

Military drawdown may hurt service member diversity, study finds

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Planned, large-scale personnel reductions in the U.S. military could inadvertently reduce gains made in the racial and gender diversity of the force since the 1990s, according to a new RAND Corporation study.

The last major drawdown in military forces, which occurred during the late 1980s through the mid-1990s, did not result in a loss of gender balance, largely because the recruiting of women and ethnic minority groups also was increased.

A large portion of the planned reductions will come from the active duty force, with the U.S. Army planning to drop from force levels of 510,000 to possibly as few as 420,000 by fiscal year 2019, creating the smallest Army since before World War II. The Marine Corps also plans significant reductions to its workforce and the Air Force has reduced its force through fiscal year 2015, although reductions to both these services will be numerically smaller.

"During major drawdown periods, the services must balance reducing the budget, ensuring fair treatment for current service members and retaining people with the right skills," said Maria C. Lytell, lead author of the study and a senior behavioral scientist at RAND, a nonprofit research organization. "One aspect that hasn't been factored in much during past drawdowns is retaining a demographically diverse workforce."

The RAND study includes an analysis of multiple drawdown scenarios to

examine the potential effects on women and racial minorities. Cuts to nontactical operations occupations could have an adverse effect on female and black service members and, in some cases, Hispanic service members.

Cuts involving personnel with longer service could adversely affect black personnel, but cuts to personnel with shorter service could adversely affect women. Tightening test standards as part of a strategy to cut recruitment could result in adverse impact on female, black and Hispanic recruits, according to the study.

To achieve the most recent round of reductions, the Army, Marine Corps and Air Force have been working to balance their forces by focusing cuts on both occupational and experience categories that have a surplus as well as on lower-quality personnel.

Unlike those of the 1990s, the most recent drawdowns, as they continue, are expected to rely less on cutbacks in recruitment and more on separation measures, including those which are involuntary. Army officials, for instance, believe it would be prohibitively expensive to entice Army personnel to leave voluntarily.

The services are limited in how they can use demographic information in a drawdown context. Legal challenges that occurred during earlier drawdowns make it unlikely that the services will pursue demographically driven decisions during a force reduction.

However, researchers recommend that the military conduct adverse impact analyses prior to making drawdown decisions. This could allow the services to identify interventions earlier in [service](#) members' military careers, such as initial career assignment, where they could have a greater long-term impact on demographic diversity. The analyses also can help the services identify whether information and assumptions

involved in the force reduction process achieve the goals that the services set for the drawdown.

More information: The study, "Force Drawdowns and Demographic Diversity: Investigating the Impact of Force Reductions on the Demographic Diversity of the U.S. Military," can be found at www.rand.org

Provided by RAND Corporation

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