

# The drawdown measures argumentative essay sample

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Adverse Effects of the U. S. Army Drawdown

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## **Introduction**

Just about a year ago, the Department of Defense (DOD) announced the intention to move to a “ smaller, leaner Army that is agile, flexible, rapidly deployable, and technologically advanced” (Feickert, Jan 2013). As a consequence, the United States Army is now in the process of one of its largest drawdowns (reduction in the size of the force) in history. High ranking officials believe this drawdown will be beneficial to the U. S. Army, but many soldiers, Department of the Army civilians, military dependants, and local economies will be greatly and adversely affected. This essay will describe some of those adverse effects, including potential adverse effects on those personnel exempt from the cutbacks, and will show why the process is flawed and that it should have been better planned and implemented.

The army has come up with various options to facilitate the drawdown process. Some of these options will force soldiers out of the military early or prevent soldiers from re-enlisting, while other options will award soldiers some type of compensation. Incentives have been put in place to encourage early departure, while some soldiers are being offered the opportunity to change military occupational specialties.

In terms of overall strategy, a major announcement made by high ranking U. S. Army officials in April 2012 will change the entire army. Recruiting and re-enlistment standards will be tightened, to reduce and “ reshape the force to meet future requirements” (San Miguel Apr 2012). The army plans to retain

qualified, competent soldiers who fall within defined re-enlistment standards, while soldiers identified as (for example) having documented disciplinary problems will be cut from the ranks. Army recruiters have already begun the process, drastically cutting recruiting targets. Tice & Bacon (Feb 2012) described many of the measures in “ Drawdown lowdown: 9 things you need to know.”

Other plans such as retention control points and early retirements have already been implemented. Sergeant Major of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III, along with other army officials wants to implement the “ whole soldier” concept in order to determine which soldiers are best qualified to continue serving on active duty.

At present, there is an unbalance in the military occupational specialties structure. Several roles are currently over-strength, while several other career fields are under-strength. The army has offered soldiers in over-strength jobs the opportunity to seek jobs in those areas that are under-strength. However, irrespective of those opportunities the drawdown still means cutting soldiers that do not meet the newly-defined standards, even in under-strength career fields. There are boards being held to determine which senior and junior Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) are “ the best of the best.” Those that do not meet the requirements will be offered the opportunity to retire early or possibly to change jobs.

The U. S. Army officials say the drawdown comes as a consequence of U. S. forces completing their mission in Iraq and that it is now time to focus on Afghanistan. They say that with very little further need of U. S. forces in Iraq, the army as a whole is therefore over-strength. Those officials also claim that

the drawdown is actually a way to ultimately strengthen the army as a fighting force. Whilst that may or may not be the case, the plans as announced provide a number of causes for concern.

## **Drawdown Issues**

Like most plans, however well designed and implemented, issues will occur. There will be disadvantages and setbacks for many individuals and even for entire army units in some instances. One of the potential issues that many soldiers will face as a result of the drawdown is adjusting to life outside of the military. Thousands of soldiers labeled as drawdown candidates face the reality of compulsory change to an unfamiliar way of life in a civilian society currently suffering high unemployment levels. Most of the drawdown candidates either joined the army directly out of high school or at a young age. While some people see army life as a simple life, for most serving soldiers the life is anything but simple. Most must wake before 5 a. m. every morning to prepare for whatever the day has in store for them. Because the day begins at such an early hour, some soldiers go as far as preparing the night before, for the next day. After physical training lasting anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour and a half, soldiers are allotted time for personal hygiene and breakfast, then comes the workday, which varies according to job and currently-assigned duty and location. After dealing with whatever the day has thrown at them, soldiers may - in some cases - come home to their family, then begin over again their routine of preparing for the following day. For some soldiers, that lifestyle is difficult. Others view their lifestyle as simple and relatively worry-free, but for many, the lifestyle is simply routine,

and that routine is their way of life. Many soldiers are accustomed to the military providing them with free and/or discounted benefits such as housing and medical support. For those soldiers who will be forced to leave the army, it will be a difficult transition, knowing that they will have to pay more for those benefits. All soldiers receive either a housing allowance or free room and board, discounted dental treatment, food allowances, and paid leave. Some of those benefits are not offered nor available in normal civilian jobs. Soldiers thus affected by the drawdown will have to find jobs with equivalent pay and benefits that will match their previous pay in the army.

Another effect of the drawdown is that many Department of the Army civilians working on Army bases will not have their contracts renewed. Their families affected will then no longer have access to military agencies such the Base Exchange and the Commissary.

For all such serving personnel who will be forced to leave the army, the drawdown plans should include comprehensive retraining programs, to prepare soldiers (and their partners if they have one) for civilian life.

Procedures such as applying for civilian jobs, applying for rented housing, applying for civilian benefits and other “ everyday” procedures may be quite new and unfamiliar to long-serving regular soldiers. To simply cast them out into the civilian wilderness would be grossly inconsiderate and unfair.

The Army wants to keep the “ best of the best” soldiers within its ranks.

Offering to buy out soldiers' contracts is a good way to discover which individuals want to remain in the army and those who want out. Some will be given the option to leave the military, but with a certain amount of money according to rank and number of years of service. It will give those soldiers

an opportunity to receive a cash sum and plan out a new future. Some older soldiers may be forced to retire years earlier than expected. Retiring after 20 years of service provides good benefits. Most soldiers in that situation were counting on serving for 20 years minimum, then submitting retirement paperwork. Many will be disappointed to have to leave earlier, and will doubtless have to rethink retirement plans worked out years before in some cases.

The military is also implementing other ways to help speed the drawdown process. The army has published its re-enlistment quota. Only 60, 000 instead of 100, 000 soldiers will now be eligible for re-enlistment over the next few years. That will be a massive disappointment to those who fully intended to spend their entire working life in the army and will now have to think again, and set new objectives if selected as a part of the drawdown. Another method being used is by having army units adhere strictly to an Army Weight Control Policy. The policy has been around for a while, but now it is being interpreted more rigidly, to accelerate the drawdown process. The army wants to become a leaner (and thinner) force. It is implementing a new Physical Readiness Training test, but there has been a more recent update. The Sergeant Major of the Army wants to change the test to require meeting a stricter standard.

Although the physical readiness plan is, on the face of it, a good idea, some serving soldiers will simply not possess the physical ability to achieve the required standard. It is clear that these new test standards represent another way to cut numbers by other, more devious means. The Sergeant Major of the Army wants to use a 4-mile run and a 12-mile rucksack march to

weed out the physically unfit soldiers from the fitter individuals. Although the concept of a physically fit force is apparently sensible and sound, there must be many serving soldiers who cannot meet those fitness standards but who do not need to. There must be hundreds, perhaps thousands, of serving personnel who have back office roles and are never likely to do anything more physically demanding than occupying an office desk and chair. Should they be forced to end their army career because they are unable to run for four miles or march for 12?! Almost certainly not!

On another subject, although there has been no official announcement as yet, rumor has it that the army will soon start processing out soldiers who have substandard performance evaluation reports. Dispensing with soldiers who have substandard performance evaluation reports could be an effective tool if is used properly, but the concern is that personal preferences and long-term allegiances may influence those selections.

The drawdown will not only hurt individual soldiers, local economies, and Department of the Army civilians; but the families of many will also feel the effects. Many of the affected soldiers will be forced to leave the army prematurely. Although many of those soldiers have a sound educational background, there are many others who are not adequately prepared or equipped to deal with everyday civilian life. For many soldiers, army life is the only life, all they have ever known since leaving high school.

The drawdown will not only hurt many soldiers by the loss of their jobs but will also hurt those involved in business with a shrinking military. Former soldiers will find themselves having to compete in the civilian job market to provide for their families.

Not only is the drawdown affecting people here in the United States, it is also starting to affect U. S. soldiers and army units in Europe. U. S. Army officials are considering restructuring the forces in Germany to save money by shortening tours and moving soldiers back to the United States. Every few years or less, a U. S. Army kaserne (army base or barracks) in Germany is deactivated and returned to the German government. That process is taking away job opportunities for soldiers and civilians, both American and German. When the kaserne is handed back to the German officials, the local economy that supported that kaserne suffers a major blow. There are many American-owned businesses in the German economy, established originally in support of the U. S. forces. So not only do the German businesses lose money when a kaserne is deactivated, Americans do too.

The drawdown is claimed to benefit the army by saving the United States of America money, while promoting a more disciplined force of physically fit soldiers. The principle may be economically sensible in these times of austerity, but the processes to implement the plan are flawed. Those soldiers affected are not the only ones that are considered unfit. There will still be a large majority of soldiers with actions not documented, that will slip through the cracks and be allowed to stay in to continue serving. Soldiers, families and army civilians will be greatly affected. For the most part, soldiers and families will lose their benefits and will have to compete for jobs in what for many will be a completely alien civilian job market.

An aspect of the drawdown that may not have been sufficiently aired and/or discussed is the possible negative effect on those remaining in the army following the drawdown. It has already been said that the demands on



soldiers and their families of extended overseas tours are excessive.

Because resources have recently been stretched by the demands of the troop numbers required in Afghanistan and Iraq, the soldiers are tired. That was according to Hinote (2008), in an article entitled "The Drawdown Asymmetry" in the summer edition of Strategic Studies Quarterly. Hinote - a Lieutenant Colonel in the USAF - attributed that fatigue to the extended tours of duty (15 months) in those theaters of war, especially when coupled with shortened recovery times in between successive tours. He claimed that "The strain on soldiers and their families is not cumulative, it is exponential" (Hinote, p. 32). The issue here is, if that is the situation with current army numbers, how much worse will it be if the U. S. faces similar overseas commitments with far fewer soldiers than we have now? Those not made redundant as part of the drawdown may turn out to be the fortunate ones!

## **Conclusions**

The U. S. Army Drawdown plans appear to be a fact of life and incorporate wide-ranging measures designed to reduce the size of the U. S. Army and at the same time to make it comprised of generally better and fitter soldiers. In these times of economic austerity the basic idea seems sensible and logical, but there are a number of issues with the measures involved. There seems to have been insufficient thought and/or concern for the plight of individuals and their families who may be summarily evicted from the army to face an uncertain future in what will for many be a most unfamiliar environment, most especially for those who entered the army directly from high school and have never had to exist and support a family in civilian society. The

army needs to have in place comprehensive retraining and preparation programs for such as those affected in this way.

Further, bearing in mind that our army personnel are already overstretched in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, forced to serve exhausting tours as long as 15 months away from families, with shortened times back home in between tours, how much worse will it be for serving soldiers when army numbers are drastically reduced? Even if the Iraq and Afghanistan commitments have ended, will that smaller army be able to cope with any new such commitment in the next overseas theater of war?

It does seem that the Drawdown Plans have sufficient basic flaws to give cause for real concern, and perhaps could / should have been reconsidered and /or better implemented, so that many of the obvious and demonstrated adverse effects on individuals would have been either ameliorated or avoided altogether. Perhaps the senior military planners and officials should have a fresh look at the details of the entire plan.

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