



## **Job Changes on Fort Stir ‘Mass Panic’**

By Derek Jordan

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SIERRA VISTA — A little more than a month after the head of the Department of Defense announced sweeping changes to the military’s reliance on defense contractors, the impact of his decision on Fort Huachuca is beginning to take shape.

During an August statement announcing renewed efforts to create a more efficient Department of Defense, Defense Secretary Robert Gates noted the ballooning use of contractors in all levels of the department, “from 26 percent of the DoD workforce in 2000 to 39 percent a year ago.” Some of the roles these contractors are filling, like managing other contractors, can and should be done by full-time government employees, Gates said.

On Fort Huachuca, the number of contractors working at the U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence has skyrocketed in the same time frame, according to Mike Reid, director of resource management for the intelligence center.

“Prior to 9/11, we had less than 100 contractors working at the intelligence center. Today, we have over 1,400,” Reid said. The bulk of these positions, more than 900, are instructors in the various areas of intelligence taught at the center.

That growth reflects not only a growing reliance on outside contractors, but also “how much intelligence missions have grown since the global war on terrorism. There’s been a huge change in how the Army fights the war and the needs that it has for trained people in various disciplines to meet the various needs of the war.”

At the same time the intelligence center was growing in importance, it started losing the soldiers who normally staffed its classrooms.

“A lot of military intelligence soldiers were being pulled over to Iraq and Afghanistan, leaving less available to man places like this,” Reid said.

As a result, “we had to fill that gap with contracted personnel.”

Now, with the call from the Defense Department’s most senior officials to streamline operations and reduce the use of support contractors, the intelligence center and other sectors of fort operations began to look at what positions could be insourced without impacting training efforts.

Over the summer, “we conducted those reviews and identified a portion of our workforce for insourcing,” and 151 positions were approved for conversion to Army civilians, Reid said.

By far, the largest impact on any operation on post, 133 instructor and 38 training development and support positions were to be in-sourced.

While it was understood that those contracted employees who were already holding these positions on the fort and had been doing their jobs well would stand out from those who applied for these new Army civilian positions, the openings, by law, were available to any qualified U.S. citizen, "so it was not a guarantee that those people were going to be the ones in those jobs," Reid said.

Adding to the confusion and anxiety over the situation was the reduced staffing of the intelligence center scheduled to take effect with the start of the new fiscal year Oct. 1.

Completely separate from the insourcing efforts, 107 contracted instructor positions were set to be cut from the center due to two major factors.

First was a major drop in the number of soldiers that the Army required to go through this type of training, Reid said.

"That number changes every year," he said. With fewer students to teach, fewer instructors are needed.

The second factor contributing to the cut was the fact that more and more military intelligence soldiers were returning from theater in Iraq and Afghanistan or not being called overseas, leaving the intelligence center with more soldiers to staff its classrooms and less of a need to fill gaps with government contractors.

"This coming year, our fill rates have improved to a point they've not been at for four years," Reid said. "So because we had more military instructors available and we had a drop in student throughput, it caused us to need to let go 107 contract instructors, and that had nothing to do with the insourcing whatsoever."

When the push to in-source was announced, the reaction of some of the defense contractors in the area was not a particularly positive one, according to some former employees.

"It was mass panic," said Justin Robinson.

Many contractors suddenly found themselves faced with struggling to gain a job against hundreds of their peers.

"There were a lot of people freaking out," Matt Cook said. "There was a lot of people finding other jobs, there were a lot of people not finding other jobs, and trying to cling tenaciously to the job they already had."

He continued, "Basically, they said they were getting rid of 190 contract positions and only replenishing that with 83 (Army civilian) positions, so there was a big group of contractors saying to themselves, 'Why would they pick me over all of these other people?'" Cook said.

Reasoning like that sent many of their fellow co-workers elsewhere to find jobs, while others, such as Cook and Robinson, stuck around.

"I just got dug into Sierra Vista," Cook said. "I just bought a house. I don't really want to leave. My other options were to get a job in another state or deploy as a civilian, or to go back into the military, and none of those options seemed very appealing."

Cook and Robinson were some of the luckier ones who managed to get one of the coveted Army civilian positions, and were going through a recent orientation course on their new benefits as government employees when they were interviewed for this report.

"I don't expect the recession to recover until 2012," said Robinson, explaining his reasoning for pursuing an insourced position, "which means they will probably cut again."

Robinson's prediction may not be far off the mark, as the defense secretary also announced in August a 10 percent cut to overall funding of support contractors each year for the next three years. While there's little doubt these cuts are going to have a direct impact on the intelligence center, it is still unclear exactly how those impacts will play out.

"We have not been given the exact reductions yet, but we are expecting that to come," Reid said. Some of the specifics yet to be hammered out in Washington include whether the reduction will come out of the main defense budget passed by Congress or from supplemental funding that typically comes later.

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