

THE FUTURE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT: WHY THE U.S. ARMY MUST DIFFERENTIATE AND GROW MILLENNIAL OFFICER TALENT

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The Army periodically has struggled with the retention of talented junior and mid-grade officers. Most recently, the Army grappled with how it could retain the broad types of talent it needed to conduct complex operations in remote parts of the globe while confronting many ideological threats. At one point in its history and after considerable analysis, the Army came to a troubling conclusion: “Since it could not motivate the highly educated work-force it was seeking, it would have to settle on simply educating the motivated people that it could attract.”¹ The report was produced during the Vietnam War in 1968. This approach had the effect of shifting the Army’s strategy away from incentivizing the retention of young officers with ambition, innovative ideas, an entrepreneurial mindset, and adaptive leadership traits to a strategy where the Army simply focused on the mass production of a large quantity of homogenous officers to progress through the ranks.

More than 50 years later, the Army faces a similar problem—how does it retain the best and brightest of its junior officers to grow and develop into the senior leaders it will need for tomorrow’s security challenges? This Carlisle Paper will begin by outlining a modest policy proposal in the Army’s Personnel System that will enable it to create a more personalized management system by identifying and matching junior officer talents with the skills it needs in multiple career fields. It will then provide a brief description of the leadership theory that underpins the proposed policy recommendations. Third, it will explain why the retention of talent has been exacerbated by officers from the Millennial Generation and how differentiating talent will better align their initial experiences with

their work place expectations. Finally, this Paper will conclude by highlighting how this policy could increase the retention of a broader range of talented young officers and better position the Army for the complex and uncertain security settings those officers will likely inherit as future senior leaders.

ENDNOTE

1. Career Motivation of Army Personnel, Junior Officer Duties, Vol. II, Philadelphia, PA: The Franklin Institute Research Laboratories, September 30, 1968, pp. 61-69.

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