

# Pentagon needs to adapt to recruit top talent: Carter

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The US military needs to give its troops and new recruits better career options due to increasing competition for talent from private companies, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said Tuesday.

The Pentagon chief called for a more innovative approach that could include easing enlistment standards for cyber-related jobs, allowing troops to take a break from service to get a degree, expanding [retirement benefits](#) to more personnel and paying off debt for university graduates.

To ensure the military retains "excellence in our ranks," the Defense Department must "make sure we remain attractive," Carter said at a televised event at Syracuse University in New York state.

"We need to think big, we need to think broadly" about how the military recruits and retains service members, he said.

Since taking over as Pentagon chief in February, Carter has frequently voiced concerns about recruitment and ensuring the most skilled service members stay in uniform after two protracted ground wars.

Carter's comments came a day after President Barack Obama indicated he supported potential changes to military benefits and pay.

In a letter, Obama said a report by a panel calling for a series of reforms was an "important step forward" for ensuring the "fiscal sustainability" of the military's pay and retirement funding.

But veterans groups and some lawmakers already have rejected the changes proposed by the panel, which issued its recommendations in January.

In the field of cyber warfare, the Pentagon could possibly raise the age limit for enlistment to bring in more experienced mid-career professionals from the technology industry, Carter said.

Current law allows enlistment from age 17 to 42, but branches of the armed services sometimes impose stricter limits.

He also said a younger generation wanted more flexibility than in the past and are less prepared to commit to a narrow career path.

"They don't like getting locked into anything. They like the idea of choice, of agility," Carter said.

The Pentagon also needs to do a better job of describing the excitement and rewards offered by a career in the military.

"We need to explain, we need to reach out" to a society where only a small fraction of people serve in the all-volunteer force, Carter said.

Under current rules, troops who serve less than 20 years receive no pension.

But Carter said Monday he was considering proposals to introduce a 401(k)-style retirement plan, in which the government would contribute to a fund during the years of a soldier's service.

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