

# **RETENTION OF MILITARY PERSONNEL. PRACTICE OF THE GEORGIAN DEFENSE FORCES AND EXPERIENCE OF THE US ARMY**

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*Having defense forces that meets modern requirements is essential for the development and stability of Georgia, protection of national interests, overcoming the threats facing the country, national security priorities and implementation of strategic choices. To achieve these goals, the country is focused on building combat-ready, well equipped and trained defense forces, which also includes planning of military personnel, recruitment, retention, career development and separation/retirement of military personnel. It should be mentioned that management of the military personnel in the Georgian Defense forces and defining the ways which lead to achieve the set goals are based on guidelines of NATO standards, US and Western experience and recommendations of international organizations, as well as NATO commitments. The article consists of an introduction, a main part and a conclusion. The introduction of the work presents the practical and the theoretical significance of the article. The main part presents the theoretical and practical aspects of conducting the process of retaining military personnel in Georgian Defense Forces and the experience of the US Army. The conclusion introduces the results and recommendations for the development of the military retention system and its future prospects.*

**Key words:** *Retention; Retention program; Retention of military personnel; Retention NCO.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Retention of military personnel is one of the important functions of the „life cycle“ of military personnel management. It is due to the close connection with other functions in the „life cycle“ of military management such as planning military personnel, recruitment, career development and separation/retirement. As a matter of fact the process of retaining military personnel balances the existence of qualified personnel with its inflow and outflow resources, helps the system to achieve a high standard of combat readiness, attracts professional personnel, and manages their professional career, development and dignified retirement, as well as the popularity of the system. Accordingly any success or failure in the process of retaining military personnel affects other functions of the „life cycle“ of military personnel management.

To create an effective system of retaining of military personnel in Georgian Defense Forces, it is important to study the experience of the US Army, to analyze the essence and purpose of the retention of military personnel, its theoretical and practical role. Defining appropriate tactics which corresponds to the strategic orientations of the military personnel management: „career management, recruitment, development and retention of talented and skilled personnel“ [1].

## 2. PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF RETAINING MILITARY PERSONNEL

The process of retaining military personnel in the Army serves in a broad sense as retaining qualified personnel, managing attrition and helping to meet the needs of the Army in terms of manning military personnel.

According to the regulations of retaining personnel of the US Army National Guard „Retention is the process of retaining ARNG Soldiers who reach their expiration terms of service (ETS). Attrition management is the process of reducing Soldier losses from within the ARNG while still under contractual obligation“ [2]. In other definition „retaining process is a process of keeping employees on the staff, and not losing them to rival firms“ [3].

It should be noted that the US army retention military personnel regulation is compiled in the form of a guideline in the „Army Retention NCO program“.

According to the guideline objectives are defined as following:

„A. Reenlist, on a long term basis, sufficient numbers of eligible RA Soldiers to support end-strength and readiness requirements.

B. Enlist, or transfer, and assign sufficient numbers of eligible Soldiers who are separating from the RA into RC units, consistent within geographic constraints.

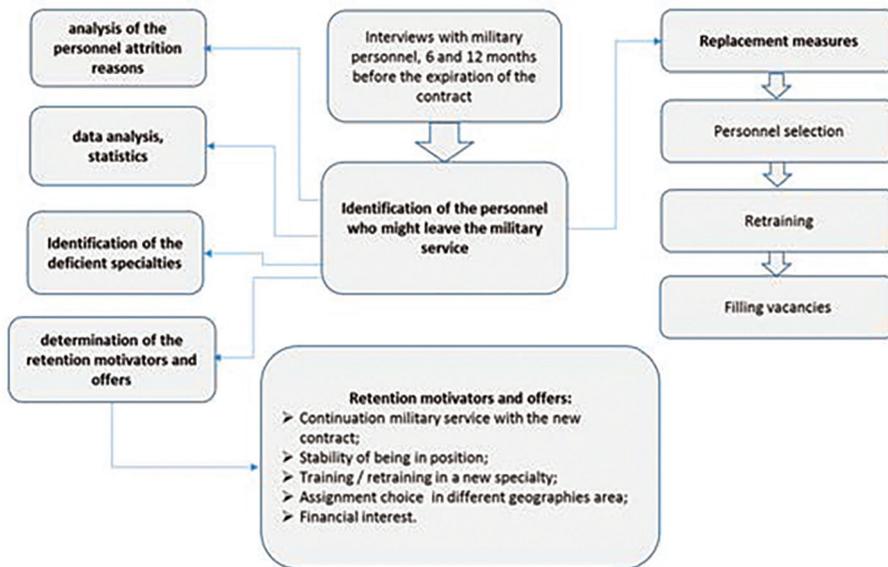
C. Achieve and maintain Army force alignments through the retention, transfer, or enlistment of highly qualified soldiers in critical skills and locations.

D. Adequately support special programs such as United States Military Academy Preparatory School (USMAPS) and Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) Green to Gold programs“ [4].

It is noteworthy that significant attention is paid to personnel retention in Georgian Defense Forces as well as in other countries, however, early identification of the target audience for retention work, lack of adequate resources and lack of communication between authorities and soldiers can hamper retention system to work efficiently. The retaining military personnel in the Army becomes especially urgent when the number of attrition exceeds the number of recruiting personnel. In order to implement effectively the personnel retention process in the Georgian Defense Forces, a “Personnel Retention Manual” was approved in 2008. It is significant that the guideline was created at a time when the ongoing changes in Georgia were related to the choice of Georgia's strategic partnership, the European and the Euro- Atlantic vector and state system were moving to a

qualitatively new stage. The process of reforming and institutionalizing the system of the Ministry of Defense had begun. Thus, the most important changes that carried out during this period and which was based on the analysis of the problems and challenges of the Defense Forces was the establishment of a retention system of the personnel. A guideline was made up to define: objectives of retention of military personnel, policy, the methodology of data collection of recruitment and attrition.

According to the „Personnel Retention Guideline“, the system of retention of Georgian Defense Forces provides timely identification of professional contracted military personnel who may leave their positions after expiring their contract. In accordance with the same guideline, the purpose of retention, as shown in the chart 1, is to select, retrain and fill vacancies with properly qualified personnel to substitute former personnel. Also, based on the information obtained, facilitate the analysis and statistics of the reasons for the attrition of military personnel, identify the deficient specialties and determine the additional motivation needed for the retention [5].



**Fig.1** Goals of the process of retaining military personnel

Thus, it is clear that the objectives of the retention guidelines of both countries (The USA and Georgia) are in close agreement with each other in theory, in particular, the main emphasis and efforts are aimed at maintaining the level of readiness of the army, recruiting, selecting and retaining the personnel, supporting training programs and increasing motivation. At the same time, it is important in the theoretical-practical aspect how consistent the mechanisms for the implementation of the set goals are. It should be noted that the practical aspects of the regulation and implementation take an important role in the retention system. In the Georgian Defense

Forces the practical part of the process of retaining military personnel is initiated from the General Staff. Twice a year requests are sent in the military units to prepare information on the expiration of military service contracts (quantitative monthly data for the forthcoming year). The list of interviewed personnel is prepared, according to the document officers and sergeants should be selected for the interview, they should be properly instructed about their responsibilities and duties. Then interview is conducted with the military personnel in accordance with the schedule and the list of the military personnel whose contract expires 12 and 6 months in advance, the

special forms are filled in to identify the personnel who does not have a wish to extend the contract. After collecting the certain information in the military units the data is sent to the Personnel Department where the data is collected. The next stage after collecting the data is to review the list and reveal the deficient specialists who will get certain offers according to the “Personnel Retention Guideline”. The list of offers is not very extensive. It consists of 5 offers:

A. being interested in prolonging the service contract (one-time financial compensation after a specified period).

B. Stability of being employed on a certain position.

C. training for other specialties.

D. deployment according to the geographical location.

E. Financial interest [5].

Practice reveals that military personnel show little interest in the offers set out in the „Personnel Retention guideline“ main requests are on the choice of geographical deployment, however, it is a very small number in comparison with the total attrition, and for the rest of the offers there is almost no demand or just several request precedents in practice. It is noteworthy that the number of military personnel

who were officially resigned from the Defense Forces within the deadline (12 and 6 months before the expiration of the contract) is significantly exceeds the number of military personnel who left the Defense Forces at the expiration of their contract. It literary turns out that the target audience with whom the system was supposed to work on retention was not perfectly defined. In order to clarify the issue, the study of internal organizational climate in the military units should be the subject of research, why there is a feeling to restrain military personnel from announcing in advance the desire to terminate the contract. Therefore it can be assumed that the problem is the lack of communication with military personnel, inexperience commanders and personnel working on retention issues (officers, sergeants) or formally non-performing duties imposed on them. Along with the retention of military personnel, the influence of the external factors of the system on the attrition of the personnel is noteworthy. Existing competition in the employment market, labor remuneration rates, demographic situation, etc. should be analyzed. In terms of retention of military personnel the USA experience is interesting, where

retention of military personnel is a functional duty for a specially trained retention NCOs. For this purpose, retention NCOs are assigned to the battalion and high-level units who perform mentioned functions, while in companies and the same size units these functions are specially selected for military service as an additional duty. Responsibilities for additional retention issues are shared by commanders and career counselors. Overall, they are a group working on retention issues.

Working group on retention issues: this is a group of all level commander staff, career advisers, full-time retention sergeants (above the battalion level). Retention sergeants of additional functions (company level). It is recommended that every 100 soldiers have one or more retention sergeants, assigned by the order of chief commanders or by the unit commanders who have additional function. While forming a retention group the objectives are set to formulate the objectives of retaining military personnel and keeping them for further additional service in the army. Setting objectives involves calculating the number of the retained personnel, predicting estimated losses and attrition rate, determining readiness

reduction coefficients, determining the indicators and providing army requirements in terms of manning and replenishment of the military personnel.

While selecting the retention staff several aspects and necessary skills should be taken into account: communication skills, how well they will be able to conduct the interview, conversations with target audience. Group members are required to be familiar with the system, to have up-to date information, to gain knowledge regularly about the system offers to employees and citizens. Group members also should be aware of administrative activities, gathering information, preparing inference and reports, being able to create individual files for interviews and surveys. Special exercises and trainings are provided to the group members in order to carry out their supervisory functions and responsibilities. They are introduced to defined functions, accounting rules and control mechanisms.

Trainings for military personnel is held periodically to enhance, improve and develop their professional level, such as: pre-training institutional, knowledge retention, quarterly training and training based on procedures

developed by the organizational unit. Methods of trainings are the followings: workshops, virtual tutorials, classroom working etc.

While working on the retention issues of the military personnel great attention is paid to the resources used, such as: received documents and regulations, Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), reports on retention analysis, retention materials (files, binders), control of the data of structural units soldiers, contract dates and survey results. Career advisers consult with newly recruited military personnel, informing them of units tasks and programs. As a result of consultation military personnel receives the essential and extensive information on how the army is operated, how to take care of soldiers, is informed about the promotion system, education opportunities, benefits, military school programs, ways of reclassification, designation sequences and other information that allows them to formulate short and long term goals for their military career.

It should be mentioned that the function of career counselors also includes to identify the selection of a military personnel and the designation relevance. Establish a retention-oriented consultation schedule and

specify the feasible dismissal period. Design a career development plan for the military personnel, which includes eliminating family and other problems that may hinder career development. After two or three months of service the recurring sessions are held with the military personnel, to help career counselors make sure that the reality, incentives, promises and benefits corresponds to their wishes and expectations. If problems are revealed commanders should help to solve them.

As for the activities for specially trained retention NCOs, they are responsible for enhancing the readiness of the unit. Retention sergeants have a direct relationship (subordination) with unit commanders on matters related to the retention of military personnel. They are required to make recommendations on retaining plan implementation and activities, identify retention problems, and assist managers in making decisions. Organize timely planning of interviews with leaders. They participate in the training process as needed, Assist high ranking sergeants in the implementation and monitoring of „the sponsorship program“. Retention sergeants also work in coordination with human

resource management specialists to provide proper and timely completion of contract extension documents. Conversations with soldiers about revealing and solving retention problems are regularly held. All kinds of publications, announcements and other methods are provided by the readiness of the units. Organize monthly, quarterly and annual briefings. As mentioned above, one of the tasks of retention sergeants is to conduct interviews with the soldiers. The purpose of a retention interview is to understand the soldier's intention, to understand the reasons behind the decision. These decision interviews are conducted at the end of military service and are aimed at extending the length of military service of trained (qualified) soldier, offering a variety of options and decision making capabilities. The periodicity of interviews on retention issues and the content of interviews conducted by various members of the retention team, e. g. 365-331 days before the expiration date of the contract, the soldier is interviewed by a retention NCOs to identify the requirements and incentives for retention by the soldier. 330-240 days before the expiration of the contract, the commander of the upper rank conducts an interview

with the soldier, and learns about the soldier's physical condition, weight and height standards, health condition, and incentives. 240-180 days before the expiration of the contract, high-ranking sergeant (commander) conducts an interview with the soldier and informs the motivators, which may support the retention.

In total, at least eight official interviews are conducted with the soldiers, which include a written plan for conducting interviews up to 30 days before the expiration of the contract. As a result, the army forms a continuous intensive chain of retention, communication with soldiers in relation with the commander staff [4].

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

International experience shows that to maintain modern requirements of the Army, the development, to develop mechanisms for managing the retention and attrition of military personnel, provides an effective retention system. And, its institutional development creates prerequisite for the system to cope with the expected challenges.

**It is preferable** to select personnel working on the retention of military personnel, to form a group based on their skills, performance

appraisal indicators and ensuring their professional development.

**It is recommended** to analyze the process of retention of military personnel, both in theoretical and practical aspects. Adequate systemic changes are carried out as needed: structural reorganization, proper delegation of functions. Providing financial, human, information, legal and technological resources.

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