

9 Things to Know About Building a F.A.S.T Force



BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

1 America's national security depends on recruiting highly skilled, talented Americans to serve. Too often policymakers focus on the latest plane, ship, or tank while losing sight of the people who fly, sail, and drive them. We cannot forget that the foundation of the U.S. military's strength is the people who serve. To win future wars, the military must recruit highly skilled Americans to serve in uniform and as defense civilians, in specialties ranging from cybersecurity to language skills to logistics.

2 One size does not fit all—not everyone will be the Chief of Staff. The legacy one-size-fits-all personnel system needs to be replaced with a modern approach better suited to today's threats and missions. Predetermined career paths create high turnover and limit the development of individual technical expertise. A flexible personnel system would ensure troops are placed in assignments that maximize individual and team performance.

3 Policymakers can boost retention by ending the unofficial draft of military families. Our troops volunteer to serve, but their families are drafted. Military families are subject to frequent relocations and unpredictable separations that make it difficult for spouses to find work. Retention decisions are often influenced by a spouse's satisfaction with military life. By better accommodating military spouse

career goals, we can better retain the men and women already serving.

4 Stop trying to balance the budget on the backs of service members. The Budget Control Act took an axe to defense spending. The Pentagon responded by cutting end-strength and seeking to cut military pay and benefits. It is not possible to recruit and retain the best while also cutting their pay and increasing their responsibilities. Policymakers must repeal the Budget Control Act and create a sustainable military pay model that entices Americans to serve.

5 We cannot solve these problems by throwing money at them. Since 2001, the cost of military personnel has increased by over 50 percent. Yet during that time, the Army lowered recruiting standards, the Air Force faces a pilot retention crisis, and service members report stagnant satisfaction with military life. Competitive compensation is crucial for a high-quality force, but to truly increase the appeal of military service, the Pentagon must implement fundamental reform to how it recruits and retains its people.

6 Close the civilian-military divide. Fewer Americans are familiar with the military. To build a stronger force, the Defense Department must be able to harness the full potential of the American people. A transformed Selective Service System that helps

to connect promising young adults with the modern, professional force is an important first step towards repairing the bonds between the American people and their military.

7 Stop fighting the last war. Threats to U.S. national security are spreading geographically, transforming strategically, and evolving technologically. The U.S. military is trapped by Cold War-era personnel policy. This system must be replaced with one capable of building a flexible, innovative force that can rapidly adapt to emerging battlefields and tactics.

8 Determine U.S. national interests...then build a strategy. The military is a tool for advancing U.S. national interests. America's leaders must determine these interests and then build a defense strategy. The nation cannot afford to have a military that is backed into a strategy as a result of tradition or the defense budget.

9 Focus on the total force. The U.S. armed forces depend on contributions from active-duty, National Guard, reserve, and civilian personnel. Despite their combined importance, the Defense Department manages each component separately. Fundamental defense personnel reform must include all aspects of the total force and utilize each component to its maximum potential.