



CANADIAN GLOBAL AFFAIRS INSTITUTE
INSTITUT CANADIEN DES AFFAIRES MONDIALES

Modernizing the Military Personnel System: Lessons from the Force of the Future

by Lindsay Rodman
May 2018

POLICY UPDATE

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Prepared for the Canadian Global Affairs Institute
1800, 421 – 7th Avenue S.W., Calgary, AB T2P 4K9
www.cgai.ca

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ISBN: 978-1-77397-011-0



The Department of National Defence's (DND) new holistic Defence Policy Review, titled [*Strong, Secure, Engaged*](#) (SSE) included ambitious and thorough treatments of important new initiatives for the Canadian military. However, the document also leaves some placeholders in areas where further thought and consideration will be vitally important. One of these areas is modernizing the Canadian military personnel system.

Many of the initiatives in SSE were laudable but vague – they lacked detail about what specifically DND hopes to accomplish and how it intends to get there. At a CGAI conference on Oct. 4, 2017, Minister of Defence Harjit Sajjan promised that the public would soon see follow-on efforts from the government to better articulate the path forward. As Canada undergoes the process of fleshing out what will be required to achieve these initiatives, especially those related to military personnel modernization, there are lessons to be learned from a similar effort by the United States.

Former U.S. secretary of defense Ashton B. Carter [touts personnel modernization](#) among his proudest achievements during his tenure. During the tail end of the Obama administration, the United States adopted major personnel reforms. Introduced and implemented under the umbrella initiative named Force of the Future (FOTF), they included far-ranging efforts to bring the military personnel system into the 21st century. While many FOTF reforms represented significant improvements to the overall personnel system, there was also much unfinished business.

Canada's specific goals in personnel reform may naturally differ from those of the United States. The two systems do have important differences, e.g., the U.S. military's "up or out" paradigm, and the size and global engagement of the U.S. force. Nevertheless, the countries' societies and current labour market trends are substantially similar and the two systems grew out of similar historical approaches to talent management. Positive and negative lessons learned from the United States could prove helpful as Canada looks toward its next steps.

The Talent Management Agenda

Often the question of personnel modernization is confused with the question of technological competence. Modernizing the military personnel system is not only about employing a qualified and talented cyber-workforce. It is about ensuring that the people who maintain Canada's defence represent the most qualified talent that Canada has to offer, and that the system itself is not weeding the wrong people out through arcane methods and processes.

The modern North American workforce has different expectations and aspirations than the workforce for which the system was created. Today's labour market is dramatically different than it was a couple of decades ago. The new reality includes tech companies, millennials' expectations and the fact that 20-year careers with one organization are practically unheard of in the private



sector. Both the Canadian and American militaries need to figure out how to stay relevant and compete in this landscape.

Identifying the Problem

In the United States, FOTF concentrated on these questions, trying to address a slew of pressing challenges across the gamut of personnel issues. In recruiting, there was a concern that accession requirements were arbitrary, and that a pattern of recruiting from the same pipelines might be leading to a less diverse force. With respect to retention, a [cascade of articles](#) during the past decade from angry lieutenants and captains (“junior officers”) accused the military of marginalizing top talent and big thinkers in favour of conformists, leading to their attrition. In addition, the obvious paucity of women and minorities in senior leadership convinced some within the Pentagon that at the very least, its promotion and retention programs were selecting white men over all others – a signal that the system is not a meritocracy.

A critique of the current system is implicit in *SSE*’s personnel modernization initiatives. The seven major initiatives can be distilled into the same three areas of reform: recruitment, retention and diversity.

There were, however, detractors from the FOTF effort. Some senior leaders in the Pentagon, especially those in uniform, objected to the underlying assumptions in FOTF, i.e., that recruiting and retention were suffering and that talent was not being sufficiently managed. There was also some skepticism from Congress, [primarily from Senator John McCain](#). FOTF’s underlying assumption that the wrong people were being promoted and retained was not backed up by data (because none existed), and implicitly insulted the current top military brass. They were simply not convinced by anecdotes that the U.S. military had a talent problem.

Seven SSE Initiatives Related to Personnel Modernization

- 2) Implement a recruitment campaign to promote the unique full- and part-time career opportunities offered by the CAF, including hiring more women and increasing diversity.
- 5) Develop and implement a comprehensive Canadian Armed Forces retention strategy to keep our talented people in uniform.
- 6) Undertake a comprehensive review of conditions of service and career paths to allow much more personalized career choices and flexibility.
- 10) Promote diversity and inclusion as a core institutional value.
- 11) Appoint a diversity champion who will oversee the implantation of all aspects of the diversity strategy and action plan.
- 13) Place a new focus on recruiting and retaining under-represented populations within the Canadian Armed Forces, including but not limited to women, Indigenous peoples and members of visible minorities.
- 14) Aspire to be a leader in gender balance in the military by increasing the representation of women by one per cent annually over the next 10 years to reach 25 per cent of the overall force.



Six tranches of initiatives were rolled out through FOTF.¹ [The first](#), announced on Nov. 18, 2015, included specific efforts aimed at answering some of those critics. An Office of People Analytics was established, and exit surveys were implemented, both of which were intended to provide real data to establish the extent to which talent was being sufficiently managed. The data obtained through those efforts will take years to yield results. While five more tranches of meaningful initiatives were rolled out by the end of 2016, the major prize – legislative reform that would fundamentally change the military’s promotion system – remained on the table for a future administration’s consideration.

Addressing DOPMA

The United States’ “up or out” military personnel system, established through the [Defense Officer Personnel Management Act \(DOPMA\)](#) in 1980, is one important point of difference between the U.S. and Canadian military personnel systems. Under *DOPMA*, [there are time limits](#) that govern how long an officer can remain in any rank, before he or she must either be promoted or leave the service. *DOPMA* is still the framework upon which regulations and policies related to U.S. military personnel are built.

This is an important distinction because the Canadian military allows officers who are technically specialized and who do not aspire to move into higher officer ranks – which almost universally require generalist careers – to stay in service. However, the Canadian military does not have ways to promote or otherwise reward subject matter expertise; a characteristic shared by the U.S. military. Though *DOPMA* represents a significant point of departure between the two systems, the similarities outweigh the differences.

The Canadian military otherwise suffers from the same inflexibilities as the U.S. military. Officers are expected to move geographically every couple of years, if not more often. Those constant moves make military service relatively untenable for many members, including those whose spouses have civilian professional careers. From an officer’s perspective, job assignments can also be made relatively arbitrarily. In this day and age, military service may not need to be as inconvenient and sacrifice-oriented as it was in the past. At the very least, the assumptions associated with frequent moves should be questioned and validated.

Long-Term Commitment to Change

Now that the administration has changed in the United States, it is unclear what will happen to some of the most forward-leaning initiatives from FOTF. Nevertheless, many of the FOTF initiatives were either fully implemented, or were on a tough-to-reverse path toward implementation by the time of the 2016 election. Some of this was due to extensive budget

¹ A list of the initiatives is available in Appendix A.



planning, earmarking 2017 and 2018 funding for FOTF initiatives. For any personnel reform to work, in the United States or Canada, a solid budget plan into the outyears is absolutely essential.

A new government in Canada could affect the course of *SSE* reforms. Luckily, *SSE*'s vision does not appear to depend significantly on legislation. The more explicitly budget commitments in the outyears can be made now, the greater chance of enduring military personnel modernization.

Diversity

Canada has been doing a lot of thinking lately about women's advancement, and that shows in *SSE* as well. *SSE* committed to "gender-based analysis +" and to increasing female representation in the force to 25 per cent from the current 15 per cent. A recruiting campaign to increase female accessions is [already underway](#).

Female promotion and retention are separate matters. The Canadian military has consistently recruited above the 15 per cent mark, yielding officers cadets at well over 20 per cent. However, among general and flag officers, only 11 out of 113 are female (9.7 per cent), and only 7.2 per cent of colonels are female. A variety of factors might play into this drop-off. Two likely contributing factors are: women's under-representation in combat arms or operator-type roles (where promotion potential is higher), and higher attrition from women along the way due to family obligations. Without addressing these problems, recruiting efforts might increase percentages of officer cadets, but they will not significantly impact the number of women in the total force.



CANADA'S FORCE COMPOSITION²

Regular Force and Primary Reserve									
Rank	Strength	Men		Women		Aboriginal Peoples		Visible Minorities	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
GEN	1	1	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
LGEN	11	10	90.9	1	9.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
MGEN	33	32	100.0	1	0.0	0	0.0	1	3.4
BGEN	84	75	90.3	9	9.7	1	1.4	0	0.0
Col	406	377	92.8	29	7.2	5	1.1	10	2.6
LCol	1679	1468	86.4	211	13.6	22	1.3	54	2.9
Maj	4632	3819	81.6	813	18.4	72	1.4	232	5.2
Capt	8302	6741	81.1	1561	18.9	149	1.9	825	10.3
Lt	1685	1289	75.6	396	24.4	47	2.6	200	11.4
2Lt	2051	1729	85.0	322	15.0	33	1.6	400	18.4
OCDT	2462	1966	78.9	496	21.1	66	2.7	388	16.3
CWO	769	712	91.9	57	8.1	14	1.3	16	1.3
MWO	2594	2346	90.6	248	9.4	63	2.5	72	2.4
WO	4874	4238	86.8	636	13.2	115	2.5	135	2.2
Sgt	9433	7885	83.5	1548	16.5	237	2.6	438	3.3
MCpl	11505	9728	85.1	1777	14.9	290	2.6	684	4.9
Cpl	25088	21677	87.7	3411	12.3	834	3.4	2314	7.3
PTE	18344	15436	85.0	2908	15.0	618	3.7	1800	8.7
Totals	93953	79529	84.6%	14424	15.4%	2566	2.7%	7569	8.1%

Source: DHRD Employment Equity Database (Aboriginal and Visible Minority Statistics)

HRMS February 23, 2018 (Component, Rank and Gender)

Prepared February 27, 2018

The U.S. military faces a similar problem. The percentage of women in the U.S. military usually hovers between 15-16 per cent, though the figures used in this article, derived from 2016, show 18.8 per cent female representation. Nevertheless, once the general/flag officer ranks were reached, only 7.6 per cent (64/846) of those officers were female.

FOTF included a number of initiatives aimed at directly and indirectly encouraging women to stay in service. The direct initiatives were mostly in Tranche 2, and included things like mothers' rooms on military facilities and extended parental leave. One indirect initiative that the Pentagon often hails as a meaningful reform is the Career Intermission Pilot Program (CIPP), which allows military service members to take a break from service. Similar initiatives that attempt to address the major difficulties of staying in service, especially for women, could yield real results.

² Data broken out by active duty and reserve are available from the author.



U.S. MILITARY GENDER COMPOSITION

Pay Grade	Army		Navy		Marine Corps		Air Force		Total DoD	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
E1-E4	177,952	32,407	95,512	28,885	100,194	9,362	98,310	23,386	471,968	94,040
E5-E6	103,908	15,149	92,926	17,971	36,441	3,244	80,529	18,543	313,804	54,907
E7-E9	43,743	5,676	27,102	3,320	12,862	725	25,637	6,357	109,344	16,078
W1-W5	13,195	1,380	1,554	112	1,918	122	N/A*	N/A*	16,667	1,614
O1-O3	38,943	9,722	25,362	6,771	11,077	1,079	26,782	8,075	102,164	25,647
O4-O6	24,264	4,613	17,495	2,883	6,070	321	21,346	4,461	69,175	12,278
O7-O10	301	18	186	22	85	1	274	23	846	64
Subtotal DoD	402,306	68,965	260,137	59,964	168,647	14,854	252,878	60,845	1,083,968	204,628
Total DoD	471,271		320,101		183,501		313,723		1,288,596	

* The Air Force does not have warrant officers.

Source: DMDC Active Duty Military Personnel Master File (September 2016)

Racial diversity seems to be a harder challenge for Canada. While Canada is a bit over [25 per cent](#) minority from the [last census](#), the military is overwhelmingly white/non-Aboriginal. Much like women, as the ranks progress, Canada also sees a significant drop-off in non-white/Aboriginal representation. Of 113 general and flag officers, only one is a visible minority, and one is Aboriginal. Although *SSE* mentions improving diversity as a goal, there does not seem to be anywhere near the same attention to this problem within DND as there is to female representation.

The [United States is about 38 per cent minority](#). Although the United States has a long way to go toward achieving proportional representation within its military, it has performed a bit better than Canada on this front, even taking into account U.S. demographics. Achieving racial diversity requires meaningful commitment from leadership. FOTF Tranche 1 implemented an initiative requiring semi-annual diversity briefings. Perhaps more important, however, is what was happening behind the scenes. The undersecretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness had one of his right-hand assistants personally devoted to diversity. It remains to be seen whether some of the initiatives aimed at improving promotion rates for minority officers that came out of her efforts will yield results, but that attention and focus is necessary for real change. Given the notable difference in the level of attention paid to women’s advancement versus advancement of minorities in the Canadian military, it is not clear that Canada has truly committed to this matter. One possible exception is the level of attention being paid to Indigenous representation in Canadian government, and in the policy-making process, which could yield dividends in the military as well.



U.S. MILITARY MINORITY COMPOSITION

Pay Grade	Army		Navy		Marine Corps		Air Force		Total DoD	
	Racial Minority	Non-minority								
E1-E4	32.6%	67.4%	41.1%	58.9%	17.4%	82.6%	29.0%	71.0%	30.8%	69.2%
E5-E6	35.3%	64.7%	43.9%	56.1%	24.4%	75.6%	30.5%	69.5%	35.4%	64.6%
E7-E9	44.0%	56.0%	36.3%	63.7%	35.3%	64.7%	31.1%	68.9%	37.9%	62.1%
W1-W5	32.6%	67.4%	39.3%	60.7%	28.3%	71.7%	N/A*	N/A*	32.8%	67.2%
O1-O3	25.5%	74.5%	22.6%	77.4%	19.7%	80.3%	22.2%	77.8%	23.3%	76.7%
O4-O6	24.7%	75.3%	18.3%	81.7%	17.8%	82.2%	17.9%	82.1%	20.4%	79.6%
O7-O10	17.2%	82.8%	10.6%	89.4%	11.6%	88.4%	7.4%	92.6%	12.0%	88.0%
Total	33.3%	66.7%	38.3%	61.7%	20.5%	79.5%	28.0%	72.0%	31.4%	68.6%

* The Air Force does not have warrant officers.

Note: Racial minority includes Black or African American, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Multi-racial, and Other/Unknown.

Note: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

Source: DMDC Active Duty Military Personnel Master File (September 2016)

What is Missing from Canada's Agenda?

A great number of FOTF initiatives deal with professional military education. Part of the U.S. military's focus on talent management is also on talent development, i.e., looking toward experiential and educational opportunities for military officers that will help them develop into the type of strategic thinkers needed at the higher ranks. Such opportunities include corporate fellowships, master's degree programs and the ROTC program, which pays for officer candidates to go to undergraduate university while they receive additional training in officership. *SSE* is totally silent about similar initiatives, including no mention of Canada's Regular Officer Training Program (ROTP).

For the Canadian military to remain relevant and effective, the intellectual capital of Canada's military leadership cannot be forgotten. Recruiting and retaining the right people is only half of the battle – they must also be educated and challenged to become leaders. If that were not incentive enough, talent development initiatives also contribute to retention goals, since they are often highly sought-after opportunities.

Conclusion

As we all wait for more details about *SSE*'s implementation, including any initiatives, timelines or other details about how Canada is pursuing the goals articulated in *SSE*, now is the time to foster discussion about what successful personnel modernization might look like. Lessons to be learned from a similar U.S. experience include:



- Data-driven problem definition can help fight off critics.
- Sustained leadership passion and attention is key to success.
- Committing budget dollars, especially in the outyears, is essential to the survival of new initiatives.
- Retention and promotion are just as important as recruitment to solving talent management problems, especially with respect to diversity problems.
- Attention must be paid to visible minority and Aboriginal diversity, as well as to gender diversity.
- Talent management includes talent development.



APPENDIX A: FORCE OF THE FUTURE INITIATIVES (IN TRANCHES)

*Requires Legislation

TRANCHE 1 (Nov. 18, 2015)

- Improve and Enhance College Internship Programs
- Establish the Defense Digital Service
- Launch the Entrepreneur-in-Residence Program
- Designate Chief Recruiting Officer
- Expand Secretary of Defense Corporate Fellows Program
- Increase Size of the Career Intermision Program
- Update and Modernize Retirement System
- Implement Web-Based Talent Management System
- Establish Office of People Analytics
- Implement Exit Surveys
- Examine Ways to Improve Recruiting
- Diversity Briefings
- *Additional Initiatives*
 - o Talent Management Centers of Excellence
 - o Civilian Skills in Reserve Component
 - o Compensation Study
 - o Increased Use of Reserve Component Service Members
 - o Doctoral-Level Program in Strategy
 - o Center for Talent Development
 - o Civilian Human Capital Innovation Laboratory
 - o Defense Innovation Network
 - o Active and Reserve Component Permeability



TRANCHE 2 (January 2016)

- Establish a DoD-wide Standard of Paid Maternity Leave of 12 Weeks
- Expanding Paternity Leave to 14 Days
- Expanding Adoption Leave
- Extend Childcare Development Center Hours to a 14-Hour Minimum
- Modify or Install Mothers' Rooms at Each Military Installation
- Examine Additional Options for Childcare Services
- Allow Service Members to Remain at a Station of Choice for Family Reasons
- Provide Egg and Sperm Cryopreservation

TRANCHE 3 (June 9, 2016)

- Enhanced Lateral Entry Authority*
- Voluntary "Opt-Out" of Promotion Cycle*
- Permit Adjustment of Lineal Numbers*
- Promote Flexibility for Critical Career Fields*
- Modernize U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command (MEPCOM)
- Expand Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies (JAMRS)/Defense Manpower Data Center Micro-targeting to Create a Recruiting Database

TRANCHE 4: (June 9, 2016) [Civilian-focused initiatives]

- Enable Direct Hiring of Students and Recent Graduates*
- Establish a Public-Private Talent Exchange*
- Expand Use of Voluntary Separation Incentive Pay*
- Provide 6 Weeks of Paid Parental Leave for DoD Civilian Employees*
- Leverage Authority to Employ Highly Qualified Experts (HQEs)
- Leverage Career Broadening Rotational Programs
- Increase the Use of Science, Mathematics, and Research for Transformation (SMART) Defense Scholarships



- Allow Optional Parental Phased Return Through Part-Time Work after the Birth or Adoption of a Child
- Expand the Use of the Student Training and Academic Recruitment (STAR) Program
- Better Leverage Civilian Employee Training Funds
- Remove Barriers to Mobility Between Civilian Jobs in Different DoD Components

TRANCHE 5: (Nov. 1, 2016)

- Create a Speakers Bureau of senior leaders and subject matter experts from across DoD to engage with and educate key audiences on the value and benefits of military service to both the individual and the Nation.
- Conduct a Comprehensive Review of DoD Outreach Programs that engage with America's youth and those who influence them, in their homes, schools, and communities.
- Provide a Menu of Options that each Military Service Can Tailor to its Unique Recruiting Needs.
- [Increase] Fund[ing for] the DoD Joint Advertising Marketing Research & Studies (JAMRS) program
- Enhance Military Recruiter Access to High School Students
- Expand partnerships between the Armed Forces YMCAs and Boys and Girls Clubs and the military

TRANCHE 6: (Nov. 1, 2016) [ROTC-focused initiatives]

- Engage with Top Tier colleges and universities with ROTC Detachments
- Provide a Menu of Options [for ROTC] that each Military Service Can Tailor to its Unique Needs.
- Direct the Military Department Secretaries to add language, where and when applicable, to ensure promotion and selection board precepts value ROTC assignments/affiliations
- Direct the Military Services to conduct a quadrennial review and validation of the content and packaging of ROTC Training Manuals and academic curricula.
- Require an annual report from the Military Departments to the Secretary of Defense detailing the specific training opportunities each Military Service makes available to its ROTC cadets and the associated costs and benefits.
- Provide a Menu of Options that each Service Can Tailor to its Unique Needs [to Enhance the Quality of ROTC Instructors and Instruction]



- Measure and record the critical value of the overall ROTC program by developing assessment tools, including objective criteria and metrics of effectiveness, by which to evaluate and improve the performance of ROTC units.
- Establish the “ROTC Futures Award” as an annual award program to recognize educational institutions and ROTC cadre/instructors for outstanding support and facilitation of a successful ROTC program (akin to the Secretary of Defense “Freedom Award” for employers who support the National Guard and Reserve).
- Provide a Menu of Options that each Military Service Can Tailor to its Unique Needs [to Enhance ROTC Program Administration]

► About the Author

Lindsay L. Rodman is the Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow (Canada), placed at the University of Ottawa's Centre for International Policy Studies (CIPS). She is a U.S. attorney and an expert in U.S. defence and foreign policy, and recently joined CFR (a U.S.-based think tank) and CIPS after leaving the Obama Administration, where she served in the Pentagon as Senior Advisor for International Humanitarian Policy. Prior to her political appointment, she was an active duty judge advocate in the U.S. Marine Corps, serving in various roles, including as Deputy Legal Counsel to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and as the Operational Law Attorney for 1st Marine Division (FWD) in Afghanistan. Her last assignment as an active duty Marine was in the White House as Director for Defense Policy and Strategy at the National Security Council. She remains in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves. Prior to joining the Marine Corps, Lindsay was an associate at the law firm of Arnold & Porter LLP (now Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer) in Washington, DC. She is a graduate of Harvard Law School (JD, 2007), the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University (MPP, 2007), and Duke University (AB Mathematics, 2003).

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