

Recruiting Woes and the Return of the Draft

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A number of politicians in Washington are supporting the idea of bringing back the military draft to alleviate the Army's recruiting woes. It is no secret that the Army faces a tough recruiting situation as long as the war on terrorism continues. The Army National Guard and Army Reserve also face a grim recruiting outlook. Many people believe that the Army is spread too thin. Some say that we could not possibly fulfill our obligation to support the Korean peninsula if war broke out there. The ethical dilemma for the Army is whether to recommend a draft. Draft supporters claim that a draft is the best way to deal with an inevitable shortage of new Soldiers. I strongly believe that a draft is a terrible way to deal with the shortage of Soldiers and would do irreparable harm to the all volunteer force.

America has a long history of drafting citizens for military service. We have drafted in nearly every major conflict since the Civil War. The draft has created strife among the citizens of the United States every time that it was used. During the Civil War there were draft riots in New York City. It is nearly impossible to look at footage of the Vietnam War without seeing images of anti-war demonstrations. The draft served to polarize the anti-war effort. Why would anyone want to bring the draft back? The most popular reason for supporting the draft is the view that we cannot support the current war on terrorism. I agree that the Army is spread thin. The Regular Army, the Army Reserve, and the Army National Guard are all having a tough time meeting recruiting goals. Is the draft the best way to deal with a shortage of soldiers? I believe that there are better ways to deal with this shortage of Soldiers without destroying all the things that are great about our all-volunteer Army.

The all volunteer Army is a professional force. You don't draft people into a profession. Men and women from all walks of life join the Army because they want to do their part to defend this great Nation. The motivation to endure hardship to protect the Nation is there. When

you force someone to join the military you are not guaranteed to have the same kind of motivation. Armies exist to defend the Nation. It just makes sense to staff the Army with those that want to be there. The job is too important to leave to amateurs.

A fundamental problem with the draft is that it fails to correct the very problem that it was designed to fix. A drafted soldier will traditionally serve two years. In the Vietnam era a soldier was given about three months to report for a classification physical when his number was drawn. After the classification physical the draftee would report in a couple months to basic training. In most cases the draftee would be in Southeast Asia within nine months of the classification physical. There are a number of reasons why this kind of timeline would not work today. The most obvious reason is technology. The Army uses a lot more technology than it did in the past. The timeline would have to be adjusted to allow more time to get draftees trained up on all the complex equipment we use in the Army. You can't afford to have untrained soldiers destroying expensive equipment. I think it would be very difficult to take a draftee from classification physical to combat in less than 12 or 13 months. Now we only have 11 or 12 months of service left from the draftee. The fact that it takes so long to get the draftee into the field makes the draft a poor choice.

Another related problem with bringing in a large number of new recruits at one time is cost. It would be extremely expensive to provide the necessary food, clothing, training, and pay for a large increase of new soldiers. This money would have to come from somewhere. It would have to be taken from other areas of the defense budget where it is more critical. Think about what it would do for morale if leaders had to tell the volunteer Army that we cannot afford to give them a raise this year because the draftees are costing too much money. This would introduce internal strife to the organization. That is not what we need during a war.

There are many more effective ways to deal with the shortage of Soldiers in the Army. The controversial stop loss policy is one effective way to deal with recruiting shortfalls. The program is not popular among the Soldiers that it affects, but it is quite effective. Why is it preferable to the draft? Timeliness is the most important reason. The Soldiers affected by “stop loss” are already trained. You do not have to wait for 12 or 13 months to get the Soldier to the fight. Most Soldiers affected by “stop loss” have at least two years of Army experience. Many times they have much more. You will never get this kind of experience from a draft. The cost of keeping a Soldier in the Army an extra year or so is much less than it would cost to train, cloth, feed, and pay a draftee. Soldiers owe 8 years of military service when they enlist. It makes so much more sense to make Soldiers fulfill their contracts than to bring civilians into the Army against their will. Bonuses and other incentives to get Soldiers to stay in the Army are effective for the same reasons as the “stop loss.” These programs cost less and give commanders in the field trained Soldiers much quicker.

The draft is a terrible way to deal with the shortage of Soldiers in the Army. The draft has served to rally the public against the military since the Civil War. I do not see how this would benefit the Nation during these trying times. The professional military is performing extremely difficult missions all over the world. I think it is a testament to the value of the all-volunteer force that we are able to perform these missions so effectively. Keeping motivated professional Soldiers is more important than filling a bunch of uniforms. The timeline of the traditional draft makes it a very poor choice. It takes at least a year to train a draftee for service in the Army. The inexperienced Soldier will be short almost as soon as he gets fully trained. Bringing in a large amount of draftees at one time would strain the defense budget. Money would have to be diverted from the front lines where it is needed most to feed, cloth, train, and

pay the draftees. "Stop loss" is a much better solution to meet recruiting shortfalls. The Soldiers are already trained and it gets Soldiers to the fight much more quickly. The Soldiers that are affected by "stop loss" are also much more experienced. The cost of keeping Soldiers in the Army a year or so longer is also much less than training a draftee. Bonuses and increasing incentives for Soldiers would be effective for the same reasons. For these reasons, I believe it would be a terrible mistake for the Army to support a draft.