

GAO

Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee
on Military Personnel, Committee on
National Security, House of
Representatives

June 1995

MILITARY PERSONNEL

High Aggregate Personnel Levels Maintained Throughout Drawdown





United States
General Accounting Office
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National Security and
International Affairs Division

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June 2, 1995

The Honorable Robert K. Dornan
Chairman, Subcommittee on Military Personnel
Committee on National Security
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This report responds to your request that we assess how the military drawdown has affected the services' ability to staff their active duty combat and support units. It concludes that the Department of Defense (DOD) managed its drawdown in ways enabling it to keep a high percentage of its authorized positions filled throughout the drawdown. The report also identifies factors contributing to personnel shortages at selected U.S. military installations and factors that could lead to personnel shortages in the future.

This report refers to our earlier recommendations on DOD's civilian and military force mix and U.S. participation in peace operations. To permit DOD time to respond to these recommendations, we are making no additional recommendations in this report.

We are sending copies of this report to the Chairmen, House Committee on National Security and Senate Committee on Armed Services, and the Secretaries of the Army, the Air Force, and the Navy. We will also make copies available to other interested parties upon request.

Please contact me on (202) 512-5140 if you or your staff have any questions concerning this report. Appendix III lists the major contributors to this report.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark E. Gebicke".

Mark E. Gebicke
Director, Military Operations
and Capabilities Issues

Executive Summary

Purpose

The largest military drawdown since the end of the Vietnam conflict is now about 80 percent complete. By the end of fiscal year 1999, the Department of Defense (DOD) will have reduced its military and civilian personnel by almost a third. Concerned that this large drawdown might have degraded readiness, the Chairman, Subcommittee on Military Personnel, House Committee on National Security, asked GAO to identify (1) the extent to which the services were able to fill authorized positions in their active duty combat and support units, (2) factors contributing to personnel shortages at selected U.S. installations and units, and (3) factors that could lead to personnel shortages in the future. GAO reviewed personnel trends in the Army, the Air Force, and the Navy for fiscal years 1987 through 1993. The Marine Corps could not provide automated historical data and was excluded from GAO's data analyses.

Background

The services used a variety of personnel management tools to achieve reductions. They decreased their recruiting, restricted the number of personnel permitted to reenlist in overstuffed specialties, and offered early separation to individuals near the end of their first enlistment. Congress also authorized financial incentives for early separation, a reduction in time-in-grade requirements for voluntary retirements, and a 15-year retirement option for selected military personnel. Reductions-in-force were to be used only as a last resort.

The services sought to maintain a high percentage of their authorized positions filled (referred to as fill rates) in each rank and military specialty. DOD considers units with personnel fill rates above 90 percent as able to perform their missions. Personnel officials become concerned if fill rates for specific military specialties fall below 80 percent.

Results in Brief

Despite major personnel reductions, the services generally kept over 95 percent of their authorized positions filled throughout the drawdown. They also maintained high fill rates for most ranks and kept over 90 percent of authorized positions filled in a large majority of their military specialty categories. The major area of concern was a continuing shortage of field grade officers (Air Force, Army, and Marine Corps majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels and Navy lieutenant commanders, commanders, and captains), especially in the Army where fill rates generally remained between 80 percent and 85 percent. Although Army and some Air Force personnel trends improved in fiscal year 1993, aggregate and enlisted personnel fill rates declined in the Navy. These

trends suggest that the Navy, which began its drawdown later, may just now be experiencing the impacts that the Army and the Air Force encountered earlier.

Many factors that contributed to personnel shortages at units and installations were directly related to the drawdown and could dissipate as the drawdown concludes. For example, not all personnel in units being withdrawn from Europe and not all those in units affected by U.S. base closure and realignment decisions were required to transfer with their units. These policies created shortages in some units and led to multiple personnel transfers. Also, some officials permitted personnel in critical shortage categories to participate in early out programs because they feared that limiting participation would adversely affect morale.

Other factors contributing to shortages were less directly related to the drawdown. Without changes in operating policies, procedures, and legislative requirements, such shortages could persist. For example, shortages were created because (1) personnel had to be transferred between units to meet the requirements of operations other than war, (2) military personnel had to be temporarily assigned to duties formerly handled by civilians whose positions were eliminated, and (3) scarce field grade officers had to be assigned to joint duty and reserve units before other operational positions could be filled.

GAO's Analysis

High Personnel Fill Rates Maintained

The Marine Corps has finished its drawdown, the Army and the Air Force expect to complete all or most of their reductions by the end of fiscal year 1996, and the Navy expects to finish by the end of fiscal year 1999. The Army, the Navy, and the Air Force have generally kept over 95 percent of their authorized positions filled, although the Air Force's fill rate dipped to 94 percent in 1990. The Army's lowest rate of 97 percent occurred in 1992—the height of its drawdown. Aggregate fill rates in the Army and the Air Force improved by 3 percentage points in fiscal year 1993. However, this rate in the Navy, which began its drawdown later, declined by an equal amount.

The services also kept a high percentage of their authorized officer positions filled, except in fiscal year 1992 when the Army's rate fell to

92 percent. This decline was offset by an 8-percentage point improvement the following year, which brought its rate to close to 100 percent. Aggregate personnel levels for enlisted categories remained over 95 percent and even exceeded 100 percent in some years. For any given year of the drawdown, the services filled over 90 percent of the positions in about three-fourths of their military specialties.

The only real area of concern during the drawdown has been continuing low personnel fill rates for field grade officers. This shortage was especially acute in the Army, where fill rates for field grade officers remained between 81 percent and 83 percent from fiscal years 1988 through 1992 before recovering to 91 percent in fiscal year 1993.

**Some Units
Disproportionately
Affected by Shortages**

Despite generally positive aggregate trends, shortages occurred unevenly across the force, with some units more adversely affected than others. Three key factors led to these shortages. First, the European drawdown created temporary imbalances at some installations and units because personnel were permitted to remain in Europe to complete their assigned tours. As a result, some units returned to the United States with as few as one-quarter to one-half of their authorized personnel. Some shortages persisted for up to 2 years. Similar dislocations were created from base closure and realignment decisions.

Second, early separation programs led to some shortages that might have been avoided. Although the services restricted personnel in certain specialties and ranks from separating early, they had only limited control over the number of participants from any one unit or installation. As a result, disproportionate shortages in specific specialties occurred at some installations and units.

Third, some installations have not adjusted to civilian personnel reductions. At most installations, military personnel were temporarily assigned to carry out functions formerly performed by civilians. Although DOD eliminated 196,000 civilian jobs between fiscal years 1987 and 1993, the duties performed by those civilians were not always eliminated. As a result, some military personnel had to be temporarily assigned to cut grass, serve as lifeguards, and work in gymnasiums.

Other Factors Suggest Continuing Shortages

A key factor contributing to shortages is the current high level of operations other than war, which has required personnel transfers between units. According to DOD officials, these transfers have adversely affected combat readiness, training, and morale in units that have had to contribute personnel. Gaining units have also been affected because transferred personnel do not always possess the proper specialty required in their new positions. For example, infantrymen were trained for use as military police in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Although all services have been affected, the problem is especially acute in the Army because a large percentage of its support forces are in the reserves. To meet the requirements of these operations, the Army had to deploy most of its active duty support units of some types and to fill vacancies with personnel from other active units and reserve volunteers. Because support units are often not authorized to be fully staffed in peacetime, the Army had to transfer personnel between units. For fiscal year 1994, 31 percent of the Army's active support units were authorized to have 80 percent or fewer of their required personnel.

Shortages in some ranks may also continue as a result of legislative requirements that limit the services' flexibility in correcting identified shortages. For example, the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act and annual DOD authorizations establish the number of field grade officers each service may have at each rank. Additionally, the services have been expected to maintain their fiscal year 1990 officer-to-enlisted ratios during the drawdown. As a result, the services could not always adjust their authorizations at specific ranks and had to leave some positions vacant or fill them with lower graded personnel.

The need to fill joint duty assignments is yet another factor that has placed increasing demands on the limited pool of field grade officers. As of November 1994, the services were assigning between 11 percent and 17 percent of their field grade officers to these positions. Because these positions must be filled first, other key leadership positions must be either left vacant or filled with lower graded officers.

In an attempt to improve training in reserve units, the Army is now required to assign additional active duty officers and senior graded warrant and noncommissioned officers to reserve units. During fiscal year 1994, the Army assigned 899 active duty officers, 99 warrant officers, and 1,002 noncommissioned officers to reserve units. Due to the minimum experience level required, many of the best trained and most qualified

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captains, majors, and lieutenant colonels must be assigned to these positions before active duty positions are filled.

Recommendations

GAO has made recommendations related to some of its findings in other reports. (See pp. 28 and 34.) To permit DOD time to address these earlier recommendations, GAO is not making any further recommendations.

Agency Comments

DOD concurred with GAO's findings. (See app. I for a copy of DOD's comments.)

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Abbreviations

DOD	Department of Defense
GAO	General Accounting Office
SORTS	Status of Resources and Training System

Introduction

The largest military drawdown since the end of the Vietnam conflict is now about 80 percent complete. By the end of 1999, the Department of Defense (DOD) will have cut its major force structure elements roughly in half and will have reduced its military and civilian personnel by almost a third. The sheer size of this drawdown has particularly challenged DOD to maintain a future military force that is balanced, prepared, and ready to discharge its mission. An important aspect of this challenge has been to avert personnel shortages that could adversely affect readiness. The services have used a variety of tools to conduct the drawdown and preserve readiness.

Services Have Made Substantial Progress in Implementing Their Downsizing Programs

DOD's downsizing program has significantly reduced force structure and authorized personnel levels. With respect to force structure, the services have made substantial reductions, and further reductions are planned. In March 1993, the Secretary of Defense began a DOD-wide review "from the bottom up" to define the appropriate defense strategy, force structure, modernization programs, and supporting industrial base and infrastructure to meet U.S. security requirements in the post-Cold War era. The results of this review, announced in October 1993, continued the downward trend in military force structure that began in the late 1980s with the improvement in U.S.-Soviet relations. Table 1.1 compares the actual size of selected force structure elements in fiscal years 1987 and 1993 with the levels recommended for fiscal year 1999 by the Bottom Up Review.

Table 1.1: Size of Selected Elements of DOD's Force Structure

Fiscal Years 1987, 1993, and 1999

DOD force structure element	Number of each element ^a		
	1987	1993	1999
Active Army divisions	18	14	10
Air Force fighter wings	25	16	13
Navy carriers	14	13	12 ^b
Navy ship battle forces	568	435	346
Marine divisions	3	3	3

^aNumbers include active component forces only and are actual as of the end of fiscal years 1987 and 1993 and planned as of the end of fiscal year 1999.

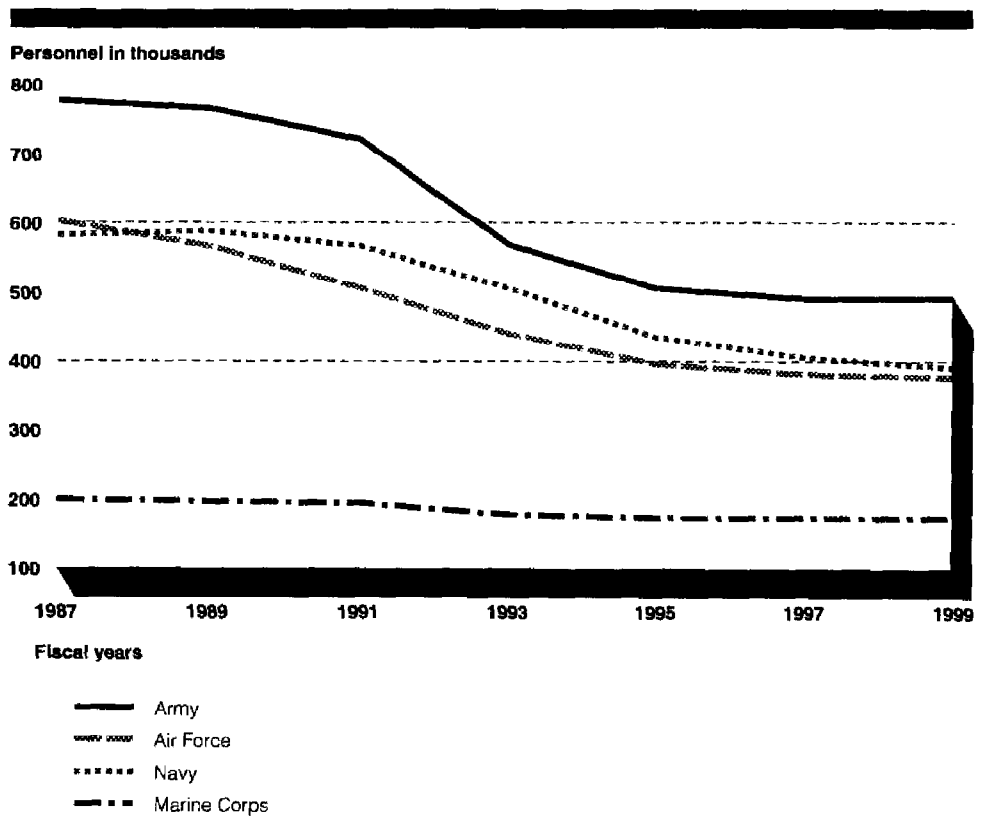
^bIncludes one carrier in the Navy reserve.

Source: DOD, Report on the Bottom Up Review (Oct. 1993).

Chapter 1
Introduction

DOD is making corresponding reductions in the services' authorized military and civilian personnel levels. By fiscal year 1999, DOD's total authorized active duty military personnel will have been reduced from about 2.17 million in fiscal year 1987 to about 1.43 million, as shown by figure 1.1. DOD will also reduce its civilian personnel from about 1.1 million in fiscal year 1987 to about 758,000 by the end of fiscal year 1999.

Figure 1.1: Authorized Personnel at Fiscal Year End by Service (fiscal years 1987 through 1999)



Note: Actual personnel through fiscal year 1994; planned personnel for fiscal years 1995 through 1999.

Source: DOD Comptroller data as of February 1995.

As shown, the services have reduced their forces by different amounts. The Army and the Air Force will have each reduced their personnel by about 30 percent. The Air Force began a steady drawdown in fiscal year

1987, and it plans to achieve most of its reductions (97 percent) by the end of fiscal year 1996. To deal with budgetary pressures, the Army began accelerating its drawdown in fiscal year 1992, and it plans to complete its drawdown by the end of fiscal year 1996. The Navy initiated a long-term, steady downsizing program in fiscal year 1989, and it plans to complete its drawdown in fiscal year 1999. The Marine Corps was required to reduce the least—about 25,500 personnel—and completed its downsizing in fiscal year 1994. By fiscal year 1999, the Army and the Air Force will have reduced their authorized military personnel levels by 37 percent each, the Navy by 33 percent, and the Marine Corps by almost 13 percent.

Services Used Various Personnel Tools to Manage the Downsizing

The services could have theoretically achieved their mandated personnel reductions by severely cutting back their recruiting programs and simply relying on normal attrition and retirements to reach desired personnel levels. In the past, it was common for the services to lose more than 15 percent of their personnel each year through attrition and retirements, even when their personnel authorizations remained relatively constant. However, achieving reductions in this manner could have created imbalances in certain ranks and specialties, according to DOD officials. Thus, the military services continued their recruiting programs and used a variety of personnel management tools to target certain ranks and specialties for reductions. Their intent was to preserve a balanced staff in terms of rank and specialties and protect career advancement opportunities. Congress, concerned about the impact of force reductions on military personnel, encouraged the services to use voluntary means whenever possible to achieve the needed reductions.

Recruiting Efforts Were Reduced

The services' normal practice is to vary the rate at which they recruit personnel and assign specialties depending on projected needs. During the downsizing program, all of the services reduced, but did not stop, their recruiting programs. By continuing their recruiting programs, the services ensured a steady flow of personnel for future needs.

Use of Early Releases Continued

Under their normal early release programs, the services allowed individuals to separate before the end of their first enlistment period. Personnel separated under this authority were usually released in the same year that they were scheduled to separate. In fiscal year 1992, with the availability of financial separation incentives, participation in these programs declined. However, because early releases can reduce salary

costs for the year in which they are used and do not involve any severance pay, all of the services, except the Marine Corps, continued to use this tool to reduce personnel with less than 6 years of service. Additionally, the services used the early release programs to reduce participation in overstaffed specialties.

Reenlistment Programs Were Tightened

The services tightened the requirements for first-term enlisted personnel to reenlist. Specifically, greater attention was given to ensure individuals who wished to reenlist met physical fitness and weight standards. Also, personnel in overstaffed specialties who wished to reenlist had to be willing to train for an understaffed specialty. These requirements reduced the number of personnel allowed to reenlist.

Involuntary Methods Were Used Sparingly

When necessary, the services used a variety of involuntary personnel management tools. For example, the services substantially reduced personnel by continuing their "up or out" policies. In contrast to other organizations that hire individuals at various levels depending on their qualifications and experience, military personnel join at the entry level and are then promoted. Thus, the military "grows its personnel from within." To ensure that they retain only high quality personnel, the services operate an up or out policy that requires officers to be promoted within specific time frames. Also, the services modified their retention control programs. These programs establish the maximum number of years that enlisted personnel in a given rank can continue in the service before being denied the opportunity to reenlist. Each service reduced the maximum years of service for promotion. For example, Navy enlisted personnel formerly had to be promoted to the rank of E-6 (Petty Officer First Class) within 23 years; this was reduced to 20 years.

The services also used formal Selected Early Retirement Boards to select specific personnel for retirement before their normal mandatory time frames. These boards, which were used to reduce the number of officer and enlisted personnel eligible to retire, focused on specific overstaffed ranks and selected those individuals with the lowest performance ratings. Because reductions in force were to be used only as a last resort, the Air Force and the Army each used formal reduction-in-force boards only once to involuntarily separate officers in specific ranks.

Congress Provided Additional Tools

In the National Defense Authorization Acts for fiscal years 1991, 1992, and 1993, Congress authorized additional measures to encourage voluntary separation. It

- authorized two special categories of separation pay—providing either a one-time lump sum payment or annual payments—to induce voluntary separations for servicemembers who had completed 6 or more, but less than 20, years of service;
- reduced time-in-grade requirements for voluntary retirements among officers having already completed the 20 years of total time needed to retire;
- provided DOD with the authority to offer a 15-year retirement option for selected members of the military, effective in fiscal year 1993; and
- extended lump sum separation pay and transition assistance to enlisted personnel who were separated.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Based on concerns that major reductions in DOD spending at a time of high levels of military activity might degrade readiness, the Chairman, Subcommittee on Military Personnel, House Committee on National Security, asked us to assess how the military drawdown had affected the services' ability to staff their active duty combat and support units. In assessing this key indicator of readiness during the drawdown, our objectives were to determine (1) the extent to which the services were able to fill their authorized positions, (2) factors contributing to personnel shortages at selected U.S. installations and units, and (3) factors that could lead to personnel shortages in the future.

To obtain background information on drawdown policy, procedures, and management, we received briefings from officials in Washington, D.C.; from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness; Joint Staff; the Deputy Chiefs of Staff for Personnel for the Air Force, the Army, and the Navy; and Headquarters, Marine Corps. To identify the roles and responsibilities of major commands with respect to the drawdown, we interviewed officials of the Air Combat Command, Langley Air Force Base, Virginia; Army Forces Command, Fort McPherson, Georgia; Army Training and Doctrine Command, Fort Monroe, Virginia; Atlantic Fleet, including its air, surface, and submarine groups, Norfolk Naval Base, Virginia; and Marine Forces Atlantic, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

To measure the extent to which the services were able to fill their authorized military personnel positions during the drawdown, we obtained data on the services' authorized and actual personnel for combat and support specialties, by rank and specialty, for fiscal year end 1987 (the beginning of the drawdown) through fiscal year end 1993 (the latest available data). The services determined the specialties typically found in combat units and units that provide direct support to combat units (support units). Our analysis included all enlisted and officer personnel in these categories, except for warrant officers and general officers. We excluded warrant officers because the Air Force does not use them, and their use in the Army and the Navy varied during the period of our analysis. Based on these criteria, personnel in general support positions, such as those in the Pentagon and in individual or overhead accounts (transients, trainees, patients, and prisoners), were excluded from our analysis. Our analysis included about 82 percent, 92 percent, and 83 percent of the total personnel in the Army, the Air Force, and the Navy, respectively. (See app. I.) The Marine Corps was unable to provide accurate data because it had not maintained automated historical data on personnel levels. Accordingly, we excluded the Marine Corps from our data analyses. However, we discussed the effects of downsizing on Marine Corps installation and unit personnel levels and included this information in our report.

We identified data sources or obtained data from officials of the Defense Manpower Data Center-West, Monterey, California; Air Force Military Personnel Center, Randolph Force Base, Texas; Total Army Personnel Command, Washington, D.C.; U.S. Navy Enlisted Personnel Management Center, New Orleans, Louisiana; Bureau of Naval Personnel, Washington, D.C.; and Headquarters, Marine Corps, Manpower Personnel Center, Washington, D.C. Although we did not conduct a reliability assessment of the computer systems the services used to extract the data, we reviewed the data to ensure that it was generally consistent and accurate.

Our data analyses included statistical analyses of aggregate personnel fill rates by service for individual ranks and for military specialties as of the end of fiscal years 1987 through 1993. In addition, we analyzed the fill rates for selected specialties to determine if they declined or remained low during the drawdown. We also conducted a separate data analysis to determine variances in personnel authorizations among Army combat, combat support, and combat service support units between fiscal years 1991 and 1994. Army headquarters provided this data.

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Introduction

To identify factors contributing to personnel shortages at units and installations and factors that could lead to shortages in the future, we interviewed unit commanders and personnel officers and reviewed pertinent personnel data at selected combat and support units in all of the military services. These units included the Army's III Corps headquarters, 13th Corps Support Command, 6th Aviation Brigade, 3rd Finance Group, 1st Cavalry Division, and 2nd Armored Division at Fort Hood, Texas; XVIII Airborne Corps headquarters at Fort Bragg, North Carolina; and 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized) at Fort Carson, Colorado; the Air Force's 7th Wing, 7th Support Group, 7th Logistics Group, and 7th Operations Group at Dyess Air Force Base, Texas; and the Navy's U.S.S. Stump, U.S.S. Saipan, U.S.S. Hunley, and U.S.S. Scranton at Norfolk Naval Base, Virginia, and VF-43 Fighter Attack Wing and VA-75 Medium Attack Wing at Oceana Naval Air Station, Virginia.

We conducted our work between August 1993 and January 1995 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Aggregate Fill Rates Remained High Throughout the Drawdown

Our analysis of DOD data for military personnel in combat and support specialties for fiscal years 1987 through 1993 indicated that the services filled over 95 percent of their authorized personnel positions by using various personnel management tools. They also maintained relatively high personnel fill rates for most ranks and military specialties. However, the historical shortage of field grade officers¹ continued during the drawdown.

All Services Maintained High Personnel Fill Rates

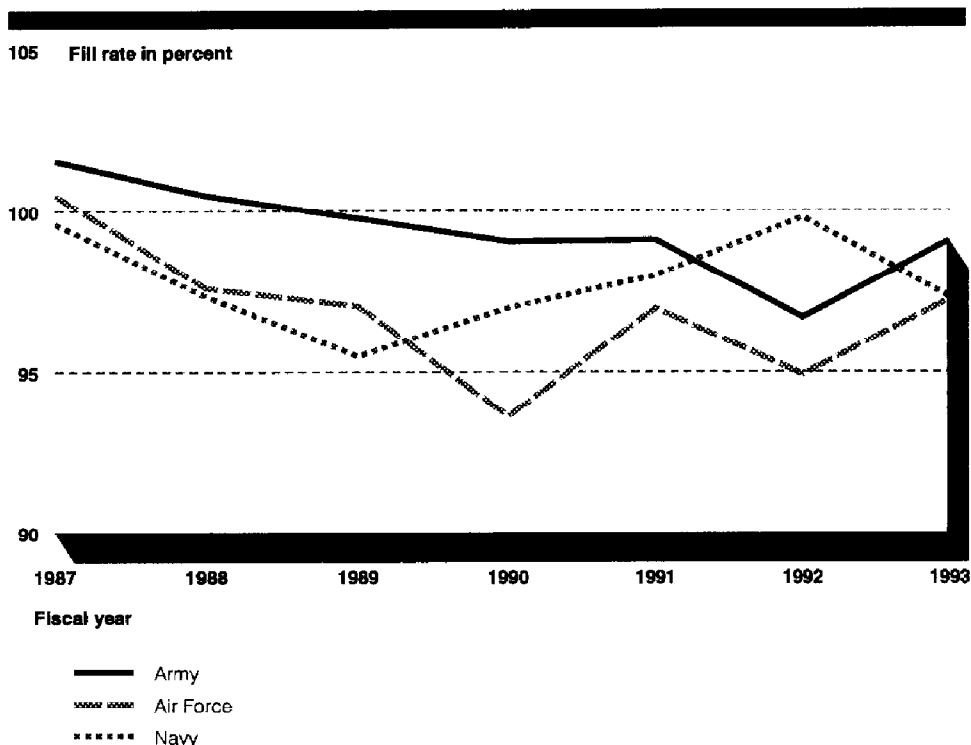
Our analysis of fiscal years 1987-93 personnel data for military personnel in combat and support specialties² showed that the services were able to keep a relatively high percentage of their authorized personnel positions filled (referred to as "fill rate") during the drawdown. As shown by figure 2.1, each service maintained an aggregate fill rate of 95 percent or higher for each of the 7 years analyzed with one exception: the Air Force's fill rate dipped to 93 percent in 1990. The aggregate fill rates of the Army and the Air Force improved in fiscal year 1993—dramatically in the Army. The Navy, which initiated the major portion of its drawdown in fiscal year 1992—later than the other services—experienced a sharp decline in its aggregate fill rate in fiscal year 1993. The high Navy fill rates in the earlier years of the drawdown most likely reflect the sharp reductions in the number of naval ships, while personnel levels were declining more slowly.

¹Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels and Navy lieutenant commanders, commanders, and captains.

²Enlisted specialties analyzed included Army military occupational specialties, Air Force specialty codes, and Navy ratings.

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Aggregate Fill Rates Remained High
Throughout the Drawdown

Figure 2.1: Percentage of Authorized Positions Filled at Fiscal Year End by Service (fiscal years 1987 through 1993)



Note: Analysis includes personnel in combat and combat support positions. It excludes personnel in general support positions.

Source: Army, Air Force, and Navy personnel data.

Service personnel specialists could not provide a criterion for an acceptable aggregate personnel fill rate. However, in measuring the readiness of units, the services often use criteria established in the Status of Resources and Training System (SORTS)—the readiness report most commonly referred to by the services. The services do not rely solely on SORTS data to assess unit readiness, but rather supplement it with other data and information. SORTS measures four broad indicators of readiness—personnel on hand, training, equipment on hand, and equipment maintenance. A unit's overall readiness rating in SORTS is based on a composite score of all four indicators coupled with the commanders' subjective judgment. According to the SORTS criteria for personnel on hand, units with 90 percent or more of their personnel are considered prepared to conduct all required missions. In terms of actual numbers, the

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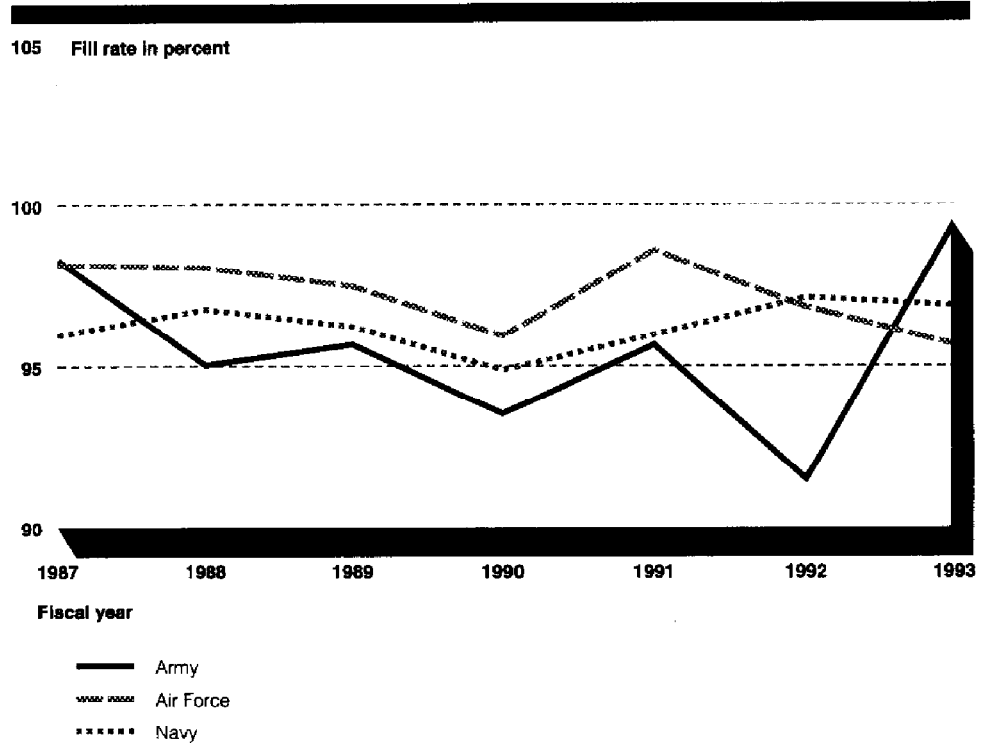
Army's 1987 fill rate of 101.6 percent, for example, represents a surplus of 9,690 personnel out of 621,418 total authorized positions; its 1993 fill rate of 99.1 percent represents 4,594 vacant positions out of 486,844 total authorized positions. The Air Force's fill rate of 94.9 percent in 1992—the height of the drawdown—represents a personnel shortfall of 22,723 out of 447,528 total authorized personnel positions.

**Fill Rates for Most
Officer and Enlisted
Categories Remained
Steady**

The Army, the Air Force, and the Navy were able to maintain high fill rates for officer and enlisted personnel at each rank. By allowing early releases, offering early retirements, and restricting the number of initial enlistments and reenlistments, the fill rate for each rank has remained fairly constant. Officer fill rates in the Air Force and the Navy never fell below 95 percent in the aggregate, as shown in figure 2.2. However, the Army's supply of officers remained below the other services and precipitously dropped by the end of fiscal year 1992—the height of its drawdown. In actual numbers, the shortfall in Army officers increased from 1,063 to 4,648 between fiscal years 1987 and 1992, while total authorized positions fell from 62,748 to 54,455. Despite this decline, the supply of Army officers rebounded in fiscal year 1993, and its aggregate officer fill rate increased by 8 percent in that single year.

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Figure 2.2: Fill Rates for Officers at Fiscal Year End by Service (fiscal years 1987 through 1993)



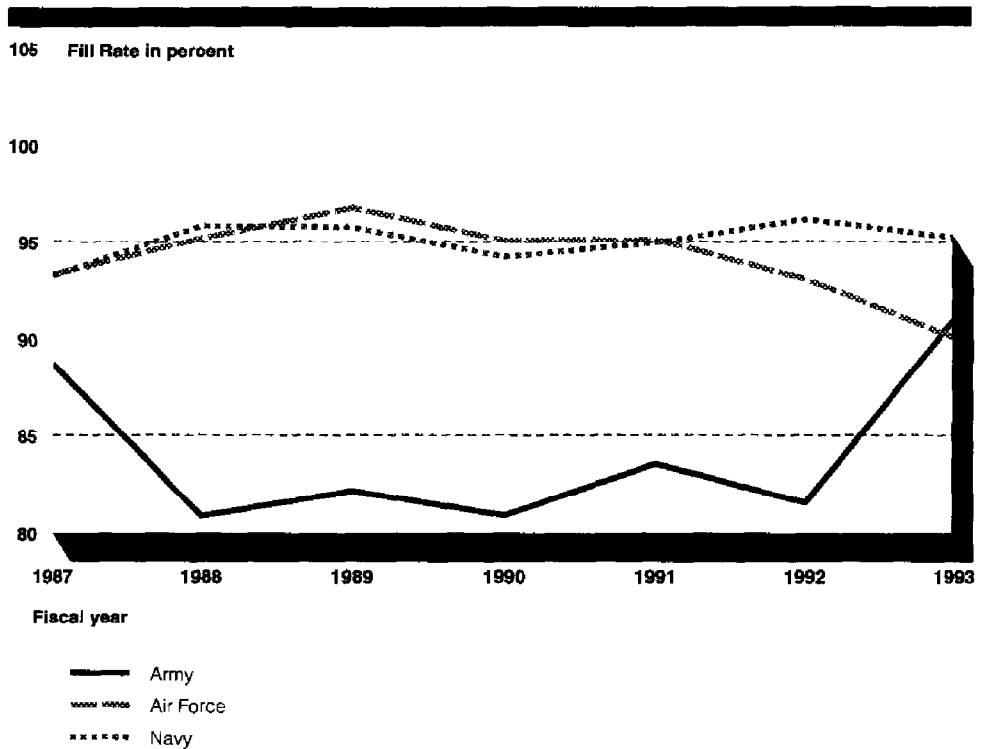
Note: Analysis includes personnel in combat and combat support positions. It excludes personnel in general support positions.

Source: Army, Air Force, and Navy personnel data.

The greatest shortages in each of the services usually occurred in field grade officers, the category in which all the services have historically experienced shortages, as shown by figure 2.3. However, the Army experienced the greatest shortages; fill rates remained between 81 percent and 83 percent between fiscal years 1988 and 1992 before rebounding in fiscal year 1993. Much of this improvement is attributable to a 5-percent reduction in authorizations for majors combined with a 10-percent increase in the number of majors.

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Aggregate Fill Rates Remained High
Throughout the Drawdown

Figure 2.3: Fill Rates for Field Grade Officers at Fiscal Year End by Service (fiscal years 1987 through 1993)



Note: This analysis includes field grade personnel in combat and combat support positions and excludes personnel in general support positions.

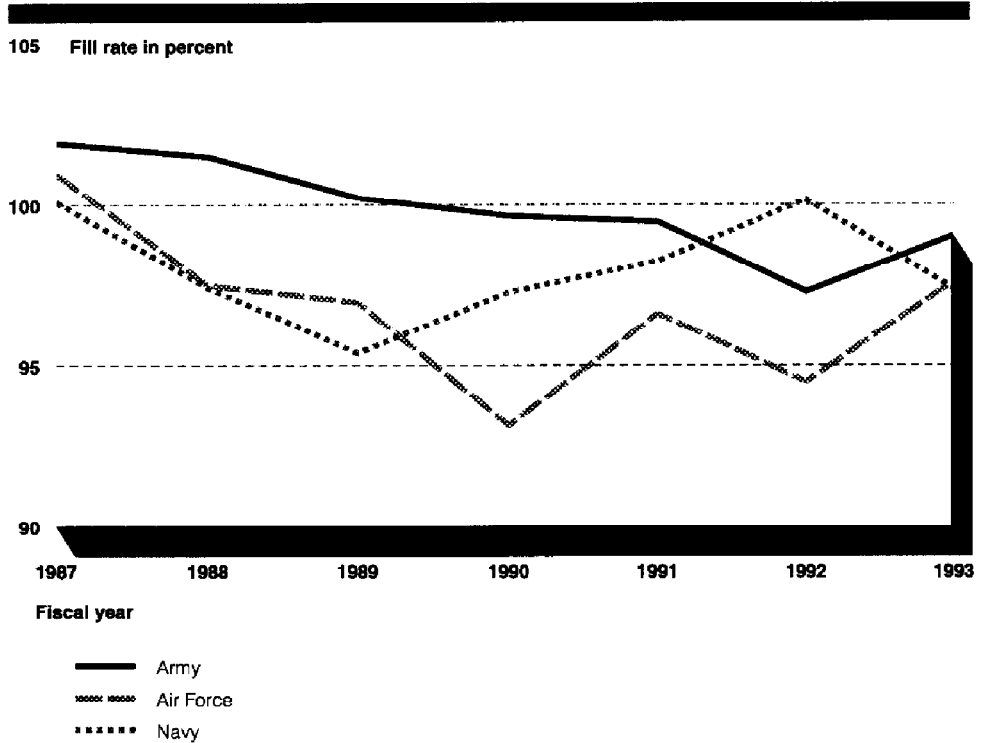
Source: Army, Air Force, and Navy personnel data.

Because a minimum number of years of service is required to reach the field grade officer level, almost all field grade officers were eligible for early retirement, and many took advantage of this option. In addition, the services reduced their time-in-grade requirements for voluntary retirements among officers who had completed the 20 years needed to retire. This requirement change prompted many other eligible officers to retire. Because the services advance their personnel from the entry level through the ranks, it will take several years for lower rank officers to reach field grade. Although the Army had the lowest officer fill rates, its enlisted fill rates remained between 99 percent and 102 percent, thereby significantly offsetting these shortages. The exception occurred in fiscal year 1992—the height of its drawdown program—when the fill rate dipped to 97 percent. As figure 2.4 shows, fill rates for enlisted personnel in each

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service remained above 95 percent throughout the period, except for 1990 when the Air Force's rate dropped to 93 percent.

Figure 2.4: Fill Rates for Enlisted Personnel at Fiscal Year End by Service (fiscal years 1987 through 1993)



Note: Analysis includes personnel in combat and combat support positions. It excludes personnel in general support positions.

Source: Army, Air Force, and Navy personnel data.

In terms of actual personnel, the Army had a surplus of 10,753 out of 558,670 authorized enlisted positions in 1987. However, by the end of fiscal year 1992, it had 12,811 vacancies out of its authorized 469,297 enlisted positions. The Army experienced a recovery in its enlisted personnel fill rate by the end of fiscal year 1993, with 432,426 of its 436,720 positions filled.

For this same period, enlisted personnel levels in the Air Force fell from a surplus of 4,461 airmen out of 465,005 authorized positions in fiscal year

1987 to a shortage of 20,092 airmen out of 364,816 positions in fiscal year 1992—a decline of 6.5 percent. Like the Army, the Air Force's fill rate for enlisted personnel improved significantly in fiscal year 1993.

In contrast to the improvements shown in the Army and the Air Force in fiscal year 1993, the Navy's fill rate declined by 3 percent in that year. Again, this may reflect the fact that the Navy did not begin the major portion of its drawdown until fiscal year 1992. Although inconclusive without further data, these trends suggest that fill rates in the Navy could ultimately improve as they did in the Army and the Air Force as its drawdown progresses.

Fill Rates Have Declined in Some Specialties

To determine if the services had shortages in specific combat and support specialties during the drawdown, we analyzed the fill rates for all specialties in our database. We excluded officers from our analysis of specialty fill rates because officer assignments are often based on factors beyond their specific occupational specialty. To account for changes in specialty codes and weapon systems, we selected only those skills that had authorizations in each year that our data covered. Our analysis of the resulting 427 enlisted combat and support specialties showed a slight decline, as shown by table 2.1. For example, whereas only 19 specialties had fewer than 80 percent of their authorized personnel in 1987, this number increased to 34 in 1993. Moreover, while most specialties maintained fill rates over 90 percent, the number of specialties with this higher level of fill rate declined from 363 in 1987 to 302 in 1993.

Table 2.1: Number of Military Specialties in Each Fill Rate Range at Fiscal Year End

Fill rate range (in percents)	Fiscal year						
	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
80 percent or less	19	18	13	16	19	28	34
Between 80 percent and 90 percent	45	64	73	72	73	93	91
90 percent or over	363	345	341	339	335	306	302

Note: Includes 427 enlisted specialties.

Source: Army, Air Force, and Navy personnel data.

The majority of the specialties with fill rates below 80 percent were prevalent in support units rather than combat units. For instance, in fiscal year 1993, 22 of the 34 specialties with fill rates below 80 percent were support specialties. Many of these support specialties—such as wire

system installers—were in small quantities in these units. As a result, the fill rates of these “low density” specialties fluctuated greatly since a small change in the number of personnel in the specialty created a large change in the fill rate. Support units are sometimes significantly affected by shortages in these low density specialties because they are frequently authorized to fill only 90 percent or fewer of their wartime personnel requirements in peacetime. (See ch. 4.)

Conclusions

The services managed their drawdowns in ways that have preserved generally high fill rates in the aggregate, for officer and enlisted categories and for most military specialties. The Army and the Air Force, having begun their personnel drawdowns earlier than the Navy, appear to have weathered the heaviest impacts of their personnel drawdowns. Their trends generally improved in fiscal year 1993. Shortages in the Navy, on the other hand, may persist since its drawdown began later. Its relatively high fill rates until recently may reflect the significant reduction in the number of ships (and the related personnel authorizations) in relation to personnel levels, which were declining more slowly.

The primary trend suggesting concern during the drawdown has been continuing shortages of Army field grade officers. However, even this statistic improved dramatically by the end of fiscal year 1993.

Drawdown Adversely Affected Some Installations

Although aggregate personnel fill rates have remained relatively high during the drawdown, personnel shortages have occurred unevenly across the force, with some installations and units more adversely affected than others. Factors contributing to the shortages included policies related to the relocation of personnel from Europe as well as base closures and realignments. In addition, shortages in critical specialties occurred at some installations because commanders were reluctant to restrict participation in the early release programs. Some military personnel were temporarily assigned to perform functions formerly done by civilians, whose positions were eliminated in the drawdown. Because these factors were directly related to the drawdown, shortages caused by these factors may subside as the drawdown concludes.

Installation and unit officials complained of personnel shortages at most installations we visited. However, available information was generally insufficient for us to determine how pervasive these shortages were because it did not capture the extent of temporary duty assignments or the extent to which positions were filled with personnel without the required rank and/or specialty. Nevertheless, officials in all four services at the wide range of installations and units we visited consistently cited the same types of shortages.

European Drawdown and Base Closures Led to Some Shortages

Policies related to the relocation of personnel from U.S. force reductions in Europe created personnel imbalances at some military installations. According to DOD officials, personnel affected by the drawdown were permitted to remain in Europe to complete their tours if they had been in their assignments less than a year. In some cases, they were reassigned to another European unit if their unit was inactivated. The intent of this policy was to avoid excessive turbulence. As a result, units frequently returned to U.S. installations with substantially fewer personnel than authorized—some with as few as one-quarter to one-half of their authorized personnel.

To illustrate, 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized) at Fort Carson, Colorado, received five units from inactivating divisions in Europe. Those units arrived with most of their equipment, but with only one-half of their authorized personnel. According to the division's personnel officer, it took almost 2 years to fully staff the new units, train them, and develop their cohesiveness. He noted that it was particularly difficult to fill shortages in combat service support units because many of the involved support specialties were understaffed throughout the Army.

Fort Hood, Texas, received transportation, military police, and maintenance units from Europe. Those units arrived with 27 percent, 47 percent, and 63 percent of their authorized personnel, respectively. According to III Corps headquarters personnel officers, filling those units to acceptable levels caused other units throughout Fort Hood to experience temporary shortages in selected specialties.

The bulk of the imbalances created by the European drawdown should be over by now. Legislation requires DOD to reduce its forces in Europe to approximately 100,000 by the beginning of fiscal year 1996. However, similar imbalances resulting from U.S. base closure and realignment actions are likely to continue. DOD is currently engaged in a third round of base closure and realignment decisions that will necessitate relocating personnel over the next several years.

As with the European drawdown, personnel affected by base closure and realignment decisions were not always transferred with their unit if they had been assigned at the installation for a short time. Instead, to avoid excessive family relocations, such personnel were often reassigned to another position at the installation. This practice created shortages in the relocating units.

Other base closure actions created temporary shortages in some specialties. For example, the Air Force experienced a temporary shortage of active duty navigators because trained replacements were not available in the proper ranks. Because the Air Force's navigator school was scheduled to be closed for 2 years due to a base closure and realignment decision, the Air Force temporarily filled these vacancies with staff officers and reservists of different ranks until appropriate personnel became available.

Civilian Drawdown Adversely Affected Some Installations

In some cases, the services used military personnel to perform functions previously done by civilians and other military personnel whose positions were eliminated under the civilian drawdown. According to military officials, this shifting occurred because many tasks formerly conducted by civilians have continued, even though the positions have been eliminated. These officials said that civilian positions have declined at certain installations at the same time that the number of military personnel assigned to these bases has increased. Soldiers have sometimes been given temporary "special duty" assignments such as cutting grass, serving as lifeguards, and working in gymnasiums to compensate for the civilian

personnel losses. In some cases, stopgap measures were taken to temporarily deal with this problem. For example, when Dyess Air Force Base lost civilian personnel positions, local retired Air Force personnel volunteered to fill the vacancies.

Some bases gained military personnel due to the European drawdown and base closure and realignment actions at the same time that their civilian support personnel were being reduced. For example, Fort Hood added a division with two maneuver brigades, an aviation brigade, a division support command, and other assets, resulting in a growth in military personnel, yet did not receive additional funding for civilian personnel. Between fiscal years 1987 and 1994, its military personnel grew from 38,000 to 45,000 while its civilian personnel declined from 3,100 to 2,200. To compensate for these losses, military units at the base began providing personnel to temporarily cover tasks formerly done by civilians. At the time of our visit, 1 infantry battalion had 21 infantrymen temporarily assigned to jobs that would ordinarily have been filled by civilians. For example, five were used as lifeguards and four as clerks.

Fort Carson experienced three reductions-in-force in its civilian positions between 1988 and 1993 due to budgetary constraints. However, after the first two reductions, officials at Fort Carson soon recognized that some functions previously handled by civilians needed to continue and proceeded to hire more civilian personnel. The division's assistant commander cited the drawdown of civilians, coupled with an influx of military personnel, as the reason it used military personnel in these special duty assignments.

The commander of the civil engineering squadron at Dyess Air Force Base said that his backlog for installation building maintenance had increased due to the cutback in civilian employees and losses in military personnel who separated early or were deployed. His backlog increased from 30 days in fiscal year 1992 to 110 to 115 days in 1993. According to this officer, maintenance personnel were no longer able to perform routine repairs and maintenance on the installation's facilities due to the backlog.

Our discussions with Navy commanders and personnel officers did not reveal similar shortages. According to personnel officials in the Atlantic Fleet Command, the shortage of base support personnel was partly alleviated by decommissioning ships, which freed up large numbers of personnel for reassignment. For instance, according to Atlantic Fleet

statistics, during fiscal year 1993, the fleet had approximately 10 percent more personnel assigned to shore duty billets than were authorized.

Our October 1994 report¹ on DOD's military and civilian force mix pointed out disparities in the ways civilian personnel were used between the individual services and highlighted the lack of service criteria for assigning positions to civilian personnel. The report recommended that DOD assess its mix of military and civilian personnel. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1995 requires DOD to review its military support positions and report to Congress by April 30, 1995, on the potential for converting military to civilian positions.

Early Release Programs Led to Some Personnel Shortages

Because participation in DOD's drawdown programs was voluntary, the services had only limited control over who left individual units and installations. Even though unit commanders had the authority to recommend that an individual in a critical specialty be precluded from participating in the programs, they were either unaware of their authority or reluctant to use it. As a result, some units had higher losses than others and critical specialty skills were lost.

Some Units Were Disproportionately Affected

Army support units were particularly affected by the early release program. The majority of these units are in the reserves, and few support units of some types exist in the active Army. In addition, the majority of the Army's specialties that exist in small quantities are prevalent in support units. For these reasons, the impact of shortages on active Army support units was particularly acute. To illustrate, at one Army Corps Support Command, nearly 60 percent of the soldiers that separated early during fiscal year 1994 were from one of its nine battalions. Additionally, 80 percent of the individuals in the command that left early were in rank E-5. The impact of these departures was compounded by the historic 20 percent to 30 percent turnover rate in support units. By comparison, the turnover rate of combat units averages about 10 percent. The personnel readiness of this active duty support unit was particularly important because about 60 percent of the Army's support units were in the reserves and accessible only in the event of a reserve call-up.

Although less affected than the Army, the Air Force also experienced acute shortages at some installations. For example, commanders said that

¹DOD Force Mix Issues: Greater Reliance on Civilians in Support Roles Could Provide Significant Benefits (GAO/NSIAD-95-5, Oct. 19, 1994).

13 of the 20 eligible personnel career field airmen and one-half of the airmen in a contracting squadron participated in the program. The supply squadron commander at the installation said that contracting operations at the installation were disrupted for 6 months after these losses.

The services did not keep statistics on early release program participants by unit or installation. However, commanders at the Air Force and the Army installations we visited told us that these high concentrations adversely affected their operations.

Commanders Were Reluctant to Restrict Participation in Early Out Programs

To prevent the loss of critical personnel in individual units and installations, the services allowed unit commanders to recommend that individuals be precluded from separating early if their departures would create personnel shortages. However, some of the unit commanders were unaware of that authority, while others said they were reluctant to use it. These latter commanders told us they were concerned that denying an individual the opportunity to take an early out might adversely affect unit morale. As a result of this practice, some units—particularly in the Army—lost a higher-than-average percentage of personnel in critical specialties during the drawdown.

The Navy and the Marine Corps were the services least affected by the early release program because commanders frequently required personnel to complete their next scheduled deployment before they could separate early. Army and Air Force commanders said that, although they sometimes attempted to dissuade individuals with critical skills from taking early outs, none had recommended denial from participation in the program. However, according to the personnel officer of the 1st Cavalry Division, commanders did ask some personnel to delay their departures until their units completed scheduled deployments to the National Training Center.

As with the European drawdown, the bulk of the personnel imbalances created by the early release programs should have already occurred. The Army and the Air Force plan to complete their drawdowns in fiscal year 1996, and the special authorities to offer this option is scheduled to expire on October 1, 1999.

Services Lacked Flexibility to Correct Shortages

Air Force officials noted that the cost of relocating personnel between installations limited their flexibility in filling vacancies, even though surplus personnel elsewhere could have been reassigned. These officials noted that the impact of personnel shortages was heightened because mission requirements remained the same or increased with the transfer of missions from closing installations without any additional personnel to carry them out.

Budgetary constraints also forced the Navy and the Marine Corps to restrict the number of transfers between the east and west coasts and to assign shorebound personnel to the same port they came from. These practices were intended to save relocation costs but reduced the services' ability to correct personnel shortfalls throughout the force.

Personnel Shortages Are Likely to Continue Due to Factors Unrelated to the Drawdown

Even after the drawdown concludes, certain personnel shortages are likely to persist for a variety of reasons, including the following:

- The services primarily structure their forces to meet wartime requirements, not the high level of operations other than war that have continued for several years. Because wartime and peacetime requirements differ, personnel shortages will continue unless current structuring practices change or the current level of operations other than war subsides.
- Staffing decisions must be made within the constraints of legislative and other requirements. As a result, the services will be limited in how much they can rectify identified shortages in affected personnel categories.

Operations Other Than War Have Required Substantial Transfers of Army Personnel

The high level of operations other than war during the past several years has led to substantial transfers of military personnel to meet the requirements of these operations. Vacancies have thereby been created in the losing units. The Army has been the most affected due to the way it has structured its forces and the manner in which it has staffed its various types of units.

Personnel Transfers

The recent high levels of operations other than war have challenged all the services in meeting their requirements. Task forces to support operations other than war are typically formed with a limited number of units or personnel. However, over time, such task forces have tended to grow and require additional personnel. In addition, some operations have continued longer than anticipated, thereby requiring rotations of new units. Although entire units are usually deployed, the services often have had to transfer individuals from other units to fill the places of individuals who, for various reasons, could not deploy.

Individuals also had to be transferred into deploying units if those units were not authorized to be fully staffed. For example, in the case of the operation in Somalia, Forces Command's policy was that Army units would deploy with the personnel on hand. However, commanders in Somalia required that all units be staffed at 100 percent. As a result, truck drivers were transferred from units throughout the United States to fill deployed units to 100 percent of their wartime requirements.

As requirements increase, personnel with specific skills are also sometimes added. One Air Force official noted that such requests are often

for "fully trained" personnel, such as instructor pilots and navigators, and as a result, units often lose key personnel that are difficult to replace. Combat support units are especially affected by these requests since they have many different specialties and only a few personnel in each skill. As a result, losses of even a few individuals can adversely affect these units.

The number of requests for individuals with specific specialties to serve in such operations has dramatically increased, according to officials at the Marine Corps' Marine Forces-Atlantic Command. For example, in fiscal year 1993, the command received requests for 9 individuals in 8 specialties; in fiscal year 1994, it received requests for 260 people in 87 specialties. Similarly, Army III Corps officials said that they fielded requests for about 50 to 60 personnel a month in fiscal year 1993. The following year, the monthly average was about 130, with a high of 300 in a single month.

The division personnel officer at Fort Carson said the division often lacked flexibility in meeting the needs of task force commanders when they requested individuals in specific ranks and specialties. He added that filling the requests routinely caused turbulence within affected units. For example, to support operations in Somalia, one infantry battalion was asked to provide helicopter door gunners and maintenance personnel. Due to the large number of personnel taken from the battalion, the division had to transfer personnel from other battalions to preserve personnel readiness.

Army Is Structured for Wartime Requirements

The substantial personnel transfers that have been required to meet the requirements of operations other than war were due, in part, to the manner in which the Army structures and staffs its forces. Because the Army structures its forces to meet its wartime requirements, substantial numbers of its support units are in the reserves. For example, 97 percent of its civil affairs units, 76 percent of its quartermaster units, 69 percent of its engineer units, and 63 percent of its transportation units are in the reserves. Also, the active Army has few support units of some types. For example, the Army has only one active duty civil affairs unit and only six psychological operations units.

In the event of a crisis, the Army depends on the President's authority to call up reserves to support its combat forces. If the President does not exercise this authority, the Army must fill vacancies in its active duty support units with reserve volunteers or else transfer active duty

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personnel from other nondeploying units into deploying units. These individuals are not always in the needed military specialty categories. For instance, the Army had to provide special training to several infantry companies before deploying them to work as military police in the refugee camps in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Another related problem is that the Army does not generally authorize its support units to have all the personnel they would need in wartime. The Army is the only service that authorizes the extent of wartime requirements each of its units may have in peacetime. Under this system, the Army has generally authorized support units to have 90 percent or less of their personnel in peacetime. These units will receive additional personnel from the reserve components if they are called up for war or a national emergency.

In contrast, Army combat units are generally authorized to have all their personnel in peacetime. The Army gives staffing priority to its combat units because they are considered the chief means of deterrence. Also, Army officials believe that it is more prudent to understaff support units, rather than combat units, since it cannot fully staff all of its personnel requirements.

As table 4.1 shows, 85 percent of the Army's combat units were staffed at 100 percent, while only 58 percent of its active combat support units and 55 percent of its combat service support units were authorized to be fully staffed.

Table 4.1: Percentage of Active Duty Army Combat, Combat Support, and Combat Service Support Units at Selected Personnel Authorization Levels (Fiscal Year 1994)

Unit type	Percentage of units			
	Staffed at 100 percent	Staffed at 90 percent	Staffed at 80 percent	Staffed at 70 percent or less ^a
Combat	85	11	3	1
Combat support	58	27	13	2
Combat service support	55	13	18	13

Note: Data is the authorized level as of the end of fiscal year 1994. Detail may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

^aExcludes special authorization categories such as cadre status. These categories represent less than 2 percent of the Army's active duty force.

Source: Army Force Accounting System, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations.

These force structuring and staffing practices are long-standing, dating back to the late 1970s and early 1980s when the Army began to rely more heavily on its reserve components. The impact of these practices was felt during the Persian Gulf War, when the Army had to resort to substantial transfers of personnel to meet its support force requirements.¹ The current high levels of peacetime military activity, combined with the small number of active duty units of some types, have led the Army to use a wide array of techniques to meet the personnel requirements of these operations. It has had to transfer personnel between various types of units, assign personnel who did not possess the desired military specialty, and seek volunteers from the reserves.

We recently issued a report on U.S. participation in peace operations that also noted the stresses being placed on Army support forces.² That report recommended that the Secretary of the Army reexamine whether high priority support units should still be staffed at less than 100 percent of their authorized personnel levels in peacetime.

Assignments Must Be Made in Concert With Legislative Requirements

Certain legislative requirements establish ceilings on the number of personnel that the services may have at specific ranks. The services must also fill a growing number of joint duty assignments before they fill other requirements and must also assign substantial numbers of active duty personnel to reserve units. These requirements, while important, have limited the services' flexibility in correcting shortages because their staffing decisions must remain within these constraints. In addition, the continuing shortage of field grade officers has meant that some positions must be left vacant or be filled with lower graded personnel.

Officer and Enlisted Personnel Ceilings

Military personnel legislation has limited the flexibility of the services in trying to correct identified personnel shortages. For example, legislation establishes the percentage of enlisted personnel in the E-8 and E-9 ranks (senior noncommissioned officers) each service may have. Through fiscal year 1994, the services could have no more than 2 percent and 1 percent, respectively, of their enlisted personnel in the E-8 and E-9 ranks. However, the Army's stated requirement for personnel in the E-8 rank totals nearly 3 percent of its authorized enlisted force. As a result, the Army cannot fill

¹Operation Desert Storm: Army Had Difficulty Providing Adequate Active Reserve Support Forces (GAO/NSIAD-92-67, Mar. 30, 1992).

²Peace Operations: Heavy Use of Key Capabilities May Affect Ability to Respond to Regional Conflicts (GAO/NSIAD-95-51, Mar. 8, 1995).

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its E-8 noncommissioned officer requirement. To alleviate its E-8 senior noncommissioned officer shortage, the Army was granted temporary relief from these limitations for fiscal year 1995.

Similarly, the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act, as updated by annual DOD authorization acts, establishes the number of officers each service may have at each rank. These ceilings effectively established the number of field grade officers the services had to release to reach their mandated personnel levels. As a result, the services could not always increase personnel authorizations at a specific rank, even though shortages were identified. The services have historically had a shortage of field grade officers. These shortages continued throughout the drawdown because requirements for personnel at these levels increased without a corresponding increase in authorized positions, as noted in the following sections.

Joint Duty Requirements
Have Increased Demand
for Field Grade Officers

Among the highest priorities that the services must fill are Unified Command³ and defense agency and activity positions, commonly called joint duty positions. These positions often have minimum requirements regarding the rank, education, specialty, and command experience of those assigned. Because the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 requires officers to have served in a joint duty position to advance above field grade ranks, they usually must serve in these positions if they are to be considered for promotion. As a result, officers assigned to these positions are generally those with the highest potential.

DOD officials said that joint duty requirements have placed increasing demands on the limited pool of field grade officers because these positions generally require personnel at these ranks. As previously stated, the drawdown has led to a continuing shortage of these officers. Part of the difficulty in filling these requirements stems from the fact that DOD has centralized some functions in defense agencies and activities that were formerly conducted by the services. While reducing requirements in the services, these actions sometimes increased the demand for these officers. Whereas the services sometimes staffed these functions at less than 100 percent of their authorized positions, these same functions that became joint duty positions were often required to be filled at 100 percent. As a result, the services were sometimes required to provide more

³Positions controlled by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

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personnel to the joint duty function after the transfer than when it was a service function.

As of November 1994, total joint duty requirements accounted for more than 16 percent of the services' field grade officer authorizations. The Air Force had over 17 percent of its field grade officers assigned to joint duty assignments as of that date. Army, Navy, and Marine Corps requirements had assigned 17 percent, 13 percent, and 11 percent of their authorized field grade officers respectively to joint duty assignments.

Active Duty Army
Personnel Assigned to
Reserve Units Increasing

Two provisions in DOD authorization legislation required the Army to assign active duty personnel to provide everyday support and training to National Guard and Army Reserve units. The intent of these provisions was to ensure that reserve units—especially combat units—would be ready to deploy when called up.

Under these provisions, the Army assigned 2,000 active duty soldiers, consisting of 899 officers, 99 warrant officers, and 1,002 noncommissioned officers, to support reserve units in fiscal years 1993 and 1994. An additional 3,000 active duty soldiers are to be assigned to support reserve units. This initiative is scheduled to be carried out in fiscal year 1995.

The officers that the Army has assigned to these positions have been some of its best trained and most qualified captains, majors, and lieutenant colonels due to the experience requirements for these positions. The initiative also required that senior ranked warrant and noncommissioned officers be assigned to reserve units.

Congress did not authorize additional active duty personnel to carry out these provisions. Although 800 positions were filled by personnel already supporting reserve units, the remaining 1,200 personnel were diverted from assignments in other active duty units. Although this program is important in that it is intended to improve reserve component training and to increase active-reserve integration, its requirements have compounded the Army's shortage of officers and senior noncommissioned officers to meet active component requirements.

Conclusions

Personnel shortfalls and imbalances associated with policies related to the European drawdown and base closure and realignment decisions appear to be temporary imbalances that will correct themselves as the drawdown concludes. Likewise, personnel shortages that resulted from the services' implementation of early release programs will abate as the drawdown is completed.

Nevertheless, certain personnel shortages are likely to persist because their underlying causes are not directly related to the drawdown. The increasing number of active duty officers that the services must devote to joint duty assignments and reserve units—although clearly important requirements—leave fewer officers available to fill other key leadership positions. Moreover, the need to temporarily assign military personnel to cover tasks formerly carried out by civilians could continue until the services arrive at the appropriate mix of military and civilian personnel. As noted in chapter 3, our October 1994 report recommended that DOD examine whether some military positions should be converted to civilian positions. DOD is expected to report to Congress on the potential for such conversions.

In addition to these factors suggesting that personnel shortages may continue, Army force structuring and staffing practices are also likely to contribute to shortages. If the current level of operations other than war continues without a change in force structure practices, the Army will continue to have to transfer personnel into deploying units, thereby creating vacancies in other units. Not only are these transferred personnel not always of the appropriate rank or specialty, they also may not have received the desired training. Losing units, in turn, are less ready to achieve their missions due to the vacancies created and the resultant impact on unit training. As noted in this chapter, our recent report on peace support operations raised the issue of the understaffing of Army support forces and recommended that the Army reassess this policy with respect to high priority support units.

Providing additional funding for military personnel may not be the best solution to the types of shortages identified in this report. Even without increased funding, the shortages related to the drawdown are likely to dissipate once the drawdown concludes. Moreover, shortages unrelated to the drawdown could be reduced through other means, such as changes in operating policies, procedures, and legislative requirements. For example, DOD could reduce the need to transfer personnel to meet the requirements of operations other than war by structuring its forces to better match these

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requirements. Reducing the military's involvement in such operations or reducing its level of overseas presence is another alternative that could reduce the need for such transfers. Finally, Congress could enact legislation temporarily waiving from some legislative requirements for the remainder of the drawdown period. Both DOD and Congress would need to weigh the merits of these actions.

To permit DOD sufficient time to address the recommendations contained in our two earlier reports previously mentioned, we are not making any further recommendations at this time.

Comments From the Department of Defense



PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

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MAY 12 1995

Mr. Henry L. Hinton, Jr.
Assistant Comptroller General
National Security and International Affairs Division
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Hinton:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the General Accounting Office (GAO) draft report, "MILITARY PERSONNEL: High Aggregate Personnel Levels Maintained Throughout Drawdown," dated March 28, 1995 (GAO Code 703029), OSD Case 9825. The DoD concurs with the report.

There are two factors addressed in the report that the GAO identifies as especially critical: (1) the temporary assignment of military personnel to tasks formerly done by civilians and (2) the scarcity and undermanning of some active Army support forces. The Army expects the temporary assignments to decrease and has taken steps to ensure that the practice does not degrade unit readiness. The second critical factor is also being studied by the Army and was addressed in recommendations from other related GAO reports (OSD Cases 9755 and 9823). The previous DoD comments are still germane.

As the report acknowledges, the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) contains tables limiting the numbers of field grade officers in each Service based upon their total officer strength. Temporary grade relief from these tables has been authorized for the Army and the Marine Corps and the DoD has submitted a legislative proposal requesting similar relief for the Navy and the Air Force. The DoD is actively reviewing the need for permanent adjustments to the grade tables.

Officer-to-enlisted ratios have also been addressed in several National Defense Authorization Acts. The requirement for officers in the Department is not an extension of ratios that occurred in a larger, less technologically advanced military. Rather, the resultant officer-to-enlisted ratio is the outcome of various equipment, force structure, manpower, and personnel policies and operations decisions. Though officer-to-enlisted ratios are not actually legislated, the Services have attempted to abide by the sense of the Congress that a constant officer-to-enlisted ratio be maintained during the drawdown.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft report.

Edwin Dorn



Total Personnel Compared With Personnel Included in Our Analyses by Service, Fiscal Years 1987 Through 1993

Table I.1: Total (Army, Air Force, and Navy)

Fiscal year	Officers			Enlisted		
	Total	Included in our analyses	Percent	Total	Included in our analyses	Percent
1987	287,340	212,742	74.0	1,673,862	1,470,191	87.8
1988	284,516	210,515	74.0	1,642,627	1,429,591	87.0
1989	282,727	206,886	73.2	1,637,050	1,409,742	86.1
1990	278,996	200,104	71.7	1,580,156	1,365,852	86.4
1991	274,110	197,520	72.1	1,520,240	1,326,124	87.2
1992	254,689	183,303	72.0	1,355,896	1,201,200	88.6
1993	238,264	175,463	73.6	1,275,938	1,136,442	89.1

Table I.2: Army

Fiscal year	Officers			Enlisted		
	Total	Included in our analyses	Percent	Total	Included in our analyses	Percent
1987	107,964	61,685	57.1	668,410	569,423	85.2
1988	106,963	60,172	56.3	660,445	564,453	85.5
1989	106,877	59,172	55.4	658,321	558,469	84.8
1990	104,862	56,505	53.9	641,341	543,263	84.7
1991	106,256	56,156	52.9	614,848	529,702	86.2
1992	95,201	49,807	52.3	511,834	456,486	89.2
1993	87,845	49,824	56.7	480,379	432,426	90.0

Table I.3: Air Force

Fiscal year	Officers			Enlisted		
	Total	Included in our analyses	Percent	Total	Included in our analyses	Percent
1987	107,338	95,367	88.9	495,244	469,466	94.8
1988	105,126	93,581	89.0	466,856	437,781	93.8
1989	103,697	91,300	88.0	462,831	429,754	92.9
1990	101,046	87,691	86.8	433,846	399,599	92.1
1991	96,702	86,508	89.5	409,765	380,349	92.8
1992	90,376	80,081	88.6	375,684	344,724	91.8
1993	84,073	73,545	87.5	356,126	328,627	92.3

Appendix II
Total Personnel Compared With Personnel
Included in Our Analyses by Service, Fiscal
Years 1987 Through 1993

Table I.4: Navy

Fiscal year	Officers			Enlisted		
	Total	Included in our analysis	Percent	Total	Included in our analysis	Percent
1987	72,038	55,690	77.3	510,208	431,302	84.5
1988	72,427	56,762	78.4	515,326	427,357	82.9
1989	72,153	56,414	78.2	515,898	421,519	81.7
1990	73,088	55,908	76.5	504,969	423,030	83.8
1991	71,152	54,856	77.1	495,627	416,073	84.0
1992	69,112	53,415	77.3	468,378	399,990	85.4
1993	66,346	52,094	78.5	439,433	375,389	85.4

Note: Total personnel shows actual end strengths at the end of each fiscal year and excludes cadets and midshipmen. Our analyses included authorized personnel positions in combat and support units. Specifically excluded from the analyses were general officers, warrant officers, and personnel in general support positions.

Source: DOD Comptroller provided service totals; the individual services provided data on authorized combat and support positions.

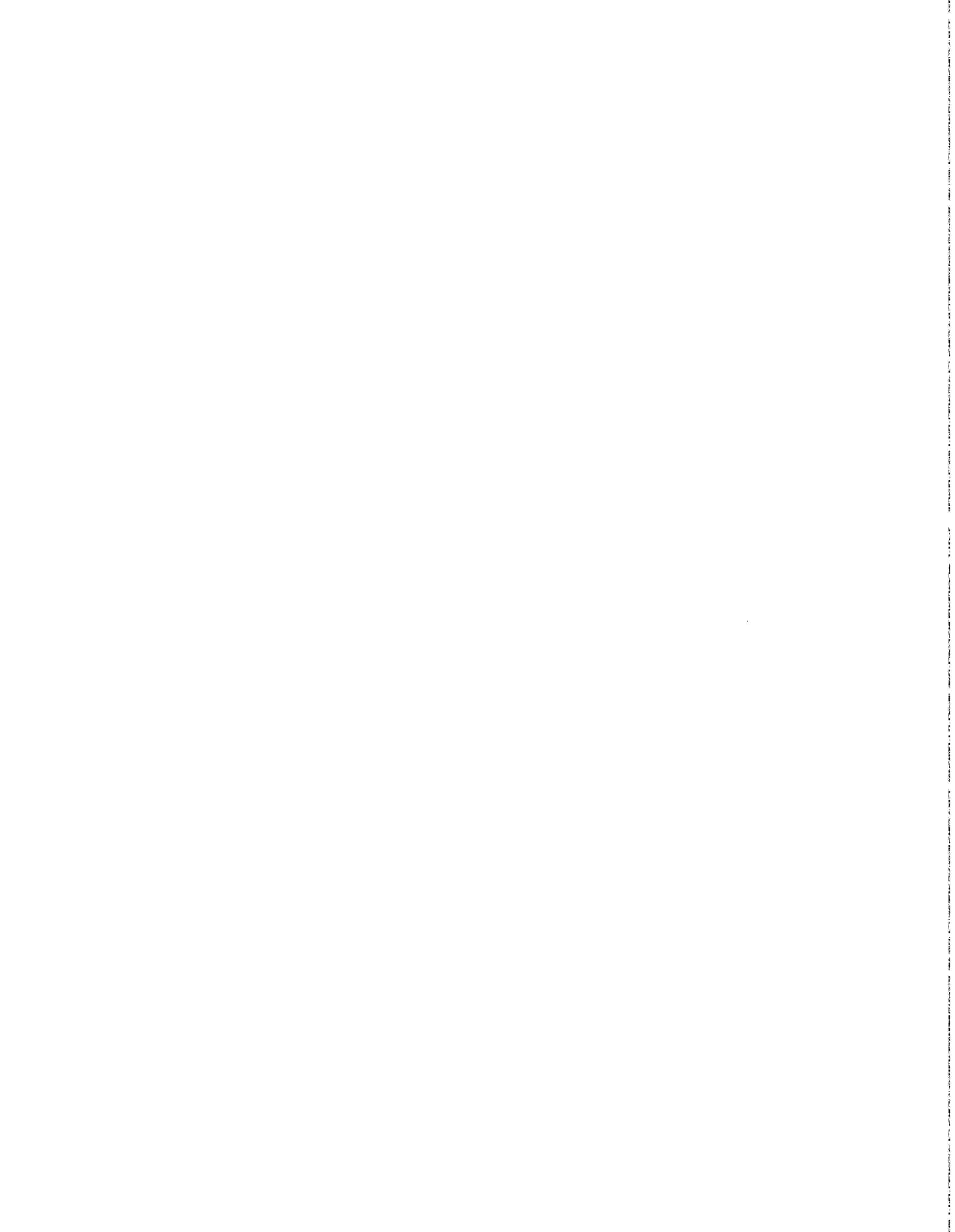
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