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THE DRAWDOWN: IMPACT ON OUR ABILITY TO
RECRUIT, RETAIN AND SUSTAIN THE FORCE OF 2001

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Preface

The Air Force just concluded one of the largest drawdowns in its history. While much has been written about the drawdown, there has been no overall look at major impacts of drawing down an All-Volunteer Force. This research project focuses on impacts on people and the personnel programs used to execute the drawdown. Personnel officers will find this report especially interesting since today's captains and majors are the ones who will be tasked to execute the next drawdown. It behooves all to know what has and hasn't worked in the past and use that knowledge as drawdown programs continue in the future.

I would like to thank my Research advisor, Lt Col Steve Torrence for his advise, counsel, and guidance throughout this project. I would also like to thank Major Jeff Hobson and the staff of the Personnel Issues Team, HQ AF/DPI for their support. Much of the raw data that made this report meaningful came from the Personnel Issues Team. Without their help this report would be far less quantitative.

Abstract

The Air Force is wrapping up one of the largest and fastest drawdowns in its history. More significant, it is the first ever to impact the All-Volunteer Force. This paper reviewed the following drawdown impacts on active duty Air Force people: retention; sustainment; and recruiting. Historical trends, studies, and surveys were used to examine impacts in each area, and there have been many impacts.

While first-term enlisted retention is at an all-time high, second-term retention is down. Although the trends show non-rated officers and navigators were most affected, pilot and navigator retention is at an all-time high. Both officer and enlisted members saw promotions suffer in terms of opportunity and timing. Operations Tempo (OPTEMPO) is up four-fold from 1989 while Air Force strength fell by 30 percent. The impacts of increased OPTEMPO on people and their families may eventually show up in lower retention rates and reduced readiness. Finally, the recruiting environment has suffered. Propensity of youth to join the Air Force has fallen 30 percent in the last six years. This tougher environment means recruiters must work harder and recruiting budgets must rise to meet new challenges.

Drawdowns are not new, indeed they've proven to be cyclic. We can learn from the past and present, to address inevitable, future drawdowns. Future research should consider impacts on the Total Force, including active, civilian, Guard, and Reserve.

Chapter 1

The Drawdown: History, Philosophy, and Tools

The fall of the Berlin Wall, and the break-up of the Soviet Union represented what the Bush Administration referred to as “the new world order.” One of the outcomes of that new world order was a need for the US military to reexamine its force structure. After 40 years of gearing up mainly to meet the well-defined threat posed by USSR, US forces must now prepare for a variety of less predictable problems and dangers.¹

Throughout history, the United States has been a militia nation.² The American people have never been comfortable with a large standing military during peacetime. Following major conflicts from the Revolutionary War to WW I, the citizen soldiers who came to the defense of the nation returned to their civilian occupations and the military returned to a caretaker status. And, during the peacetime cycle, the military drew down its military might, sometimes to dangerous levels.³ Today, given that our nation’s Cold War enemy no longer exists and the war which American’s had been fighting for 40 years is over, how big is big enough? The answer to this question may never be known. However, the Services, and the Air Force in particular, quickly embarked on one of the largest and fastest drawdowns of forces in their short history.

History

In 1986, Air Force strength was over 608,000. At the end of 1996 (just ten years later) there were 33,000 fewer officers and 186,000 fewer enlisted members (a reduction of over 35 percent). Two out of every three people who were on active duty in 1986 are gone today. General McPeak, then the Air Force Chief of Staff, pointed out “the last time we were at 400,000 was in 1948, before the Berlin Airlift.”⁴

While significant, drawdown is not new to the Air Force. As you can see in Figure 1, the Air Force has been drawing down for 32 years of its 48-year history. What sets this

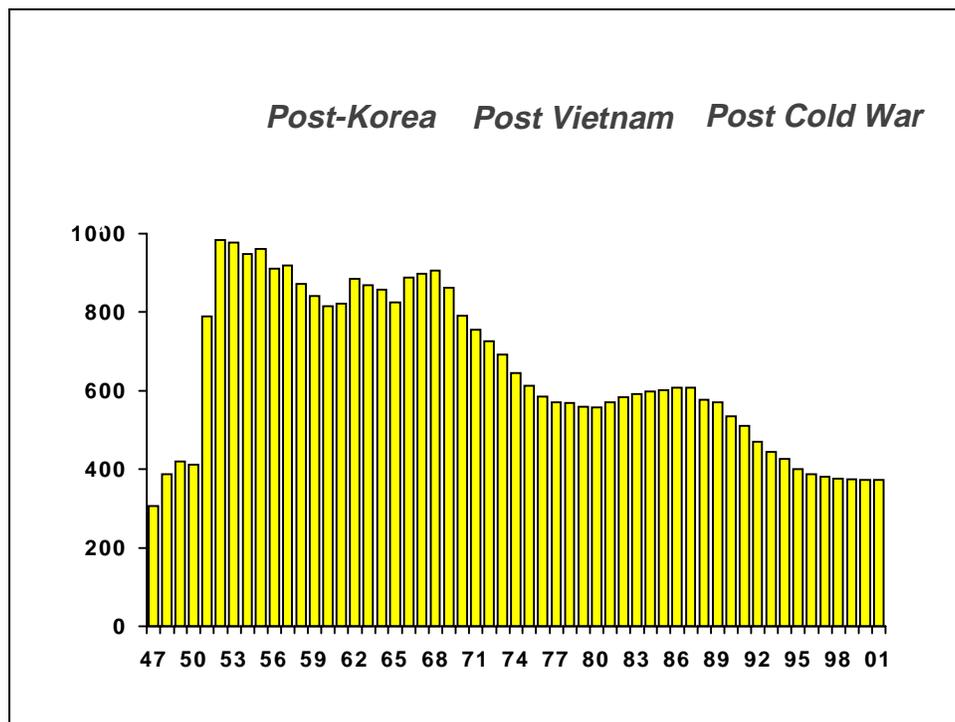


Figure 1. Drawdown in Perspective⁵

drawdown apart from the others is that this is the first drawdown ever to affect an All-Volunteer Force (AVF). Drawdowns after WWII, Korea, and Vietnam were comparatively painless because the bulk of those discharged were draftees and those who joined the Air Force to avoid Army service. Most of them welcomed release at the

earliest possible moment. Most AVF professionals in sharp contrast want to remain in uniform.⁶ There are no draftees to “let” go home. Everyone in the force today, and those in the force at the start of the current drawdown, are in the Air Force because they chose to be here. “We are victims of our own success. We have worked hard to...make the Air Force an attractive way of life. These efforts...now are complicating efforts to drawdown the force.”⁷

In the last major, 1970s drawdown, the services lived through what is commonly referred to as a “hollow force,” a force that lacked the right number and kinds of people, and experienced poor retention and recruiting. Ultimately this led to poorly maintained equipment...and rock bottom morale.⁸ Air Force leaders must not let that happen again. The programs used today and the repercussions of those programs will affect the force and our ability to recruit, retain, and sustain future forces for years to come.

The current drawdown is about 90 percent complete.⁹ Both military and civilian leaders have worked very hard to put a positive face on the future. Undersecretary of Defense Dorn refers to the drawdown as “one of the great success stories in recent US history as a management matter...with fewer than 2,000 forced separations short of retirement.”¹⁰ But the bad news is no one knows the true impacts and the future remains uncertain. Many Americans, particularly those in Congress, continue to call for additional cuts in military spending. Until Congress gives the Air Force an end strength and budget, it’s too early to tell about future fiscal year end strengths.¹¹ Top military leaders anticipate another review of the military’s size and shape after the 1996 election, regardless of who wins.¹²

Philosophy

Air Force leadership approached the drawdown with a well thought out philosophy. The goal was to minimize involuntary losses while shaping the force for the 21st century, and they designed the personnel drawdown to go with the drawdown in force structure. They tried to target the grades, years of service, and specialties based on force structure changes.¹³ The philosophy was essentially five phases. First, accessions were reduced. Next, career force entry was limited. Third, voluntary separations were maximized. Forth, the retirement eligible population was reduced. All this was done to minimize the use of phase five, involuntary programs as a last resort.¹⁴

The use of voluntary programs allowed the Air Force to take care of its own and sent a positive signal to the rest of the Air Force.¹⁵ In fact, by most accounts better than 90 percent of all losses during the drawdown were through voluntary means. However, this statistic is somewhat misleading. Examining how these policies were used shows that many of those losses were “induced” through various methods or tools, but counted as voluntary.

Tools

The section above introduced the drawdown’s five-phased approach. This section will discuss how the Air Force used this approach.

First, the Air Force reduced accession levels. In an institution that does all its hiring from the bottom, the easiest course is to force out younger members or put a stranglehold on recruiting, but that’s asking for trouble.¹⁶ If accessions are reduced too much for too long you create a “bathtub,” an unbalanced inventory that can have drastic implications for

the future in terms of experience, paygrade, and occupational mix. As those reduced accession year groups move through their careers, the dip in force levels goes with them. Soon the shortage isn't in E-1s, but in critical supervisory NCO grades. In order to avoid that, the Air Force reduced its accession levels to no lower than 85 percent of what it takes to sustain the force.¹⁷ In 1986, it hired over 9,200 officers and 65,000 enlisted, and in 1997 it will hire just 4,800 officers and 31,000 enlisted.

Once entry into the Air Force was restricted, entry into the career force was limited. For officers, this showed up in reduced opportunity for regular augmentation, an early competitive career selection process. Prior to the drawdown, an officer was given three opportunities for regular augmentation, first upon selection to captain, and again at the fifth and seventh year points. Today's officers get just one opportunity, at the six year point. For enlisted members, career force entry was limited in two ways. First, reenlistment was restricted in as many as 27 skills, depending on manning levels. Second, all not promoted to E-5 by their tenth year were forced to separate. Prior to the drawdown an enlisted member could stay to 20 years once promoted to E-4.

Next, voluntary losses were maximized. Key to this effort were two new programs Congress gave the Services known as Voluntary Separation Incentive and Special Separation Benefit (VSI/SSB). In essence, these programs paid members to leave voluntarily. As an example, an E-7 with 18 years of service could draw a lump sum benefit of over \$68,000 by agreeing to leave the Air Force short of retirement. Senior leaders believe the Air Force would never have made it if it had not been for the bonuses.¹⁸ As of the end of FY96, the Air Force paid over 6,000 officers and nearly 35,000 enlisted to leave early.

Then the retirement eligible portion of the force was reduced. By doing this the Air Force not only avoided separating those short of retirement, but by reducing the more senior grades, helped maintain promotion tempo through the drawdown. For officers this policy took the form of Selective Early Retirement Boards (SERBs). SERBs were boards convened much like a promotion board except that the order of merit was reversed; those on the bottom were retired. Although no future SERBs are planned, to date over 4,000 officers were SERBed since 1991. These are the people who, every time we've given a war, they've come.¹⁹ SERBs were avoided in the enlisted force, but the High Year of Tenure, or the longest one can serve in a grade, was reduced for four enlisted grades (Table 1). Some argue this is the same as a 100 percent SERB of the enlisted force.

Table 1. HYT Policy Changes²⁰

Policy	TSGT	MSGT	SMSGT	CMSGT
Old	23	26	28	30
New	20	24	26	30*

* 33 yr. extension Program canceled

Probably the most significant drawdown tool came from Congress. Beginning in FY93, Congress gave the Services authority to allow those with over 15 years of active service to retire. The authority was known as Temporary Early Retirement Authority (TERA) and, although a penalty was paid by the member, the program was a success. As of the end of FY96, nearly 16,000 members have elected the TERA option.

As a last resort, the Air Force turned to involuntary programs. The Air Force held only one Reduction in Force (RIF) board, Summer 1992. The board selected over 1,500 officers, gave them a severance check, and separated them involuntarily. However, one can argue this was not the only involuntary program. The Air Force campaign to avoid

RIF hinged largely on a “carrot and stick” separation program. To encourage members to take the money and run (VSI/SSB), the Air Force warned its personnel that, if it did not get enough volunteers it would have to RIF. The severance pay would be one-third less than what was available under the SSB program.²¹ The SERBs and RIFs also affected not only those who were selected to retire [or separate], but every single one of the Air Force troops who had to meet SERB or RIF boards.²² General Boles, then the Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel said, “these two management actions, RIF and SERB, have done more to damage morale and inject uncertainty into the force than any other personnel action I’ve encountered in more than 32 years of active military service.”²³

To truly understand the impact of these programs one must look at impacts on the forces of today and tomorrow by reviewing impacts of these programs on retention, sustainment, and recruiting.

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¹Bruce Callander, “The Human Side of the Drawdown,” *Air Force Magazine*, July 1992, 39.

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⁴Robert S. Dudley, “Forty Percent Down,” *Air Force Magazine*, August 1993, 23.

⁵Ms Breeden, Talking Paper on AF End-Strength, HQ AF/DPPR, June 1996.

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⁹House of Representatives, *Military Personnel Quality of Life Issues: Hearings before the Subcommittee on National Security*, 104th Cong., 1996.

¹⁰Rick Maze, “Dorn Declares Drawdown a Success,” *Air Force Times*, 5 March, 1996, 14.

¹¹Bowman, 16.

¹²Steve Watkins, “Re-up, Move Up,” *Air Force Times*, 5 August, 1996, 11.

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¹⁴Captain Loren Faulkham, “Surviving the Drawdown,” Briefing, US/UK Airman Talks, Pentagon, VA., 3 March 1995.

¹⁵Suzanne Chapman, “Snapshots From the Personnel Front,” *Air Force Magazine*, February 1995, 64.

¹⁶Tom Philpott, “After the Drawdown,” *Air Force Times*, April 27, 1992, 10.

¹⁷Faulkham.

¹⁸Poindexter, 12.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p.13.

²⁰General Hickey, Thomas J, *Total Objective Plan For Career Airmen Personnel*. Washington D.C.: HQ AF/DP, 1991.

²¹Callander, 39.

²²Chapman, 61.

²³House, *Manpower/Personnel Overview: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Military Forces and Personnel*, 103th Cong., 1994.

Chapter 2

Retention—Holding on to Our Investment

Why Retention is Important

In the late 1970s, the mass exodus from the services of highly skilled and experienced NCOs did much to bring about the military woes now known collectively as the “hollow force.”¹ The Air Force lacked the ability (or desire) to retain people in the right numbers and skills. Retaining experienced people impacts readiness. It is important to remember that people are deliberately recruited for a career, and military equipment and operational doctrine have been designed around that high quality, career force. Sophisticated equipment and operations require knowledge, expertise and seasoned judgment which only a career force can deliver.² Most personnel experts agree it takes a decade to produce an experienced NCO or pilot, and retention saves money otherwise spent on recruiting and training new members. For example, the Air Force spends \$5671 to put one enlisted person through basic training and \$7097 to put an active duty airman through the 10-week munitions school.³

Enlisted Retention

Enlisted retention is measured at specific career decision points, typically at the end of the first term of service (usually four or six years), at the end of the second term of

services, and again for those short of 20 years of service. Retention is a measure of the percentage of those who are eligible to stay that actually elect to stay. Table 2 shows retention rates through the bulk of the drawdown. The data show a couple interesting trends.

Table 2. Historical Enlisted Retention Rates⁴

Category	FY88	FY89	FY90	FY91	FY92	FY93	FY94	FY95
1st Term	49	59	52	59	58	61	59	63
2nd Term	74	77	69	77	76	82	81	77
Career	95	95	93	95	96	97	96	96

First, note that FY95 first term retention is the highest reported. In fact, it's as high as it has been in the history of the AVF. Nearly two-thirds of those offered the opportunity to reenlist did so in 1995 compared to just 58 percent in 1986.⁵ This high retention can be tied to two things, and both required significant financial commitment. First, learning the lessons of the 1970's hollow force, the Air Force made huge investments in quality of life. In FY96 for example, the Air Force programmed \$79.2 million on quality of life issues such as housing, dormitories, and child care centers. Since military pay shortfalls had contributed greatly to retention and hollow force problems, reenlistment bonuses were paid to encourage retention in critical skills. This year [1996] we plan to pay SRBs to people in 55 different skills⁶ (at a cost of around \$30 million).⁷ First term retention has also been essentially unaffected by drawdown programs. As discussed in chapter 1, separation programs have targeted accessions or those in the career force.

Next, note the recent trends in second term retention. The rate is down over 5 percent in the last two years. One would expect retention rates following the bulk of the

drawdown to be unusually high. Those who were going to leave did so with bonuses and those who remained did so in spite of those bonuses. This may account for the rise in second term retention in FY93 and 94. However, many people may have been staying in hopes of being offered a bonus. By law, one must have over six years of service to be eligible for a bonus and the Air Force tried to keep that number above ten years. One explanation for the decline in retention over the past two years may be a perceived loss of benefits such as retirement pay. For decades, one could retire with 20 years of service and draw 50 percent of base pay in retired pay. This group is the first to make its reenlistment decision under the new retirement system that pays just 40 percent of base pay at 20 years. Regardless of which explanation is believed, second term retention must be watched closely the next several years. Overall, the jury is still out on enlisted retention.

Officer Retention

Officer retention is very different from enlisted retention. Although most, if not all, officers have some minimum service obligation, they are not required to reenlist at the end of that obligation.⁸ They serve by virtue of their commission. As a result, planners look at retention behavior during the critical retention years; the years from when an officers initial obligation expires through the point where the value and timing (at 20 years) of the military retirement system significantly impacts retention decisions. For support officers that period is from 4-11 years of service, and for pilots and navigators it's 6-11 years. The measure used is called Cumulative Continuation Rate (CCR). It measures, for example, of pilots who start their sixth year of service the percent will complete their eleventh year. Table 3 shows current trends. For the most part, pilots

Table 3. Historical Officer Retention Rates⁹

Category	FY88	FY89	FY90	FY91	FY92	FY93	FY94	FY95
Pilot	43	36	37	35	34	62	82	86
Navigator	74	75	66	70	54	28	84	86
Mission Spt	54	56	54	58	37	21	61	51
Nonrtd Ops	60	69	59	65	43	20	70	54

were exempt from participating in drawdown programs such as VSI/SSB and TERA, which targeted the non-pilot population. Note that in 1993, a year when officer end strength fell by 6,000, only 1 in 5 support and non-rated operators survived these critical retention years. The majority of those who left were mid grade officers. Many of these losses came from year groups that were simply too large for the smaller force needs. Drawdown policy targeted those year groups in a effort to “shape” the force. Although those painful decisions may pay off as we approach a more stable end strength, the Air Force didn’t do much to control losses within these career areas. Thus, the true impact may not be understood until these year groups compete for colonel and functional managers look for senior leaders who perhaps don’t exist.

The pilot population did pay its own price. Because force structure drew down faster than end strength, many officers who completed pilot training had no cockpits to go to. As a result, they were placed in the “bank” (sent to non-flying jobs) and promised flying jobs as much as three years later. At its peak in 1993, there were over 900 pilots in the bank.

At the end of FY95, pilot retention was at an all-time high. This all-time high pilot retention is a direct result of the pilot bonus. In 1995, 64 percent of those offered the bonus accepted as compared to 35 percent just six years ago.¹⁰ In 1996, we were projected to spend over \$44 million on the bonus program.¹¹ The fact that civilian airlines

are hiring fewer new pilots also helped retention, but improvement in the civilian economy, particularly if it leads to a surge in airline hiring, could quickly change the picture.¹²

For navigators, FY95 retention was also an all time high but for different reasons. Low retention in both FY92 and 93 led us to, in effect, “buy” losses.¹³ That is, those who would have left in later years left early because of one of the drawdown programs. As a result, these unusually high retention rates should not be expected to continue.

What the future holds for retention is still up in the air, but overall, the outlook is good. In a recent survey, 72 percent of officers and 62 percent of the enlisted force reported they intended to stay until retirement.¹⁴ However, according to General Boles, “The fact is force structure cuts only delay the day when low retention will take its inevitable toll.¹⁵ Poor retention leads to increased training costs and decreased readiness; personnel planners must remain aware of early signs of trouble and react swiftly.

Notes

¹Suzanne Chapman, “Snapshots from the Personnel Front,” *Air Force Magazine*, February 1995, 63.

²Senator John McCain, *Going Hollow, The Warnings of the Chiefs of Staff*, September, 1994, 9.

³Steven Watkins, “Re-up, Move Up,” *Air Force Times*, August 5, 1996, 12.

⁴Lt Col Roberts, *Talking Paper on Enlisted Retention and First Term Attrition*, HQ AF/DPXFS, 26 March 1996.

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⁸Brian D. Miller, *Impact of the Drawdown on Minority Officer Retention*, Research Report (Monterey, CA.: Naval Postgraduate School 1995), 23.

⁹Major Garton, *Officer Retention Analysis--End FY95*, staff study, October 1995.

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¹¹Major Miller, *Talking Paper on FY96 ACP Program*, HQ AF/DPXOF, April 1996.

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¹²Bruce Callander, “Ugly Chickens Come Home to Roost,” *Air Force Magazine*, June 1994, 50

¹³Garton.

¹⁴AFNS, “Survey results give AF leaders insight,” *Recruiter*, October 1996, 3.

¹⁵Bruce Callander, “The Human Side of the Drawdown,” *Air Force Magazine*, July, 1992, 40.

Chapter 3

Sustainment—Those Who Remain

Drawing down forces has had its biggest impact not on those who left, but on the lives of those who remain. All facets of a serviceman or woman's life have changed, and many of those changes have been positive and negative. Should life in the military deteriorate beyond some basic level, retaining what we have and recruiting the next generation would become increasingly difficult. Retention decisions, for example, are not made independent of certain other factors such as promotion.¹ This chapter addresses two factors that have been especially affected, promotions and operational tempo. These two factors were chosen because they are quantifiable, visible programs that affect the retention decision.

Promotions

The Air Force's ability to effectively accomplish its mission depends on an ability to promote the right people at the right time. One of the side effects of a drawdown strategy that seeks to protect career airmen and officers short of retirement is slowed promotions. When mid-grade strength falls slower than overall strength, the result is a force proportionally too big in the middle. Vacancies required for promotion aren't there, so promotions slow. As a result, there is a growing perception the system is neither fair nor

predictable.² Neither of these perceptions are true if one understands the dynamics of the system.

Enlisted

The Air Force used a balanced approach toward the drawdown. That, coupled with programs targeted at specific grades, skills, and years of service³ helped the Air Force maintain reasonable promotion tempo throughout the drawdown for much of the enlisted force (see Figure 2⁴). Impacts on promotion tended to show up either in terms of opportunity or timing. The solid bar in Figure 2 represents the promotion objectives established by policy.⁵ During the 25 promotion cycles held between 1991 and 1995, the Air Force didn't promote at these minimum rates seven times.⁶ The reason is clear.

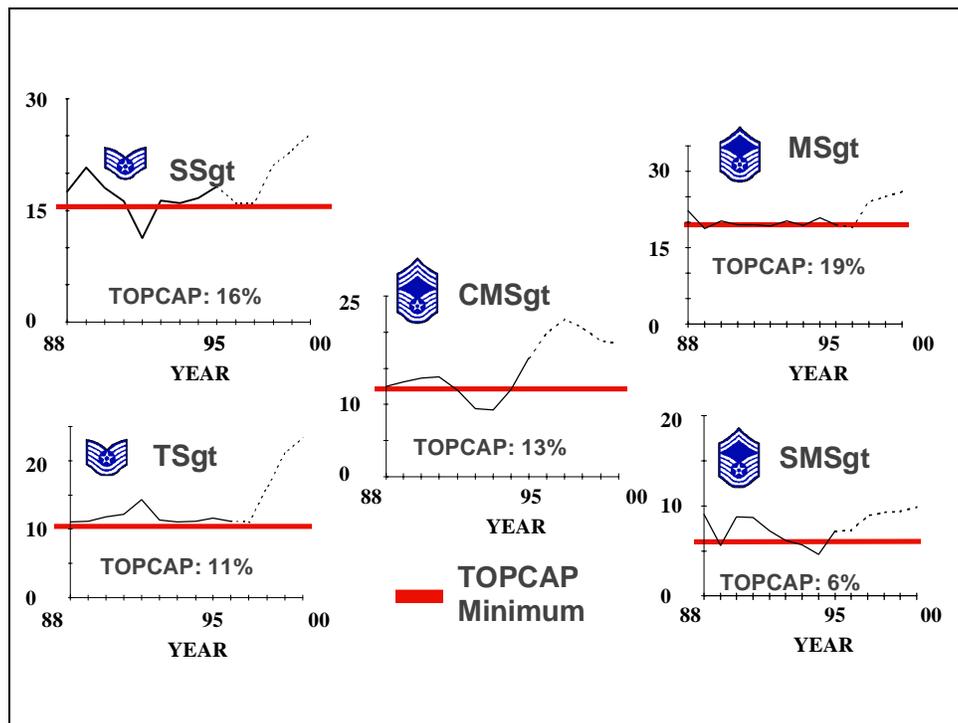


Figure 2. Enlisted Promotion Rates⁷

Because of our conscious decision not to use enlisted RIFs or SERBs to meet the targets, the Air Force could not achieve the minimum rates.⁸ Most senior NCOs would agree that

a moderate slowdown in promotions was a small price to pay to avoid RIF and SERB. The real story for the enlisted force is in promotion timing. Figure 3⁹ shows when the average enlisted member is sewing on each grade relative to established objectives (solid bars).¹⁰ Note that it's the junior NCOs paying the biggest price for the drawdown. Staff Sergeant selectees won't be back in the target window until after 2001. For Technical Sergeants, it will be at least another five years. Early drawdown programs affected mainly young NCOs (10-11 years of service). That, coupled with reduced accession levels led to a force that, on average, was older, leading to older eligibles and older selects.

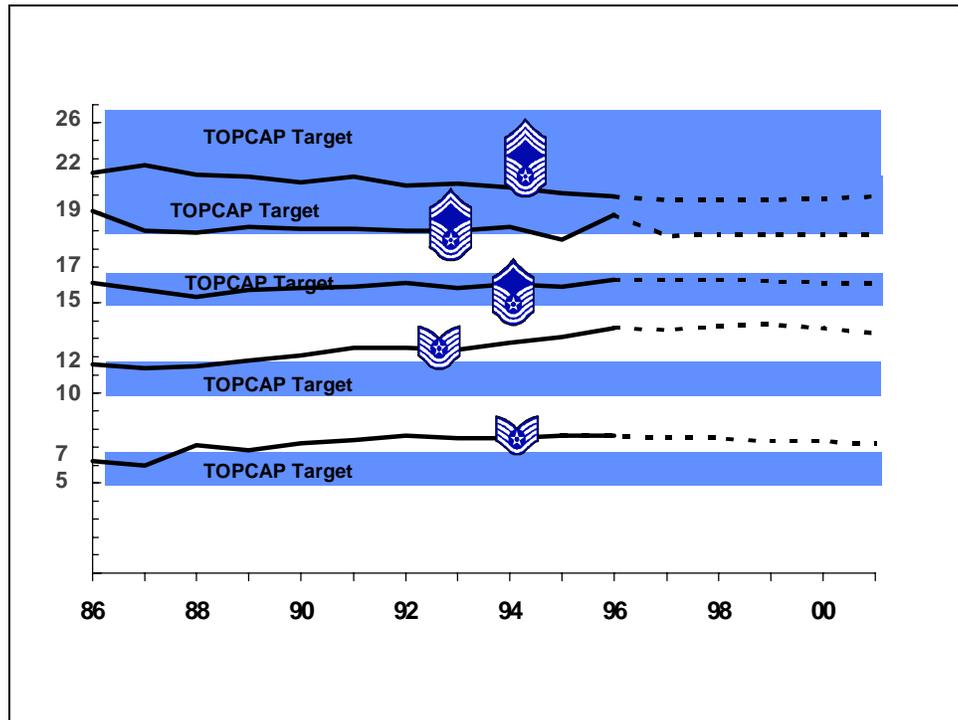


Figure 3. Average Sew-On Time¹¹

Today the news is not all bad. For the first time since the bulk of the drawdown began, enlisted promotion rates in 1995 for all grades exceeded the Air Force desired minimum rates. Not only did they exceed this rate, but they are expected to remain healthy for the foreseeable future.¹²

Officer

The impact of the drawdown on officer promotions has also shown up in both opportunity and timing. Promotion opportunities have been reduced to the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) minimums for every field grade.¹³ For majors, opportunity was reduced from 90-80 percent, Lt Cols from 75 to 70 percent, and for Colonels, from 55 to 50 percent. Table 4 shows the number of officers not promoted as a result of these changes. The overall impact is 2,575 fewer field grade promotions in just the last six years. Promotion board members say they always run out of quota before they run out of quality. That means these 2,575 officers who would have been promoted before the drawdown are quality people who would have done good work at the next higher grade. Thus, they are the real drawdown victims.

Table 4. Impact of Reduced Promotion Opportunity¹⁴

Board	Major (80)	Lt Col (70)	Colonel (50)
CY91	-413	NA	NA
CY92	-291	-94	-63
CY93	-274	-111	-55
CY94	-289	-147	-65
CY95	-275	NA	-60
CY96	286	110	42
Total	1828	462	285

The second drawdown impact on promotions is timing. Again, one of the causes of the timing lag is the Air Force philosophy of protecting those short of retirement. The other significant factor is year group size. Many of the year groups competing for field grade promotions were assessed during a time when the nation was building not drawing down its military. As a result, they are larger than needed and it simply takes a long time to promote all in these large year groups. Note that although the Air Force reduced

promotion opportunities to the minimum, the average major didn't pin on until about the 12 year point each of the last three years [1993-1995].

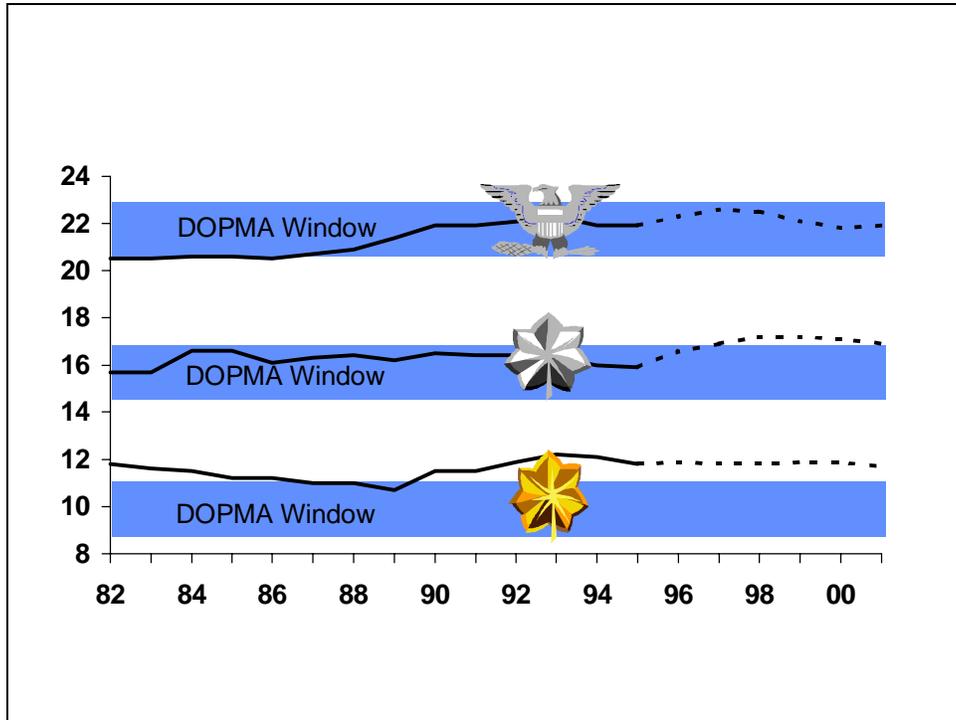


Figure 4. Average Pin-On Time¹⁵

OPTEMPO/PERSTEMPO

At the same time promotions were lagging, the Air Force was asking more of its people. Forces today are being committed at a higher rate than during the cold war years. Recent force reductions increased the chance that every person in uniform is likely to face deployment in this high tempo environment.¹⁶ In fact, compared to 1989, just before DESERT SHIELD, there are nearly four times as many Air Force people deployed today (3,635 in 1989 vs 13,700 on 1 Jan 1997 (See Table 5¹⁷)). During this same time Air Force strength fell by 32 percent.

Table 5. Historical OPTEMPO

FY	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96
#Deployed O/S	3635	31607	8483	7216	9856	13577	12794	13700
%Deployed O/S	0.6	6.0	1.7	1.5	2.2	3.2	3.2	3.4

This increase in OPTEMPO has been driven by America’s response to world events. For example, according to Secretary of the Air Force Sheila Widnall, “In Iraq we’ve flown three times the number of sorties since the end of DESERT STORM as we flew during DESERT STORM, and in Bosnia we’ve flown almost 13,000 sorties and delivered 70,000 tons of meals and medicine¹⁸. It’s history’s longest-running humanitarian operation, twice as long as the Berlin Airlift. But, after 10 years of declining defense budgets and unplanned operations like Haiti, Somalia, and Rwanda, the force is being stretched at both ends.¹⁹ The impact is most apparent in special, high demand skills and weapons systems. In 1995, for example, the average RC-135 crew in ACC was deployed 161 days while the average CCT member in AFSOC was deployed 160 days.²⁰

The effects of force reduction on OPTEMPO are compounded by the fact the Air Force dramatically reduced the number of people stationed overseas. Today, only about 81,000 Air Force people are forward stationed in Europe, the Pacific, or Southern Commands, compared with over 150,000 in 1989²¹.

The impact of increased OPTEMPO is real and affects people and their families. The missed birthdays, canceled plans, and broken family commitments add up. Sailors expect to go to sea, but they also expect to come home.²² Dependents expect the services to be there, but often when units deploy they take the chaplains, social workers, surgeons, and dentists with them. At a time when the family needs those support services the most, they may be undermanned.²³ The time the Air Force asks people to stay away is a big part of

the reenlistment decision. Today nearly 70 percent of the enlisted corps is married, and as a result, it's reasonable to believe families reenlist, not individuals.

The most significant impact of this increased OPTEMPO may be on readiness. The seriousness of the readiness problem was played down in the early hollow force years of the 1970s just as it is being played down now, but the problem became all too clear when readiness broke.²⁴ High OPTEMPO does not mean the services are training...it means just the opposite. According to Senator McCain, warfighting skills in the services are being dulled by too many deployments for non-military work and too little training. Most of the flying hours in Europe this year [1994] went to support the Somalia and Bosnia operations, not to train pilots and crews for the range of missions they will perform in combat.²⁵ It should be noted that combat risk is qualitatively linked to realistic training, high experience levels and high quality personnel. As the Air Force foregoes training and increases workload on those who stay it may be setting itself up to pay a much higher price than it thinks.

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¹Brian D. Miller, *The Impact of the Drawdown on Minority Officer Retention*, Research Report (Monterey, CA.: Naval Postgraduate School 1995), 5.

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¹⁵McIlvoy.

¹⁶Strom Thurmond, "The "Hollow Force," *The Officer*, April 1995, 21.

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²²Senator John McCain, *Going Hollow, The Warnings of the Chiefs of Staff*, September, 1994, 10.

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²⁴McCain, 5.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 13.

Chapter 4

Recruiting—Hiring Tomorrow’s Force

Thus far, this paper addressed impacts on today’s force and how that force may behave in the future; the programs used and who they affected; recent retention trends; and the combined impact of those issues such as promotion opportunity and OPTEMPO. Perhaps more significant than impacts on today’s force however, are the perceptions of tomorrow’s force, the force that hasn’t yet been hired. According to General Boles, then Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel, “The Air Force faces its biggest challenge of the past 40 years in the recruiting environment in the late ‘90s.”¹ Even in a smaller force, the Air Force continues to need new people. This chapter reviews the impacts of drawdown programs on that force. This chapter addresses the question, given all that has been discussed so far, fewer promotions, higher OPTEMPO and a declining end strength—what is the impact on the ability of the Air Force to recruit the force of 2001.

Far and away the most important factor in sustaining force readiness is the ability to recruit high caliber servicemen and women to fix the equipment, fly the planes, manage the logistics, and train the troops.² Figure 5 shows that in 1997 the Air Force will hire some 35,000 officers and enlisted members, and that need remains fairly constant for the next several years.

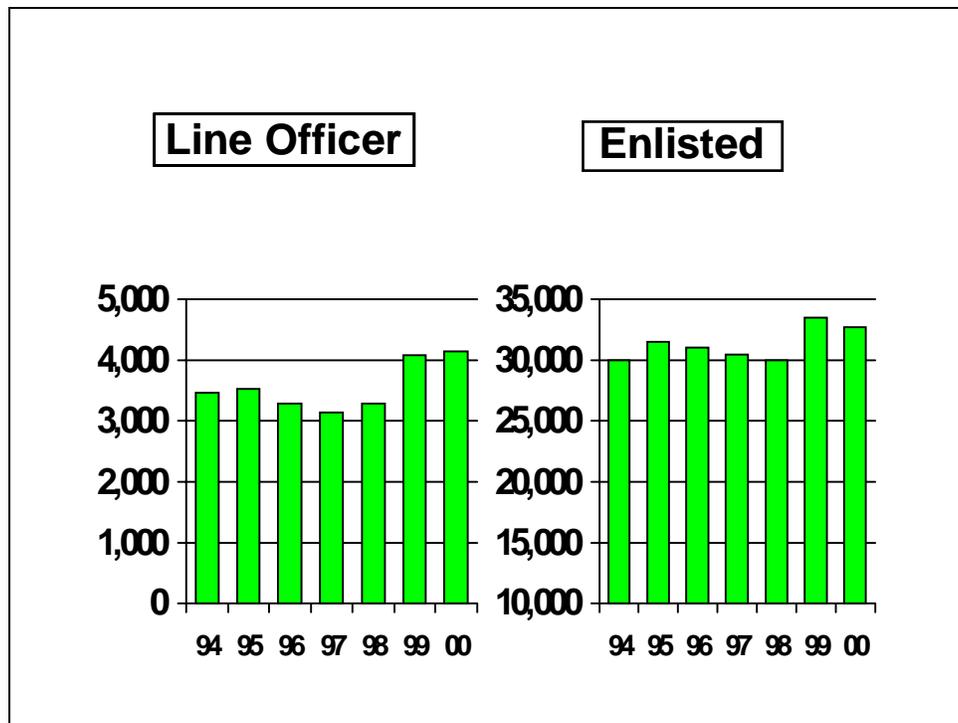


Figure 5. Officer and Enlisted Accessions³

Propensity

Each of the services measure their ability to recruit in the future using a survey known as the Youth Attitude Tracking Survey (YATS). The survey randomly samples youth across the nation regarding the likelihood they'll join one of the services. As seen in Table 6⁴, the propensity of youth to join the Air Force has fallen 30 percent in the last

Table 6. Propensity to Serve

AF Propensity to Enlist:	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
16-21 Year Old Males	17	15	16	14	14	12	12

seven years, from a high of 17 percent in 1989 to a low in 1995 of 12 percent. This decline in propensity is compounded by the fact the number of young men and women, in the potential enlisted age population, is beginning to decline.⁵ Interest in officer

commissioning programs is experiencing a similar decline. Applications to the Air Force Academy fell 33 percent from nearly 13,000 in 1990 to just over 8,500 in 1995. During that same time, applications to AFROTC fell almost 50 percent from a high of over 12,000 in 1990 to just over 6,000 in 1995.⁶

There are several reasons for this decline in propensity, all of which can be linked in one way or another to the drawdown. One explanation is that there are simply fewer military “mentors” in our society today. Fathers, mothers, brothers, teachers—the people who have historically carried the military message from one generation to the next—don’t have the same military experiences as previous generations.⁷

Not only are there fewer mentors in society, but the ones that are there have different experiences. One can think of separating military members as Air Force Ambassadors. Once they pass Air Force gates, they enter society and tell their story. Those ambassadors today tell that story from the perspective of those who were affected by the drawdown. Specifically, think about the stories told by captains RIFed with eight years of service, lieutenant colonels and colonels who, after 25 years of service, some in combat, were given their pink slips, or even the young officer or enlisted member who took one of the separation incentives strictly out of fear of being RIFed. These ambassadors carry a message of concern and mistrust, not one of “heroes” and job stability. This poses a significant challenge because, at least in the civilian job market, research suggests employee referrals yield higher quality workers than do sources such as newspaper ads or employment agencies.⁸

Aggressive media coverage of the military’s drawdown also played a role. According to Edwin Dorn, Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, media coverage

created “a sense that the services aren’t hiring anymore.”⁹ To overcome this media blitz, the Air Force would have needed to mount an aggressive media program of its own in the form of advertising. But at a time when advertising was key, budgets were falling.

Therefore, lower propensity can also be linked to declining recruiting budgets. At a time when recruiting was getting tougher, the recruiting budget was falling. Table 7¹⁰ shows that in 1991, one year prior to the biggest drawdown year, the Air Force advertising budget was cut almost in half and stayed at that level for four consecutive years. At a time when the Air Force most needed to send a positive message to America’s youth, the resources to send that message didn’t exist. To add to the problem, the Air Force has 18 percent fewer recruiters today (1994) than it had just three years ago. In 1993, the Service shelled out an average of about \$247 per recruit. In 1994 dollars, that was the lowest ratio since 1977 and about one-third the amount spent in 1974, the year the All-Volunteer Force was begun.¹¹

Table 7. Advertising Budget (\$M)

Fiscal Year	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97
Advertising \$ (M)	16.3	8.6	8.7	7.7	7.8	13.6	14.3	15.0

Goals

The impact of a tough recruiting environment can usually be seen either in missed accession goals or reduced quality as the Air Force is forced to chose among fewer people. On the numbers side of this equation the news is good. The Air Force has met its enlisted recruiting goals throughout the drawdown. In 1995 and 1996, it made its overall goal, but fell short in some mechanical specialties. For officers, it met its line officer recruiting goals in 1996, but fell short of both doctors and dentists.¹²

Quality

The quality side of the equation has been up and down. As the Air Force becomes smaller and more complex, it depends entirely on quality people to meet mission demands. Disciplinary problems increase as quality decreases and unit effectiveness drops.¹³ It's reasonable to assume then, as quality falls, readiness (the product of unit effectiveness) falls.

In the Air Force, accession quality is measured in two ways: first the percent of accessions with at least a high school education and second, where recruits score on their entrance exams. Table 8 shows the most recent trends. Note the Air Force continues to hire better than 99 percent high school graduates. Those scoring in the top three categories (the top half) on the entrance test has varied as recruiting becomes tougher. In

Table 8. Recruit Quality¹⁴

Quality Indicator:	FY90	FY91	FY92	FY93	FY94	FY95	FY96
High School Diploma Grads	99.2	99.1	99.1	99.1	99.2	99.0	99.1
Test Category I-IIIa	85.5	85.6	85.5	80.0	80.8	84.0	82.5

1993, the percent of accessions fell better than 5 percent from 1992. The rate rose a bit in 1995, but fell back again last year.

Air Force leadership has recognized the recruiting dilemma and responded by increasing its recruiting budget, putting more recruiters on the street and working to improve the quality of life for those who volunteer for this tough and demanding work. Many of the changes needed in 1992 and 1993 are only now beginning to take place. However, the recruiting challenge may get even tougher as the economy continues to improve and potential recruits look elsewhere for their futures.

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²Robert S. Dudney, "Forty Percent Down-and Dropping," *Air Force Magazine*, August, 1993, 24.

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⁶Lt Col Holaday, Talking Paper on Recruiting and Advertising, HQ AF/DPXF, March 1996.

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¹⁴Holaday.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Lessons, and Future Research Opportunities

Conclusions

Given that there are no additional force structure cuts in the Air Force's future, other than those already programmed, the bulk of the drawdown is over. Overall, the Air Force can call its efforts a success. A balanced approach, coupled with targeting specific grades, skills, and years of service, has softened the blow of this rapid drawdown on its future. Two additional factors stand out as being key to this success. First, Congressional understanding and support early in the drawdown was paramount. Without legislation and funding to support programs like VSI, SSB, and TERA, many more additional losses would have been involuntary. Although some losses may have been manipulated, they were still individual choices. Had involuntary losses been significantly larger, the Air Force might have found itself in a much worse position in terms of retention and recruiting. Second, the lessons learned during the "hollow force" years of the 1970s were not forgotten. While a great deal of effort was spent on separation programs, personnel planners never lost sight of their responsibility to care for those who remained. Large investments in quality of life programs and reasonable pay raises are evidence of that commitment. Career airmen and officers today are survivors. They lived through one of

the fastest drawdowns in Air Force history. Their commitment and quality is unquestionable. Although smaller, the Air Force today has the right people to move into the 21st century.

Lessons Learned

A quick review of Figure 1 shows that, throughout our history we've drawn down and built up in cycles. One of the beauties of the cycle is that it allows for the rolling of lessons of the past into the processes of the future.¹ While the drawdown was a success overall, there are always lessons to be learned.

First, although beyond the aegis of Air Force leaders, National Command Authority and Congress must consider the whole environment, not just the budget. Representative Bob Doorman (R-California) said, "drastic defense reductions made without regard for the actual requirements of training, readiness, and quality of life, are resulting in a demoralized military that is stretched to the danger point."² While perhaps overstated, Congressman Doorman points out the nation's leaders must consider more than just the bottom line.

The lessons of the past have also taught DOD leaders to keep a close match between force structure and the people needed to sustain it.³ A balanced approach, especially in the enlisted force, seems to do just that. However, one example of where this didn't happen is with banked pilots. Overall, impacts on career fields for both officers and enlisted members aren't known. The bottom line is that force structure must always drive types and numbers of people, but Air Force structure is only part of the equation.

DESERT STORM successes proved the value of joint operations and solidified the idea that future wars will be fought jointly. Force reductions that degrade individual US

Armed Services affect most joint capabilities, but some more so.⁴ The working, training, and fighting climates will be more “joint” than right now.⁵ As a result, future drawdown plans must be based on a joint strategic vision not individual service programs.

On a related note, nowhere in this paper or in the literature reviewed is there any major discussion of wartime requirements. Future tailored drawdown programs must begin with a solid understanding of wartime requirements. Drawdown efforts should first target those skills and grades exceeding that requirement. While programs did target specific skills, the baseline was a peacetime force, not wartime requirements.

The impacts of focusing on the quality of life of those who remained also paid big dividends. In the 70s military leaders ignored them; the result was a hollow force. In the 90s leadership focused on them; the result was all-time high retention rates. Future drawdowns must do the same. Not only did these programs help active duty members, but they improved quality of life for the entire family, and remember, families reenlist.

The Air Force needed to attack the recruiting problem much earlier. Just one year prior to the biggest single drop in strength, the Air Force cut its advertising budget in half and left it low. In hindsight, exactly the opposite should have happened. Future drawdown plans must recognize the challenges of perception and respond. Recruiting tomorrow’s force must remain an up-front concern.

One of the most painful actions taken was the convening of SERBs. The Air Force avoided SERBs in the enlisted force by simply rolling back high year of tenure. SERBs may have been avoided entirely had a similar change been made in the officer corps. For example, rather than letting colonels serve to 30 years, limit them to 28. Lieutenant colonels could be limited to 26 rather than 28. With a provision to waive high year of

tenure on a case-by-case basis, officer separations would have been much more humane while giving the Air Force the flexibility to retain critical wartime skills.

Finally, as the drawdown drew to a close, the Air Force could have done a better job advertising future programs. Specifically, some stayed in hopes of being offered a separation bonus in the future. An overall strategic plan that looked across the drawdown, rather than one year at a time, would have let everyone know who would and would not be offered incentives. Those who stayed waiting for a bonus may have voluntarily left earlier, reducing the overall drawdown cost.

Future Research Opportunities

This paper took an overall broad look at the impacts of the drawdown. In so doing, a number of questions were uncovered and remain unanswered. Several of these questions deserve further research.

First, is the drawdown impact on retention today and in the future. Recruiting is a concern from Capitol Hill to individual recruiters; OPTEMPO is being worked by both operators and personnel planners, not to mention the Chief of Staff and the Secretary; unfortunately retention has no such advocate. The question that remains unanswered is, “what was the impact on retention at the micro level?” How has the drawdown affected individual career areas? Are the new retirement systems impacting retention decisions?

Second, while this paper looked strictly at the active duty military drawdown, Total Force components, Guard, Reserve and civilians, have been through a similar process. In fact, much of the civilian drawdown still lies ahead. While civilian strength is down some 30 percent since 1986, it will fall another 8 percent from the end of FY96 to the end of

2001. The question then, is , “what are the impacts of reductions on these components and what is the impact on the overall Total Force?”

Finally, and probably most pressing, is the impact of the drawdown on readiness. Chapter III showed that OPTEMPO has risen steadily since the end of the Gulf War. This increased tempo is happening at the same time our strength is falling. As a result, units may not be training at the same rate with the same effectiveness. Additionally, those who stay behind are working harder to do more work with fewer people, again perhaps at the expense of training. The question then is, “how has the increase in OPTEMPO, coupled with declining end strengths, affected operational readiness?”

As a final thought consider this. Gaps between policy and capability became painfully evident in 1941-42 when Japan savaged US outposts in the Pacific. Reinforcements never relieved US defenders at Wake Island, Bataan, or Corregidor, who died or experienced brutal captivity.⁶ More recently, not paying attention to quality of life and readiness issues in the 1970s led to a “hollow force” incapable of exercising National Military of Strategy. The Air Force must learn the lessons of the past so it doesn’t make the same catastrophic mistakes in the future.

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