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THE ARMY: VOLUNTEER OR CONSCRIPTION

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THE ARMY: VOLUNTEER OR CONSCRIPTION

by

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SUMMARY

This essay presents the major problems and concerns facing the nation relative to an All-Volunteer Army. Present anti-draft sentiment has caused politicians and their constituents to overlook or rationalize the serious dangers inherent in a professional military force. The essay emphasizes that to maintain the security of the nation and to prevent the emergence of a military sub-culture, it is more advisable to continue the Selective Service System. In order to reduce sentiment directed against the draft, the present system must be reformed in order to eliminate the inequities and injustices that it thrusts upon the youth of our nation.

INTRODUCTION

The Armed Forces of the United States exists for one distinct purpose: namely, to insure the security of our nation and to deter, and if necessary destroy, any aggressor. Thus far in the short 190 years of its history our nation has been successful in this endeavor. Americans have lived in an environment of uninterrupted freedom, liberty and justice. This fact has been made possible mainly because our armed forces have consistently risen to the occasion to successfully meet all external threats. Further, the military arm of the government has always supported the national goals of the nation, never refusing the missions given to it or encouraging open rebellion against executive orders, a phenomena witnessed in many other nations. The leaders of our nation from the outset have recognized that military power exists only to support national policy and that any other use of this power is illegitimate. To insure this principle, the military has been under civilian control. Moreover, in recent years the Army has been further subjected to civilian influence by being composed of a mixture of volunteers and conscripts - professional soldiers and citizen soldiers. The past successes of our Military have been achieved with this type of forces. It must be noted, however, that historically the system used to conscript soldiers has been criticized and resisted. In 1863 during the Civil War when Congress enacted a draft law, resistance reached a bloody climax in the New York riots which left more than 1,000 dead.

In World War I there was opposition to the 1917 Selective Draft law, with evasion replacing open resistance. Over 250,000 draftees failed to appear for induction.¹

CURRENT ANTI-DRAFT SENTIMENT

In recent years with the escalation of the war in Vietnam, resistance to conscription has grown in intensity. Resistance to the Vietnam war, turmoil on college campuses, burning of draft cards, and flight of potential draftees to Canada have highlighted in a dramatic way a growing sentiment that the present draft system has become outdated and should be abolished.

Dr. George Wald of Harvard amplifies the argument by pointing out that repeal of the draft would end the role of colleges and graduate schools as draft shelters and allow them to resume their real function of educating those who want and deserve a higher education. He also claims that it would begin to purify the teaching profession (another draft shelter) of individuals filled with resentment and animosity to the state and a citizen's public duties.²

Perhaps the situation is best summed up in a memorandum to the President from Daniel Patrick Moynihan in which he was

¹US Congress. Senate. Legislative Reference Service. How Can the United States Best Maintain Manpower For An Effective Defense System? 90th Cong., 2d ses., 1968, S. Doc. 75 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1968), p. 1.

²R. D. Heintz, Jr., "Way to End Draft," Detroit News (Detroit), February 24, 1970.

stressing the need to reestablish the authority of the government and the dignity of the Presidency. He wrote: "I fear the blunt truth is that ending the draft would be the single most important step you could take in this direction."³

In light of the criticism directed at the draft and the concomitant demand to revoke it, one primary question must be asked. Will repealing the draft purify our youth and reduce their offensive, opportunistic and shameful actions? The general thought seems to be that if you abolish the system, you will at the same time purge much of the hostility from the personality of American youth. Hence, the concept for the volunteer Army receives strong support. However, there is no assurance that revoking the draft will accomplish this end. In fact, many colleges and universities have discovered that granting concessions to student radicals only gives rise to more demands. It is recognized that certain modifications need to be made within educational institutions, just as changes should be made to eliminate the inequities of the draft. Justifying the status quo solely on the basis of tradition is just as wrong as eliminating established and proven institutions. One of the major faults of society is its tendency to over-react - radically changing or abolishing institutions or practices in the face of extreme criticism. The strongly supported demand to end the draft seems to represent

³"Can the Draft Be Abolished," Newsweek, March 23, 1970, p. 19.

this radical type of reaction.

The current sentiment against the draft system cannot be ignored. Serious students of national policy are rightly convinced that our present method of manning the armed services is marked by glaring inequities. The present system of educational or occupational deferments and the inconsistencies of the policies of local draft boards are the most often cited examples of these injustices.

Since its inception, the draft system has basically remained the same. It may have served the nation well by protecting and preserving our way of life, however, too little attention has been paid to the inequities fostered by the draft and the accompanying discontentment it encourages. Advisory groups such as the Marshall Commission and Clark Panel have made many positive proposals in the interest of draft reform.⁴ Still the system remains unchanged with one exception, the recent institution of the lottery system of selection for induction.

THE GATES COMMISSION

To eliminate a previously successful system without first modifying or reforming its objectionable practices is not reasonable, especially in light of some serious problems which the volunteer army poses. However, the often referred to Gates Commission, a

⁴M. D. R. Foot, Men in Uniform, - Military Manpower in Modern Industrial Society. (New York: Praeger, 1961), p. 12.

15-member advisory group appointed by President Nixon two months after his inauguration to study the volunteer army proposal, was not given the latitude to reject the concept.⁵ In announcing the formation of the commission President Nixon said:

To achieve the goal of an all-volunteer force we will require the best efforts of our military establishment and the best advice we can obtain from eminent citizens and experts in many related fields of national endeavor. For this purpose, I have today appointed an Advisory Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force under the Chairmanship of the Honorable Thomas S. Gates, Jr., former Secretary of Defense. I have directed the Commission to develop a comprehensive plan for eliminating conscription and moving toward an all-volunteer armed force... The transition to an all-volunteer armed force must, of course, be handled cautiously and responsibly so that our national security is fully maintained... I have directed the Department of Defense and other agencies of the Executive Branch to support this study and provide needed information and assistance as a matter of high priority.⁶

No prior commission was formed to determine the feasibility of abolishing the draft, this decision had already been made. The problem was to work out plans for conversion of the armed forces to a volunteer service.

In late February 1970, the President's Commission submitted its report. In spite of initial diversity of viewpoint among its members, ten months of study and discussion produced unanimity in the commission's main conclusion:

1. That the nation's interests would be better served by an

⁵The President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force. Thomas S. Gates, Jr., Chairman. (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1970), p. VII.

⁶Ibid.

all-volunteer force, supported by an effective stand-by draft, than by a mixed force of volunteers and conscripts.

2. That the first indispensable step would be to remove the inequity in the pay of men serving the first term in the armed forces.⁷

All in all, the Gates Commission addressed itself in a convincing and thorough manner to many of the objections presented by an all-volunteer force. However, they failed to consider some of the key issues and more serious problems. The remainder of this paper will be addressed to these issues and problems.

PROBLEMS OF AN ALL-VOLUNTEER ARMY

A Professional Military Class

One of the most serious problems is the emergence of a "professional military class."⁸ In this connection, it is interesting to note that the publicly acceptable term: "Volunteer Army" was chosen over the not so popular and often feared term: "Professional Army." In essence, however, is this not what will ultimately emerge - a fully professional defense establishment. A large standing military force that would be essentially insulated from the continuing civilian influence, interest and public insight that comes from a steady turnover of draftees and ROTC short term officers poses two basic problems.

⁷Ibid.

⁸William F. Buckley, Jr., "The Gates Report," New York Post (New York), March 7, 1970, p. 11.

First, the current mixed composition of the Army has enabled it to be more responsive to the society which it serves. The presence of civilian soldiers ensures that the lines of communication between the military and civilian communities are always open. A purely professional Army would eliminate this flow of ideas and information and turn the Army into a segregated community living in little military enclaves unaware of the problems, attitudes, feelings and needs of the society that it serves.⁹ In this environment there is a distinct danger for the value systems and reference groups of Army personnel to become solely oriented on military standards.¹⁰ History has proven the dangers of the military sub-culture. The best example of this phenomena is the Armies of both Germany and Japan prior to World War II. In both instances an elite military society arose that was relentlessly dedicated to their own preservation and interests. Their primary task was not oriented toward the interests of their government or their people. The establishment of a professional military class in the United States could bring about a similar situation. Many proponents of the all-volunteer army dismiss such a turn of events as being impossible in a free democratic society. However, basic reason points to the fact that insulating the military community from civilian influence could lead to the creation of a monster.

⁹Stein, Vitich and White, Identity and Anxiety. (New York: Free Press, 1967), pp. 141-144.

¹⁰Interview with Peter Berger, Professor, New School of Social Research, New York City, New York. May 10, 1969.

The second danger connected with the emergence of a professional military class can perhaps best be explained by citing the French experience in Algeria in 1961. At the time the French Army was composed of both professional units, the French Foreign Legion, and citizen soldier units. Without going into elaborate details of the situation, the OAS (The Secret Army Organization) inspired by elite French officers led their units in April of 1961 to revolt and seize control of Algeria in hopes of blocking the imminent Algerian independence. Their devotion to a French Algeria was best stated in the words of their leader, General Maurice Challe: "Thanks to the French Army we shall retain this part of the homeland, so that a new Algeria may be born in the union of the communities in a homeland still French."¹¹ The threat of a major civil war seemed unavoidable as the OAS forces gained control of Algiers. President DeGaulle had little choice but to fully mobilize the French Armed Forces and place the nation in a state of emergency. Paris was thrown into a partial panic when word was received that the OAS forces planned to bomb the French capital. The events of the first few days looked highly unpromising. Then on the evening of the second day of insurrection President DeGaulle made a short nationwide radio speech in hopes of rallying support to his side. He concluded the speech with these emotionally laden words:

¹¹New York Times, April 22, 1961, p. 3.

The state is flouted, nation defied, our power degraded, our international prestige lowered, our role and our place in Africa compromised. And by whom? Alas! Alas! By men whose duty, honor and reason for being was to serve and obey. In the name of France, I order that all means be employed everywhere to bar the route to these men, until they are subjugated. I forbid any Frenchman, and first of all any soldier, to execute any of their orders..... French men and women, look where France risks falling and what she was about to become again. French men and women, help me."¹²

His plea did not go unanswered. Within 24 hours the citizen soldiers who had been supporters of the OAS laid down their arms and turned themselves over to the DeGaulle loyal forces in Algiers. Ultimately the only unit that remained loyal to General Calle and his ^{OAS} OSA was one parachute company of the French Foreign Legion - a professional Army unit. All other dissidents heeded the radio appeal of their esteemed President. "The war" came to an abrupt conclusion even before it had begun. Appropriately some have come to call it "The Transistor War."

In analyzing the Algerian incident, it seems valid to conclude that if it were not for the presence of citizen soldiers among the French Armed Forces in Algeria, this incident could have resulted in a full blown civil war. Fortunately, the loyalty of the citizen soldiers was first to France, rather than to their misoriented officer corps.

Similar events of this sort can be cited in many other countries. History has proven that one of the real dangers of a

¹²New York Times, April 24, 1961, p. 3.

professional army, even in a nation which prides itself in maintaining civilian control of her armed forces, is a military inspired and led insurrection. As Joseph Alsop appropriately described the problem, "Just think of waking up some morning to discover that the Army has replaced Defense Secretary Melvin Laird with Curtis LeMay."¹³

Inequities In A Volunteer Force

The objections of a Professional Army go further than the emergence of a highly efficient and proficient military establishment that is insulated from the society it serves and is thus unresponsive to the needs of that society. The Gates Commission felt that a volunteer force would eliminate the inequities of the draft. However, this is far from the truth when one considers who will man this force. It is quite obvious that the burden of military service would fall on those young men who are most susceptible to being induced, namely the poor and less educated. It hardly seems proper that the enlisted force of our nation's Army should be composed of those who have been the least favored by our society. Equality demands that the defense of our nation be shared by all the segments of our society.¹⁴ In this connection, President George Washington stated:

¹³Joseph Alsop, "History Shows Peril in Plan For Shift To Volunteer Army," Washington Post (Washington, D.C.), February 25, 1970, p. 19.

¹⁴Peter Barnes, "All-Volunteer Army," New Republic, May 9, 1970, pp. 20-21.

It may be laid down as a primary position, and the basis of our system that every citizen who enjoys the protection of a free government, owes not only a portion of his property, but even of his personal services to the defense of it.¹⁵

Inability to Adequately Man an All-Volunteer Army

Then there is the major problem of adequately manning our Army with the required number of young men so as to insure the defense of our nation. The Gates Commission dismissed this problem by saying in essence that increased pay to first term volunteers would be a sufficient inducement.¹⁶ However, the experience of Great Britain in this regard should be closely examined. In 1960 Britain adopted the All-Volunteer Force concept and abolished their system of conscription. Their efforts in recruiting the required number of men to man their forces have on the whole not been successful. In 1968 Great Britain required 38,000 enlistment to adequately man her Armed Forces. In spite of a long list of newly established incentives to include: higher pay, guaranteed jobs upon completion of service, the reduction of enlistment terms, a positive program to improve quarters for married personnel and the expansion of educational benefits for veterans, she experienced a 27% shortfall. The British were only able to secure 28,000 enlistments, 10,000 short of the required number.¹⁷ Simple

¹⁵Edward A. Fitzpatrick, Universal Military Training (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1945), p. 123.

¹⁶The President's Commission on An All-Volunteer Armed Force, pp. 52-64.

¹⁷"British Troubles With A Volunteer Army," US News and World Report, April 21, 1969, p. 80.

extrapolation reveals that if Great Britian, a nation with a population of 55 million people, could only recruit a volunteer force of 340,000, the United States with a population of 200 million could not expect to maintain a force much higher than 1.5 million.¹⁸

The Gates Commission foresees a requirement for a force of 2.5 million.¹⁹ A 40% shortfall could be disasterous. Can the United States afford to speculate in an area of such vital concern as her security? Great Britian learned the hard way. Her armed forces are currently understrength, she has reduced her Rhine commitment to NATO from 77,000 men to 50,000, withdrawn from Aden and reduced her forces drastically in Libya. A similar gamble by the United States in a world in which the balance of power is already so delicate fails to make sense. The difficulty of maintaining an adequate force without the draft poses a most serious problem which cannot be ignored. In March of 1947 the United States experimented with the concept of an all volunteer force. At that time the draft law was allowed to expire. For the next twelve months all the military services waged an extensive recruiting campaign. The Army alone allocated 20 million dollars for recruiting purposes. The final result was that from July through December of 1947, the Army manpower goal of 180,000 volunteers fell short by 38,000.²⁰ Approximately 142,000 men were actually sworn into

¹⁸Gerald E. Robinson, Why Not A Volunteer Army (Carlisle, Pennsylvania, US Army War College, 1970), p. unknown.

¹⁹The President's Commission on An All-Volunteer Armed Force, p. 7.

²⁰Rocco M. Paone, "The Last Volunteer Army," Military Review, December, 1969, pp. 9-16.

the Army. On the twenty-fourth of June 1948 the Selective Service Act of 1948 was enacted for the purpose of insuring that our Armed Forces receive the required number of personnel to defend the nation and honor overseas commitments.

Inability to Maintain an Adequate Reserve Force

Another problem is that of maintaining a reserve force of sufficient size. The Gates Commission asserts that modest additional pay incentives would attract the required number of reservists. However, they readily admit that "an analysis of the reserve problem suffers seriously from a lack of data."²¹ It is safe to assume that without the draft or some extremely attractive incentives, the reserve component strength will decrease to unsatisfactory levels. Secretary Laird expressed concern about this problem while speaking to a youth group that was visiting the Pentagon in late January 1970. In this regard he said:

I personally believe that we will have to get down to the level of 2.4 million men before we can go to an all-volunteer service. And I don't believe we can carry out our present obligations at that level unless we are willing to spend a lot of money to maintain an up-to-date reserve and National Guard.²²

The President has strongly stressed the importance of honoring the many mutual defense pacts to which this nation is committed.

However, to actively support these agreements while reducing the

²¹The President's Commission on An All-Volunteer Armed Force, p. 97.

²²"Laird Gives His Formula To End Draft," New York News, January 30, 1970, p. 6.

number of ready and standby reserve forces is a blatant contradiction.

Reduction in Quality of Army Personnel

The final argument against an All-Volunteer Force is based on the assumption that the overall quality of Army personnel will be reduced. This fact was not considered by the Gates Commission. Approximately 80% of the Army enlisted positions below the grade of E-6 in the Pentagon are currently manned by individuals with two or more years of college.²³ A survey of major headquarters throughout the Army would probably reveal a similarly high percentage of college educated personnel filling responsible positions. If the draft were abolished, the Army would lose this valuable source of skilled manpower. The cost to the Army to recruit and then train individuals to fill these positions would be great. It is questionable whether the quality of their work would ever equal that which is presently being produced by the college educated draftee.

OBSERVATIONS

The proposal for an all-volunteer (professional) army appears to be a politically motivated solution to a highly complex problem. Its main objective is to pacify and win the support of the youth of our nation. It is uncertain whether eliminating the draft will

²³Interview with Peter Lent, Chaplain (LTC), US Army, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. August 12, 1970.

accomplish this end.

The present draft system possesses many inequities, however, the wisdom of terminating the draft at the expense of the security of our nation is questionable. Present public sentiment and Presidential prodding for a volunteer army points to its possible adoption at some time in the future. Hence, the Army must be prepared to implement an executive order to become an all-volunteer force. In this regard, initial planning has already been completed by the Army in a document titled: "PROVIDE: Project Volunteer in Defense of the Nation." The positive attitude and realistic recommendations presented in this executive summary are most encouraging. The analysis presented in the report touched many of the problems inherent in the proposal. The body of this essay discussed many of these problems. In some instances it may appear that the essay overstates the problems. However, this method of presentation was chosen in order to emphasize the more drastic consequences that could result from relying strictly on an all-volunteer force.

On August 24, 1970 the Senate defeated the bill which would establish the volunteer army. It is interesting to note that the greatest objection to the bill was its price tag.²⁴ The other and far more serious implications were not considered. It appears that there is still much life in the proposal.

²⁴"The Volunteer Army," Kansas City Times, August 25, 1970, p. 1.

The current task at hand is to reform the present draft system, specifically the occupational and educational deferments. In addition, a clear and uniform national draft policy should be established. Positive actions in this regard will serve to reduce much of the clamor for a volunteer force. An equitable and just system of conscription could well be a key factor in bringing about the demise of the proposal. Perhaps this eventuality is wishful thinking. However, the newly instituted lottery system, the tightening of the requirements for deferments and the appointment of Curtis W. Tarr as chairman of the nation's Selective Service System are steps in the right direction.

In conclusion, the possible consequences relative to the implementation of the all-volunteer army far outweigh the hazy benefits to be derived from the proposal. Our nation cannot afford to speculate with her security. Moreover, the emergence of an elite military sub-culture is not compatible with our democratic society.

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