

Are America's Political Agendas Making Its Military Weak?

As a result of the Biden administration mandating political ideologies in the military, the U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force have all reported that they missed the military's annual recruiting goals this year by a combined 12%, which is nearly 20,000 recruits short—the worst since the U.S. military became an all-volunteer force in 1973. The military needs about 160,000 people a year to join to meet its recruitment goals and sustain its strength.

While most of the military services met their recruiting goals last year, they have also had to pay out hefty sign-up bonuses up to \$75,000 and lower entry standards to get there. Despite these efforts, the Army has fallen well short of its goals for two years straight, missing the mark by 10,000 troops in 2023 and by 15,000 in 2022. These shortfalls bring the Army's current manpower strength to its lowest level since 1940. The Army's current strength has prompted many military leaders, retired generals and defense analysts to raise concerns about the nation's national security and to investigate the potential reasons many Americans are now declining to serve in the military.

According to a March 2023 analysis by the National Independent Panel on Military Service and Readiness, there is a correlation between the recruiting shortfalls and growing politicization in the military. The Heritage Foundation commissioned the panel, which consisted of defense experts, analysts, retired generals and others who were “selected based on their demonstrated devotion to and concern for national defense, their experience with the U.S. military, and their expertise regarding the U.S. Armed Forces' capabilities.

The panel's report illustrated several polls showing sharp drops in the American public's trust and confidence in the military due in part to political and ideological reasons. One poll from the Reagan Foundation in November 2022 found trust in the military among Americans dropped from 70% down to 48%. Coinciding with this poll was The Heritage Foundation's own poll, revealing 68% of active-duty personnel have witnessed politicization in the military to the point where the members stated it would impact their decision to encourage their own children to join.

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While the panel stated "ridding the military of diverse ideologies" would not happen quickly, they did recommend eliminating, changing or redirecting many recent Pentagon efforts that have "no linkage to warfighting." The panel attributed the following efforts as hurting military recruiting:

Pentagon's 'Sweeping Embrace of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Ideology'

According to the panel, the Pentagon is starting to "view all matters through the lens of DEI," which negatively impacts not only the public's perception of the military but also military culture. One of these manifestations of DEI is training personnel in critical race theory, "an ideology rooted in Marxism that claims that America is fatally flawed by systemic racism and ruled by white privilege." Both Army and Air Force cadets are being taught to be "color conscious" rather than colorblind, while the Navy has set up Task Force One Navy for Sailors to examine and acknowledge interpersonal biases and intersectional identities. The panel noted these concepts are the antithesis to unit cohesion which depend on the concepts of equal "opportunity, meritocracy, and colorblindness" to

achieve warfighting effectiveness. The panel stated that rather than subordinating personal identities and subgroups for the sake of fighting together as one team, the Pentagon is injecting divisive “identity considerations unrelated to leadership ability or military skills” not only “diluting combat effectiveness” but likely preventing potential recruits from signing up to serve.

Department of Defense’s ‘Blatant Support for Partisan Issues’

For example, following the overturn of Roe v. Wade in June 2022, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin announced that the DOD would pay for service members to travel to different states to receive abortions. The Heritage poll shows this led to a 43% decrease of trust among respondents. Also, regarding climate change, the panel reported “70 percent of active-duty personnel and 34 percent of a nationally representative sample stated that the focus on climate change as a top national security threat has decreased their trust in the military.”

The COVID-19 Shot Mandate

More than 8,300 service members were involuntarily discharged from the military due to objections to the shot and nearly all religious accommodation requests to abstain from taking it were uniformly denied. As a result of Liberty Counsel’s class action lawsuits in Navy SEAL 1 v. Austin and Colonel Financial Management Officer, et al. v. Austin, Liberty Counsel obtained multiple restraining orders and injunctions, including a class-wide injunction, forcing the DOD to abandon its mandate. The Pentagon was then ordered to pay Liberty Counsel \$1.8 million for attorney’s fees and costs after two years of litigation since the Biden administration issued the memoranda mandating that service members receive the COVID-19 shot. The panel stated “allowing members who are HIV positive, are suffering from gender dysphoria, or failing to meet long-standing combat standards while simultaneously discharging people without a COVID-19 vaccine demonstrates the political

nature of these decisions while further engendering mistrust.”

‘Lowering of Standards in the Pursuit of a “Level Playing Field”‘

In the first week of the Biden administration, Joe Biden removed enlistment restrictions on transgender individuals who suffer from gender dysphoria. The panel stated allowing individuals who are “medically pre-disposed to severe anxiety and who attempt suicide at rates 10 times the general population” to enter the military hurts its readiness. While the panel also reported the military has promoted “pride” events and drag queen story hours at base venues, the media has reported that the Navy even went as far as promoting an active duty sailor in drag as a “digital ambassador” in its marketing strategy. According to Heritage’s poll, 80% of active-duty personnel and 35% of a nationally representative sample stated that allowing “unrestricted service by transgender individuals in the military has decreased their trust in the military.”

In addition to The Heritage Foundation, the Center for Military Readiness released a policy report on the military stating that the “quiet expansion” of these policies have been enacted without “public debate or congressional action,” and that the specific “transgender” policies are compromising both readiness and morale in the military.

Earlier this month, Army Secretary Christine Wormuth stated the recruitment failures of the Army are due to “a lot of things happening that are outside of the United States Army’s ability to control.” She attributed recruitment lapses to a competitive labor market and a scarcity of Americans that are both eligible and desire to join.

Yet on April 19, 2023, General James McConville, the outgoing senior leader of the Army, testified before Congress while sitting right next to Wormuth that the Army’s transgender

inclusion policies were “probably not” helping recruitment.

In addition, on Dec. 3, 2022, then commandant of the Marine Corps General David Berger acknowledged before the Reagan National Defense Forum that the COVID-19 shot mandate had a negative impact on recruiting. While expressing support for the mandate, Gen. Berger noted how “politicized” the COVID environment became and how potential recruits were immediately disinterested in enlisting after finding out they had to get the COVID shot.

Gen. Berger stated, “You talk to me in the cafeteria, and one of my first questions is, ‘Do I have to get that vaccine?’ And you go, ‘Yeah, you do.’ OK, I’ll talk to you later. It’s that fast.”

Retired Lt. Gen. William Boykin, a 36-year Army veteran and co-founder of the Army’s elite Delta Force unit, recently told the Family Research Council that while Russia, China, Iran and North Korea are building up their strength to fight against America, the U.S. military is “failing” to prepare for war. Boykin emphasized the military is “doing things that have nothing to do with preparing for war.”

Boykin stated, “[W]e’re not attracting these young men and women across America because we are offering them nothing but bullying and woke agenda training,” and giving them “critical race theory and inclusion training.” Boykin noted “that does not make you feel like a warrior.”

Notably, the U.S. Marine Corps’ decades old marketing strategy advertises they are looking for “the few, the proud” to be tough, disciplined warriors to fight the nation’s battles. Even though the Marine Corps is not immune to Biden administration policies, their recruiting success shows no sign of slowing down. According to the Marines, they have met their 2023 recruitment goal of 28,900 and already have a head start on 2024 while offering no new bonuses and keeping entry

standards high.

Berger said, "Your bonus is you get to call yourself a Marine."

Liberty Counsel founder and Chairman Mat Staver said, "Leaders in the military need to reject divisive political ideologies and change their focus back to being able to fight and win wars. A focus on warfighting means developing new capabilities, mastering combat tactics, understanding the enemy and deploying mentally and physically tough service members. Focusing on these things rather than harmful political agendas will inspire the right people to serve. As a result, America will once again have a strong military that can defend our freedoms." {eoa}

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