.

The strongest pro in favor of this policy is the policy’s effectiveness: it increases the quality of those officers being retained because it only offers early promotion or an incentive to top officers that are performing at the top of their group. It will be these officers that are retained for extended careers in the Army as senior officers and general officers. The second pro of this policy is the costs associated with policy implementation. These programs already exist within the Army’s budget so the cost is

\[50\] Ibid.
mostly administrative, as opposed to millions and millions of dollars that need to be requested and allocated. This policy mostly adjusts the way in which these existing programs are administered. The third strength of this policy is the policy’s efficiency. This policy will consolidate several processes, such as selection for graduate school or broadening programs, into a Department of the Army centralized board. The DA centralized board will be much more efficient than 30 different branches and boards trying to manage and allocate these incentive programs.

These pros far outweigh the cons although the cons are legitimate issues. For decades, Army officer retention and specifically talent retention has been achieved through regular promotion boards with a very small number of officers being promoted BZ or early. Early promotion brings with it a concern that officers may be promoted before they have the time to mature and develop properly. Additionally, existing senior officers may resist this policy because they don’t see the issue of talent retention as issue in and of itself. All of these cons are aided by the general resistance to change within large organizations, specifically large federal government organizations such as the military. The biggest weapon to address these cons is information: a properly crafted information campaign can be coupled with the pros to create conditions for a successful policy implementation. While it is true that 3 years may not be enough time for a Lieutenant to develop, and 4 years may not be enough from for a Captain to develop, that argument was already addressed in the recent past. In the height of the Global War on Terrorism, promotion from Lieutenant to Captain in 3 years was standard for all officers; I was promoted to Captain at my 37th month of service. It should be noted that I, along with many of my peers, had already led American troops in combat through 300 combat
patrols prior to being promoted to Captain. Information can also shed light on to what is actually happening to the best officers in each year group. As previously discussed in this policy proposal, early departure by the most talented officers is a real issue as demonstrated by statistics as well as subjective interview data.

I recommend that the policy be introduced to the Army via MILPER message and be open for feedback prior to implementation. The Army recently has sent out email surveys that solicit input on topics from initial military training to overall happiness and welfare. After this policy is introduced in FY2018 but before it is implemented in FY2019, that window of feedback can provide important insight in to how it will be received and implemented. I think that this policy is a critical first step in reversing the trend of losing the best of the best to the civilian world. In every Army battalion, there is at least one junior officer that everyone acknowledges is “squared away” or “high speed.” While most people in the battalion will throw jokes at Lieutenants and junior Captains, the “squared away” officer is rarely subject to this time-honored tradition. When that officer speaks, even the most seasoned and senior Sergeant will listen; when that officer leads, everyone around that officer follows. This policy is targeting that officer and will motivate that officer to stay for a career and positions of the highest responsibility.
Curriculum Vitae

Thomas D. Koh was born on September 7, 1982 and is a native of Huntsville, Alabama. He is currently a Special Agent in the Federal Bureau of Investigation as well as a Major in the United States Army Reserve. Prior to serving with the FBI, he served on active duty as a United States Army Infantry officer in various units to include the 75th Ranger Regiment and deployed to both Afghanistan and Iraq. He is a graduate of various US Army schools to include the Command and General Staff College, the Cyber Center of Excellence’s Signal School, and the Maneuver Center of Excellence’s Infantry School. He holds a Bachelors of Science in Information Systems Engineering from the United States Military Academy at West Point.