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IS IT NECESSARY TO SEEK AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE AVF?

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This afternoon we will hold a panel discussion on the need for seeking an alternative to the All Volunteer Force. The idea for this panel developed this past Spring, after I read an article by Harvard University doctoral candidate Eliot Cohen which appeared in the April 1982 issue of Commentary magazine. Cohen's article, "Why We Need a Draft," examined the purported advantages of an All Volunteer Force, and compared them with his concept of the problems associated with continuing the all volunteer policy. He concluded that there was a need to return to a limited or full-scale induction process (Cohen).

Let me summarize the events of the past several years as background for today's discussion. As you know, the military draft ended in 1973, when President Nixon permitted the Congressional authority to induct men into the armed forces to expire. President Nixon based his decision to end the draft, in part, on recommendations of the Gates Commission, a panel appointed by him to study the feasibility of an all volunteer military. The All Volunteer Force was created in concert with the Commission's recommendation that it be backed up by an ongoing registration process. The Selective Service System continued registering men until 1975, when the process was ended by President Ford. Selective Service then went into "deep standby" and remained in that posture until late 1979 when President Carter ordered the resumption of registration and revitalization of the Selective Service in response to dangers (such as the invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet forces) which suggested the need for a more rapid manpower mobilization capability if the nation ever faced a military threat. In January 1982, President Reagan reaffirmed the need for continuing peacetime registration as assuring overall preparedness. He made it clear, however, that he would stick with the All Volunteer Force and could not foresee a need for the resumption of the draft. Since mid-1980, more than 8.5 million men have been registered, and overall registration compliance stands at better than 94 percent.

The nine year AVF experience has been coupled with dramatic changes in the operation and management of the armed forces of the United States. Wages have been substantially increased to attract and retain quality personnel; training has been redesigned to insure the mastery of basic and job related skills; the role of women in the forces has been expanded to include their integration into the military academies and a wide variety of job fields; there has been a strong effort to insure equal opportunity for men and women almost everywhere in the forces, and enlistment standards have been changed to emphasize high school graduation as a "minimum" prerequisite. As recently as this past October, the Military Manpower Task Force, established by President Reagan and chaired by Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, reported that it is likely that the armed forces can achieve their goal of growing by 188,000 men (and women) over the next five years without resorting to a draft, provided that military pay keeps pace with wages in the civilian sector. The task force noted the continuing rise in percentages of recruits scoring above national averages on the Armed Forces Qualification Test. Secretary Weinberger, in response to a comment that the depressed economy was a major factor behind improved recruitment, noted that it was only "one factor." He contended

that the rise in enlistments and reenlistments was due also to the fact that "it is again an honor to wear the uniform"...that, "There has been quite a change in the way the military is viewed." (Washington Post).

In spite of reports of success in the AVF, the program is not without its critics. Some who challenge the AVF concept suggest that the military is attracting a less educated class of soldiers and that military standards have been changed to make these soldiers appear better qualified than they really are. It is suggested that training has been simplified to compensate for the lack of qualification, and that too many soldiers continue to fail when faced with tests of the most basic skills. It has been suggested that the Pentagon may be deluding itself into believing that the high school diploma, long the "standard" of educational achievement for the enlisted forces, reflects real academic performance and perseverance, especially when well over three-quarters of American youth now complete high school. There have been suggestions that the number of women in the armed forces and their training and job assignments may be degrading the overall capability to fight. Others suggest that the spillover of the women's rights movement into the military is just another manifestation of the permissiveness sweeping the nation. And, naturally, there is a chorus of voices crying that illness in the economy is the only thing keeping the AVF together. In essence, critics suggest that the AVF is a failure which should, as quickly as possible, be replaced by a draft or other manpower procurement alternative which will raise the qualifications and capabilities of the military.

These conflicting views on the concept of the All Volunteer Force will form the basis for today's discussion. Panel members will address the changes which have occurred in the armed force since implementation of the All Volunteer Force, and consider, as they deem appropriate, the issues I have described. They will endeavor to analyze conditions in the force, discuss advantages and disadvantages of continuing the AVF, and consider whether an alternate form of manpower procurement is in fact necessary. Discussion will focus on the types of persons being attracted to the AVF and consider their motivations and qualifications. The role of women will be considered in terms of their impact on war fighting capabilities.

Each member of the panel will have the opportunity to present his or her views on the topic and issues. We will then have a free discussion of the issues amongst the panel members. Following a break we will open the discussion to members of the audience, first by responding to written questions submitted during the break, then to spontaneous questions from the floor. We hope today's program proves interesting and informative.

This paper represents the views of the presenter. It has not been endorsed or rejected by the Selective Service System, and is not an Agency position.

References

Cohen, Eliot A., Why We Need a Draft. Commentary, April 1982.

Voth, Harold M., The Future of America. Reprint from Military Medicine, Vol. 145, No. 3, March 1980.

The Washington Post, Military Held Likely to Meet Manpower Goal Without a Draft, October 19, 1982.

