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**NATIONAL SERVICE AS AN ALTERNATIVE FOR  
MILITARY CONSCRIPTION**

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NATIONAL SERVICE AS AN ALTERNATIVE FOR MILITARY CONSCRIPTION

by

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## SUMMARY

The purpose of this essay is to analyze National Service as a possible alternative approach to military conscription as a means for providing the necessary manpower to support the armed forces. It considers the requirements of military recruitment, military officer procurement, and retention of trained personnel, in relation to national attitudes, historic precedents, objectives of national service, and other methods for meeting military manpower requirements. The essay concludes that the method of procuring military personnel is related to the quantity of personnel required from the national manpower pool, and that while National Service could be an effective means for distributing manpower to the armed forces and other national programs, it is neither appropriate to the 1971 political environment, nor required to meet post Vietnam military manpower requirements.

## INTRODUCTION

"The problem of providing manpower for our Armed Forces has been with us since the founding of the republic."<sup>1</sup> Throughout its history the United States has relied on voluntary armed forces except during major wars and since 1948.<sup>2</sup> However, the continuing cold war and accompanying low level of conflict since that time has made the retention of military conscription a necessity in order to maintain our forces at the level required to meet our national commitments. Over the past five years considerable thought has been given to alternatives for conscription. The principal alternatives are universal military service, some form of national service program to include nonmilitary service, or all volunteer armed forces. A major factor in determining the best alternative is the size of the armed forces required to support our National Strategy.

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel H. Hays, Defense Manpower: The Management of Military Conscription, (Washington: Industrial College of the Armed Forces, 1968), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>The Report of the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 6, (hereafter referred to as Report of the President's Commission).

## MILITARY PERSONNEL REQUIREMENTS

During the last sixteen years our armed forces have averaged about three million men with the maximum and minimum numbering not more than five hundred thousand above or below that figure. Requirements for the foreseeable future are likely to be between these limits. The total requirements for new active duty personnel to maintain these force levels ranges from just less than half a million entrants in the lower strength periods to about double that number during periods of major buildup.<sup>3</sup> Volunteers reduce the required draft to as few as 100,000 to 300,000 persons each year.<sup>4</sup> This annual requirement for new personnel is matched by in excess of two million young men who reach draft age each year.

## EXPERIENCE WITH MILITARY CONSCRIPTION

During low strength periods military conscription has attracted little attention; however, since 1966 when a buildup of the armed forces took place in order to provide troops for

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<sup>3</sup>Stanley L. Falk, Defense Military Manpower, (Washington: Industrial College of the Armed Forces, 1969), p. 30.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p. 31.

actual combat operations, the present conscription laws have come under sharp criticism. The most significant complaint has been a demand for uniformity of risk, equity, justice, and consideration of the individual.<sup>5</sup> In the eyes of many people the reduction of draft inequities is the major justification for change. Draft inequity certainly seems to be the principal grievance voiced against the system of military conscription; and draft protests have been more in opposition to the manner of administration of the draft rather than to compulsory service. The 1969 decision to use a lottery system in conjunction with draft calls was a move to correct some of the inequities of conscription. However, in spite of the recent clamor for abolition of conscription, many youth groups have endorsed compulsory service in preference to an entirely volunteer army.<sup>6</sup>

The existence of the draft, together with the possibility and uncertainty of military service has had a significant effect on the lives of young American males and females. "Over the past generation, social, political, and economic arrangements have grown up around conscription."<sup>7</sup> Young men have recognized that service calls have amounted to less than twenty percent of the

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<sup>5</sup>Hays, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>John B. Spore, "Plan Advanced For An All-Volunteer Force," Army, (April 1970), pp. 11-13.

<sup>7</sup>Report of the President's Commission, p. 11.

eligibles and have sought means to defer or avoid selection. Many have married early and started families prematurely. Others have enrolled in college, with the hope that draft calls will have been reduced before the end of their student deferments. Disadvantaged youths, who could not qualify for or afford college, have been unable to obtain student deferments. This situation has resulted in selective service calls which appear to be heavily weighted to favor the urban white youths.<sup>8</sup>

The practice of gambling with draft calls can be seen also in officer procurement statistics. A seeming majority of American college men rushed to join ROTC programs in 1966 when it appeared that student deferments would be terminated. ROTC enrollments dropped sharply, when the draft laws, which were extended in 1967, continued student deferments.<sup>9</sup> In a survey of college trained enlisted personnel conducted by the author in the period 1967 to 1970, the young soldiers almost unanimously indicated that they had avoided ROTC training while enjoying student deferment and elected to take their chances with the draft. Upon completion of college and having been called into service they elected not to apply for commissions because enlisted programs such as the Army

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<sup>8</sup>Edward B. Glick, "The Draft and Nonmilitary National Service," Military Review, (December 1969), pp. 86-90.

<sup>9</sup>Clarence P. Moll, "The ROTC Route to a Military Career," Army, (August 1968), pp. 34-38.

Scientific and Engineering Assistants program offered them a better chance to avoid overseas combat service and shorter periods of service than did commissioning.<sup>10</sup>

The changes made in 1969 whereby lottery numbers were drawn to establish relative sequence in selection of eligible youths also affected their choices. The timing of the lottery resulted in some college students now faced with almost certain induction, applying for ROTC; and resignation from ROTC enrollment by others with lottery numbers indicating little chance of induction.<sup>11</sup> An unfortunate result of the youthful gambling with the draft has been an avoidance of the responsibilities of citizenship, and an attitude of "Let George do it."<sup>12</sup>

#### RETENTION OF TRAINED PERSONNEL

Military recruitment is only one factor in the military manpower problem. In addition, retention of career officer and enlisted personnel and the quality of personnel recruited and trained are important considerations. During the post Korean War

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<sup>10</sup>John E. Wagner, Notes from a Survey of Scientific and Engineering Enlisted Personnel at the U.S. Army Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory, Hanover, N. H., 1970.

<sup>11</sup>Interview with William A. Hurst, Professor of Naval Science, Dartmouth College, Hanover, N. H., 15 December 1969.

<sup>12</sup>John D. Alden, "National Strength Through National Service," United States Naval Institute Proceedings, (July 1969), p. 69.



period there has been a continuing requirement to provide armed forces deployed outside of the United States and ready for combat. This situation, which results in prolonged and repeated family separations for career military personnel, has had a serious effect upon the retention of qualified commissioned and noncommissioned personnel in sufficient quantities for the required force levels. Any attempt to resolve the military recruitment problem must also address these problems.

#### UNIVERSAL MILITARY SERVICE

One approach to the problem of equity in service is to require all qualified personnel to serve in the armed forces. This approach has some advantages. For example, a universal system of military service without deferments forces people into the military at a younger age. This eliminates crowding of the colleges with persons opting for higher education who for their own and society's welfare should be elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> Experience from World War II, when student deferments were virtually nonexistent, indicates that military service prior to completing one's education was actually beneficial in many cases. The veterans entering college

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<sup>13</sup>Paul A. Weinstein, "Occupational Crossover and Universal Military Training," The Draft, ed. Sol Tax (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 33.

in the postwar period were, in general, more mature and more dedicated students than the younger non-veteran students. A similar effect was observed in an appraisal of veterans entering industry during the same postwar period. Over fifty percent received higher starting pay or better job titles in obtaining jobs related to their military experience.<sup>14</sup> A more recent study at one of the Ivy League Colleges indicated that out of a group of 29 students who left college and returned following military service, 28 did as well or better than they had done prior to military service. Over fifty percent were significantly better students upon their return to college.<sup>15</sup> Many national figures have expressed the feeling that nationwide draft helps to underline a sense of national commitment and provides valuable citizenship training.<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand there are also disadvantages to universal military service; the most significant of these is cost. The total military personnel requirements in peace time have been approximately 3 million men. The required new entrants into the services annually to support such a force level amount to not much

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid, p. 30.

<sup>15</sup>Interview with H. N. Moorman, Director of Counselling, Dartmouth College, Hanover, N. H., 14 June 1970.

<sup>16</sup>Margaret Mead, "A National Service System as a Solution to a Variety of National Problems," The Draft, ed. Sol Tax (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 100.

in excess of one half million men; however, approximately two million men reach military age each year. The significant difference between available manpower and the military requirements indicates that only twenty-five percent of the draft age males can be absorbed into the armed forces each year if the force levels and length of service do not change. To cut the length of service significantly will result in large numbers of personnel being committed to the training establishment and lowered combat effectiveness. To increase the size of the armed forces to accomodate all of the young men qualified for military service would increase the costs significantly.

## NATIONAL SERVICE

### Objectives

One of the alternatives to military conscription could be national service. For many years this concept has been suggested as a possible solution to the far-reaching problems of manpower shortages, draft inequities, and frustrations of youthful energies.<sup>17</sup> National service in the United States was the subject

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<sup>17</sup>Donald J. Eberly, "Introduction to Conference Proceedings," A Profile of National Service, ed. Donald J. Eberly (New York: Overseas Educational Service, 1966), p. viii.

of two conferences in 1966 and 1967. In order to establish a mutual understanding of what is meant by national service, the 1966 conference participants agreed that

"National service as a concept embraces the belief that an opportunity should be given each young person to serve his country in a manner consistent with the needs of the nation - recognizing national defense as a first priority - and consistent with the education and interests of those participating, without infringing on the personal or economic welfare of others but contributing to the liberty and well-being of all."<sup>18</sup>

The important points in this definition indicate that military requirements would have a priority for personnel but that the purpose of a national service program is far broader than fulfilling a requirement for soldiers. This purpose is truly national or even international in character and includes not only service to mankind and nation but also a continuation of ones education.

The proponents of national service enumerate many justifications for such a program. The objectives cited most often are: reduction of draft inequities; provision of cross-cultural experience; meeting of manpower needs in areas of short supply; giving participants a sense of self worth and civic pride; opportunities for education in the fullest sense; and fulfillment of service owed to the world, nation, state, and community as a

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

part of the obligations of citizenship.<sup>19</sup>

### Reduction of Draft Inequities

National service provides an approach to solving the problem of draft inequities, and perhaps could completely eliminate that criticism of military conscription. In developing national service programs as an alternative to military conscription it is first necessary to make a basic decision that nonmilitary service will be acceptable as an alternative to military service. An informal program of voluntary national service exists at this time. These voluntary programs include the Peace Corps, VISTA, and the Job Corps which are government sponsored and also such privately sponsored groups as International Volunteer Services and the American Friends Service Committee. Under existing conditions participation in one of these voluntary programs has not been accepted as an alternative to military service, but the local Selective Service Board may consider such service when evaluating an individual for conscription.

If a national service program is formally established and legislative action taken to make nonmilitary service an acceptable alternative to military service then some rule will have to be

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid, p. 6.

made to equate military and nonmilitary service. In order to fulfill the goals of equity and at the same time attract personnel into military service some tangible advantages must accrue to the young men electing to enter military service. In the spring of 1960 a survey was conducted to indicate youth preference in this regard. While these figures predate the period of active combat in Vietnam and the resultant draft protest movements, it is believed that the attitudes reflected are still valid, especially for a post Vietnam period of anticipated relative tranquility. At the time of the survey the percentage of young men opting for nonmilitary service varied from less than ten percent to more than eighty percent depending upon the conditions of service. When military service was considered as a prerequisite for nonmilitary service only six percent considered nonmilitary duty. When alternative service was reinforced by higher pay for nonmilitary service eighty percent chose nonmilitary service; however, when the military service conditions included higher pay or shorter periods of service seventy-five percent opted for military service.<sup>20</sup>

In a recent action by the House Armed Services Committee a first step towards equating nonmilitary and military service seems

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<sup>20</sup>Donald J. Eberly, "National Service Program," A Profile of National Service, ed. Donald J. Eberly, (New York: Overseas Educational Service, 1966), pp. 24-27.

to have been made, when that committee gave tentative approval to legislation to allow three years of nonmilitary service as an alternative for young men who do not want to be drafted.

However, this bill only authorizes alternative nonmilitary service for persons indicating conscientious objection to military service. Expansion of this legislation to draft age youths in general would in effect provide the legal basis for alternative national service.

#### Provision of Cross-Cultural Experiences

The second of the objectives of a national service program; "The provision of cross-cultural experiences" envisions removing the individual from his local environment to allow him to broaden his perspectives. Ideally it would be desirable to allow each participant in a national service program an opportunity to observe other cultural groups outside of the United States. Providing such an experience for each individual would be prohibitively expensive; however, most national service programs satisfy this objective to a limited extent by removing the individual from his local environment for at least a brief period of his life.

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<sup>21</sup>"Non-Military Service for Draft Objectors," IFV Sunday News, March 21, 1971, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup>Eberly, A Profile of National Service, p. 5.

### Meeting of Manpower Needs

Meeting of manpower need is, of course, immediately relevant to military requirements. However, if compulsory national service were implemented all of those persons not inducted into the armed forces would be required to participate in nonmilitary service programs. Serious differences of opinion exist in regard to the use of national service as a means to distribute manpower assets. In the National Service Conference held in April 1967 both the representatives of industry and labor opposed compulsory national service. From the industrialist viewpoint tying up a large portion of our youth in national service programs would be expensive and would not distribute labor to critical areas.<sup>23</sup> The union representative expressed doubt that compulsory national service programs could effectively utilize in excess of 1,400,000 young men each year. He pointed out further that if such programs did not result in useful and meaningful programs they might instead of contributing to the development of citizenship traits result in restlessness and disaffection.<sup>24</sup> The American tradition of freedom of the individual has made military conscription repugnant

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<sup>23</sup>Roland M. Bixler, "An Industrialist Looks at National Service," National Service: A Report of a Conference, ed. Donald J. Eberly (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1968), pp. 29-41.

<sup>24</sup>Jacob Claymen, "A Trade Unionist Looks at National Service," National Service: A Report of a Conference, pp. 43-49.



even in periods of wartime. The idea of national service has always presented difficulties for Americans.<sup>25</sup> In fact compulsory national service is such a departure from historic precedent that it is not yet politically acceptable in the United States.<sup>26</sup>

Assignment of manpower to perform jobs in areas of short supply or to menial tasks by use of national service programs would be seriously contested as an infringement of personal freedom.

From an educator's viewpoint the interruption of formal education by military or other nonmilitary service is viewed with mixed emotions. Many students perform better upon return from military service; however, in the case of extremely gifted students this loss of productive time is to be deplored. From the viewpoint of the services there are advantages to allowing at least some students to complete their academic training before entering military or nonmilitary service, for they bring to the service agency a greater capability than exists in persons with less training.

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<sup>25</sup>Leon Bramson, "National Service and American Youth: A Proposal," A Profile of National Service, ed. Donald J. Eberly, pp. 35-38.

<sup>26</sup>Terrence Cullinan, "National Service and Military Obligation," A Profile of National Service, ed. Donald J. Eberly, (New York: Overseas Educational Service, 1966), p. 18.

### Giving Participants a Sense of Self-Worth and Civic Pride

The voluntary service programs already in existence have demonstrated that the development of a sense of self-worth and civic pride has been a most valued benefit. However, before the realization of such a benefit can be assumed for a compulsory national service program, it is essential that sufficient planning has preceded the implementation of these programs. Compulsory service programs that are not carefully planned to provide meaningful and challenging service could result in dissatisfaction and frustration for the participants instead of development of a sense of civic pride.

### Opportunity for Education in the Fullest Sense

National service as a continuation of education is a major justification for a compulsory national service program. Our past experience with military training and the interruption to formal education experienced by servicemen in World War II has been frequently cited as evidence that national service has resulted in improved performance in formal training courses, learning of new skills and broadening of one's perspectives. At times the military services have been considered an educational and socializing agency in our democratic community. While many men have benefited

from such service it is an inefficient burden on the military services to task them with education and social rehabilitation responsibilities.<sup>27</sup> On the otherhand inclusion of the Job Corps and similarly oriented agencies in the total national service program would serve a vital role in preparing educationally handicapped persons for productive lives. At the present time there are large numbers of youths who enter adulthood inadequately trained to compete in the job market; these persons, many of whom would also be rejected from military service, could be major beneficiaries of well planned national service programs.

Fulfillment of Service Owed to the World, Nation, State and Community as a Part of the Obligations of Citizenship

This objective can only be achieved if the national service program is attractive, interesting, and rewarding. The institution of a compulsory national service program to meet these objectives and satisfy defense manpower requirements has been proposed by some congressional leaders.<sup>28</sup> However, congressional action to allow alternative nonmilitary service on a voluntary basis is a first step toward establishing a comprehensive national service program.

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<sup>27</sup>Hays, pp. 11-13.

<sup>28</sup>"Should We Have Universal National Service," American Legion Magazine, January 1967, pp. 16-17.

The next step should be to identify nonmilitary service programs to provide appealing avenues of service endeavor for all young people, both men and women. New activities not included in the existing subject areas of the Job Corps, Peace Corps, VISTA, or related programs might well include a Police Corps, Teacher Corps, and Health Corps for in each of these fields there are shortages of trained personnel and opportunities for service. Well planned voluntary nonmilitary service programs, with provisions for alternative service and incentives for selection of military service could satisfy this objective and also meet defense manpower requirements. Compulsory national service is probably not required at this time to satisfy this objective or to meet defense requirements.

#### ALL VOLUNTEER ARMED FORCES

Because of unrest resulting from the lengthy war in Vietnam our national objectives are being reevaluated. The trend in the United States at this time is toward smaller armed forces and reduced commitments. Associated with these changes is the decision by the present Administration to attempt to provide the requisite armed forces on a voluntary basis. Analyses leading to this decision were presented in The Report of the President's

Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force.<sup>29</sup> This report considered troop requirements against problems of recruitment, retention, costs, reserve forces, and national emergency. It concluded that conscription is a tax which under present conditions and pay scales is an excessive burden on conscripted personnel, and that in the interest of equity conscription should be eliminated. The commission recommended increases in pay for first term personnel, and improvements in the quality of military life as a means for attracting personnel into career military service. It further concluded that because of longer term retention of personnel, skill levels will be increased and the training establishment reduced thereby allowing a smaller total force. The recommendations of this commission are now being considered by Congress. An important part of the total package proposed is that a standby draft law be on the books so that in time of emergency and with Congressional approval the President could direct the conscription of additional personnel. Congress has accepted most of the recommendations, has enacted the continuation of a standby draft and is acting on increased pay scales.

Many advantages and disadvantages have been mentioned in regard to an all-volunteer force. There can be no doubt that the maintenance of all-volunteer armed forces in peace time is more

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<sup>29</sup>Report of the President's Commission.

consistent with American tradition than is military conscription and that compulsory national service is the least compatible with historic precedent. The rapid turnover of conscripted forces has been a consistent problem for the armed forces. The institution of all-volunteer forces with a minimum three or four year term of service would significantly reduce this turnover and problems of time devoted to training. In addition an all-volunteer force should be more highly motivated than a force consisting largely of personnel serving against their will.

On the negative side of the ledger are nagging questions related to quality and quantity of personnel recruited. In the post World War II period in which the forces were maintained on a voluntary basis, it was not possible to maintain adequate forces. This problem can be expected to be repeated during periods of high employment or active combat.<sup>30</sup> Assistant Secretary of Defense Thomas D. Morris, in June 1966 cited problems of high costs for an all-volunteer force, together with a high investment per man. Associated with the longer retention of personnel is also a concern that the average age of personnel in armed forces will increase, and that grade stagnation may occur.<sup>31</sup> General Bruce C. Clarke, former Continental Army Commander has expressed similar worries

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<sup>30</sup>Lynn D. Smith, "An All-Volunteer Army: Real future possibility or impractical dream?", Army, (February 1969), pp. 22-31.

<sup>31</sup>ibid, p. 25.

about the quality of an all volunteer force.<sup>32</sup>

### CONCLUSION

In the interest of brevity, analyses have not been made of total costs of the various alternatives for meeting our defense manpower commitments. While costs are significant, the real decision on the method of manning our armed forces is a political one. The size of the military forces required by the United States depends upon the American people, our National goals and the National Strategy employed to achieve these goals. If this strategy requires a limited armed force then no doubt all-volunteer forces can meet these force requirements. If, on the other hand, large forces are required some system of required service will be necessary. The use of conscription is less expensive and less equitable than universal military or compulsory national service. A well planned national service program providing for alternative nonmilitary service could support the required armed forces and satisfy the worthwhile goals of national service. The implementation of such national service programs would be a desirable long range goal; however, it is neither suited to the 1971 political environment nor required to meet post

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<sup>32</sup>Bruce C. Clarke, "Do We Really Want An All Volunteer Army," Armor, (November-December 1969), pp. 3-4.

Vietnam military manpower requirements.

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