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TECHNICAL
R E P O R T

Alignment of
Department of Defense
Manpower, Resources, and
Personnel Systems

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Prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defense

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Summary

Background and Methodology

This report addresses the alignment of the manpower, resources, and personnel systems. The first of these, the manpower system, determines the needs of various organizations for military persons who have different characteristics. The resources system determines how many of those individuals will be paid for and pays for them. The personnel system enters, manages, develops, and exits personnel. Alignment occurs when organization and system information is shared in a manner that facilitates mission accomplishment.

This research was initiated to explore the assumption within the personnel community that disconnects, or misalignments, among these three systems are responsible for organizations being mismanned or undermanned. The analysis we carried out was designed to determine whether the systems were misaligned, assess how the systems synchronize if misalignments occur, and identify policies and programs to implement improvements.

We used service and Defense Manpower Data Center requirements, authorizations, and inventory data to analyze the alignment among the systems that provide personnel to organizations at particular times and over longer periods. Case studies were used to understand how misalignments occur and how they are eventually adjudicated or, if not adjudicated, what the consequences are. We also relied on theory and models of systems with inputs and outputs to understand complex relationships.

An Explanation of System Issues

A system, in its simplest form, takes in inputs and transforms them to create outputs. The manpower and resources systems produce outputs that are inputs to the personnel system.

These three systems—the manpower, resources, and personnel systems—are all complex and decentralized, meaning that system decisions and activities are interdependent, and control, authority, and decisionmaking are diffuse. The situation is complicated further by the fact that the personnel system is a system of systems (it includes such subsystems as accessing, training, experiencing, promoting, retaining, assigning, and separating) and has a relatively closed nature. This means that the personnel system takes a relatively long time to develop some kinds of personnel (e.g., a non-commissioned officer, an experienced pilot). Nonetheless, the three systems appear reasonably aligned in terms of system and organization interoperability.

This is not to say there are no frictions in the alignment of the systems. There are, and they include management and decision systems that affect the match between kind of person needed, funding of that need, and development of that kind of person. And various changes—for example, in the economy, in technology, in force structure, and in the mix between the active and reserve components—each have a non-routine effect. Time is an additional variable given that even though the systems and subsystems have time-phased interactions, the various changes do not always occur at optimal times.

Data Analysis

This research explored the frequency and magnitude of changes to authorizations using the Army as an exemplar. We examined annual changes in authorizations across certain occupations in the Army using the Army's WebTaads database and the Defense Manpower Data Center's Forces and Resources Manpower Information System (FORMIS) database. Misalignments were evident at points in time, but it was not clear that they were systemic rather than transitory and frictional.

Studies have consistently shown problems in filling all manpower spaces accurately. One such study¹ identifies 73 occupations as hard to fill within the active and reserve components of the military services. That study also cites another study, by the Congressional Budget Office, as asserting that on average, from fiscal year 1999 through fiscal year 2004, about 30 percent of the occupations for enlisted personnel experienced shortages, and about 40 percent experienced overages. It appears from our research that these observations refer more to either systemic or frictional issues within and among the personnel subsystems than to problems among the manpower, resources, and personnel systems.

Our examination found a very large number of changes within the Army at the occupational and grade levels. However, most of the changes were very small in number (i.e., less than one percent of authorizations for people) and seem to have had no practical effect on the response of the personnel system. Indeed, our initial data review indicated that there were no significant systemic problems. We hypothesized that larger problems could occur in certain cases, such as when there were great numbers of authorization changes for higher grades in smaller occupations. However, the inability to react quickly to a need for senior people in small occupations does not stem from system misalignment but, instead, from the inflexibility created by the military personnel system's closed nature (e.g., the lead time needed to achieve the defined skill level). The military personnel system is closed in that most entries are at the lowest grade and progression to higher grades is based on performance and time spent within the system.

¹ Derek B. Stewart, *Military Personnel: Preliminary Observations on Recruiting and Retention Issues Within the U.S. Armed Forces*, GAO-05-419T, Government Accountability Office (formerly the General Accounting Office), March 16, 2005.

Case Studies: Army Stryker Brigade and U.S. Northern Command

Our research considered two instances of perceived larger-scale system misalignments: the conversion to the first Army Stryker brigade and the stand-up of the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) after 9/11.

The Stryker case had the potential for significant problems because the brigade's managerial structure was completely reorganized in the transformation from teams based on armor and light infantry to teams based on medium-weight vehicles. However, the data available did not provide evidence of a misalignment between manpower and other systems during the stand-up of the first Stryker brigade. This means not that there were no difficulties during the Stryker brigade's initiation, but that the compact timeline was accommodated.

The stand-up of NORTHCOM and the resourcing of the needed military and civilian manpower constituted a unique occurrence guided by a unique process, one that involved the collaboration of the services, combatant commanders, defense agencies, and others. The billets needed for NORTHCOM came from within other joint activities and included military-to-civilian conversions of some positions. This process was guided by stated assumptions, such as that there would be no increase in military end strength and that service contributions to joint military manpower growth would be minimized. There were also considerable challenges, including the fact that there were many different stakeholders in the process. Despite all challenges, NORTHCOM's deadline for initial operational capability was met, as was its deadline for full operational capability. NORTHCOM was stood-up off line from the usual system's processes, and some Joint Staff officials were of the opinion that NORTHCOM was a once-in-a-lifetime stand-up. Nonetheless, the NORTHCOM case demonstrates that the ability to step off line for extreme circumstances does exist and that such cases are not constrained by the manpower, resources, and personnel systems. Furthermore, there is no evidence from this case that the NORTHCOM stand-up was faulted or hampered by systemic disconnects among the manpower, resources, and personnel systems.

Conclusions and Observations

Alignment is not about whether the individual systems of manpower, resources, and personnel are effective or efficient, but about whether they interoperate effectively. In short, they do. The key variable driving whether a change is or is not disruptive appears to be time. Short-notice changes might appear chaotic in an overall system designed for regularity. Given sufficient time, however, the three systems appear to align.

Organizational changes are always disruptive, especially in large, complex organizations. Nonetheless, the procedures in place appear to display relatively little friction. The results of our analysis are contrary to the original assumption that the manpower, resources, and personnel systems are systemically misaligned. What we found is that at the military-service level, these three systems are better aligned than is generally recognized.

However, even though the three systems appear to be functionally aligned, two improvements apply: Changes within the subsystems of the personnel system could lead to better effec-

tiveness and efficiency, and additional flexibility in the personnel system could reduce the cycle time needed to meet manpower authorizations.