

Conscription Threatens Hard-Won Achievements and Military Readiness

Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel & Readiness)

Throughout most of American history, our military has been composed of volunteers. However, conscription was the primary means of obtaining sufficient numbers of military personnel during World Wars I and II and the Korean Conflict, to the point that its renewal became perfunctory. In the late 1960s, President Richard Nixon established a commission to study how best to procure military manpower – retain the draft or institute a volunteer military. After much debate within the Administration, the Congress, and across the country, it was decided that an all-volunteer force was feasible, affordable, and would enhance the nation's security.² The debate concluded that, under a draft in which not all served, it was inequitable for some to bear the burden of military service while others could escape that responsibility by lot or by guile. Thus, the authority for conscription was allowed to lapse on July 1, 1973. The last conscript entered the Army on June 30 of that year.

All Volunteer Force – Superior to Conscription...

The All Volunteer Force (AVF) has served the nation for more than a quarter century, providing a military that is experienced, smart, disciplined, and representative of America. Moreover, the AVF is more cost-effective than a conscripted force according to many studies, including an external review by the auditing arm of Congress, the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO). The AVF continues to exceed the expectations of its framers, and comprises the world's best military force.

More Experienced Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs)...

Draftees quit early; volunteers stay – so today's mid-grade and senior noncommissioned officers are well-experienced. During the most recent draft, 90 percent of conscripts quit after their initial two-year hitch, whereas retention of volunteers is five-times better -- about half remain after their initial (normally four-year) military service obligation.

To put this in perspective: In 1968-69, a full two-thirds of the military was serving in its first two years of service, whereas today that number is about one-fourth. Owing to the high personnel turnover and low experience associated with the draft, Army Sergeants – often referred to as “shake and bake sergeants” – held fewer than two years experience upon promotion, whereas today their experience level is more than twice that – nearly five years.

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² Report of the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force, Washington, DC (US Government Printing Office, February 1970). Heretofore referred to as the “Gates Commission.”

More Competent Performers...

Today's military is younger than the population as a whole, is more disciplined, and is more physically and morally fit. It is also smarter than the general population: over 90 percent of new recruits have a high school diploma while only 75 percent of American youth do; 67 percent score in the upper half of the enlistment (math/verbal aptitude) test. These attributes translate to lower attrition, faster training, and higher performance.

Research shows a very strong correlation between math-verbal aptitude scores and on-the-job task performance, as measured by hands-on performance tests across the range of occupations. In Figure 1 we show that relationship, which summarizes a multi-year Defense research project, the results of which have been validated by the National Academy of Science (NAS). For any aptitude level, gains in on-the-job performance are realized over time, with the lowest contribution made by the least experienced. Conscription – with its concentration of manpower in early years of service, guarantees an inefficient manpower investment.

Aptitude Predicts Performance

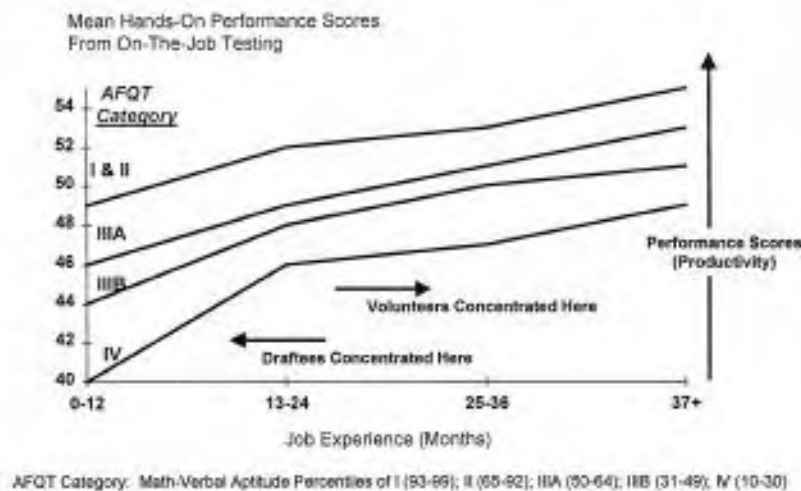


Figure 1

Further research, validated by the NAS, confirms that the most efficient investment of Defense dollars – even when considering the additional cost of recruiting higher aptitude youth – is realized when average recruit aptitude scores are between the 60th and 70th percentile. In contrast, conscription would converge toward the average (50th percentile), and a less efficient Federal investment.

More Efficient Investments...

The cost-effectiveness of an AVF has been reinforced by studies of the GAO, the private sector, and the Department. Virtually every review has concluded that, for a given level of force effectiveness, the AVF is less expensive than conscription. These conclusions are driven by three factors:³

1. With a conscripted force comes higher personnel turnover, which results in substantial costs. Shorter enlistment terms, characteristic of a draft, result in high personnel turnover and a degradation in unit stability and performance. Also, high turnover means more recruits, and more recruits mean more supervision and training; and more training means more trainers. As a result, an increasing proportion of military resources are diverted from core readiness missions to support for military training. Thus, training costs would be higher under conscription. Training can be fiercely expensive in a conscripted force because draftees who are assigned jobs requiring complex skills need longer time for training, which reduces the time available for performance in operational units.
2. Draftees also are less likely to reenlist. During the Vietnam era, only 10 percent of draftees elected to reenlist. Because of the typical pattern of individuals to serve only one short term, a conscripted force must be considerably larger than a volunteer force. Further, owing to the paucity of reenlistments, a draft force would be younger and less experienced, which has a chilling effect on job performance and personnel readiness.
3. With a volunteer military comes a more motivated force. Data show that people perform better if they are true volunteers than if they are coerced into military service. The recruitment of volunteers also has resulted in a higher quality force as measured by aptitude levels. This is noteworthy because a high aptitude force is more easily trained, performs better, and presents fewer disciplinary problems. Empirical evidence shows that a high quality and highly motivated force is more productive and less expensive in the long run.⁴

Quantification of costs in order to compare a conscripted force with a volunteer force is not a trivial exercise. However, analysts have concluded that, compared to an equally effective volunteer force, a draft would (1) reduce experience levels, (2) increase the percentage of both non-high school graduates and lower aptitude individuals, (3) increase accession levels, training loads, and force size, and (4) hike budget costs.

Specifically, the GAO in a 1988 study concluded that the AVF would be cheaper than a draft force, given a constant level of force effectiveness.⁵ According to the GAO, a volunteer force is less expensive than a draft by more than \$2.5 billion (over \$4 billion today).

But there are other costs in procuring military manpower under a draft. One such cost is the so-called "conscription tax," defined as the earnings that a draftee forgoes by being conscripted into

³ Curtis Gilroy & W.S. Sellman, "Recruiting and the Economic Implications of an All-Volunteer Force, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness), 2000, pp. 2-4.

⁴ Curtis Gilroy & W.S. Sellman, "Recruiting and Sustaining a Quality Army: A Review of the Evidence," in Robert L. Phillips & Maxwell R. Thurman, ed., *Future Soldiers and the Quality Imperative* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1995).

⁵ U.S. General Accounting Office, *Military Draft: Potential Impacts and Other Issues*, Report to the Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on Defense, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate (Washington, DC, March 1988).

the military. This tax can be substantial because the military could pay draftees less than the going rate in the private sector. Like other hidden taxes, the draft does not reduce the true costs of obtaining recruits, it merely shifts the cost to the draftees. Thus, if the military pays \$10,000 to a draftee who could earn \$15,000 in a civilian job, the draftee must forgo \$5,000 of income. In effect, this draftee is paying a hidden tax of \$5,000 for each year of service.⁶

When a lower military entry wage is paid to draftees, the Services would have an incentive to "hire" too many individuals, instead of relying on more productive alternatives such as the use of more career personnel or complementary new capital equipment. When that rise in accessions takes place, the burden of national defense (in terms of the labor supply withdrawn from the economy) is greater under a draft than under a volunteer force. Hildebrand put it this way:

"[B]ecause military 'labor' is ... undervalued, the armed services are given a false signal by the price system; they are encouraged to use labor more intensively relative to capital than is justified by the real state of relative factor endowments in the economy as a whole. In consequence, it pays to hoard labor, to use it wastefully, and to adopt capital-to-labor ratios that are too low. Turnover rates are also made too high, and these add to recruitment costs while also lowering overall efficiency."⁷

Reduced Manpower for Smarter Weapon Systems...

The AVF has encouraged a far more conservative use of labor than would be the case with a conscripted force. The high-aptitude, high-experience AVF has encouraged the Department to leverage its weapons procurement in the direction of systems that are equally or more lethal, while requiring fewer (albeit smarter and more experienced) people. In other words, the systems have been designed and procured with the AVF in mind, and that design is not compatible with a conscripted force. For example, the Army's Multiple Launch Rocket System replaces howitzer batteries and generates greater firepower with a crew size less than half that associated with the system it replaced. The demand for supervisors – and a higher experience profile – is essential. Similar trends are playing out across all Services. In the Navy, for example, Dunnigan reports:

"Over the last year, several ships have been fitted with more automated gear, and many remote sensors, so that one (trained and experienced) sailor can check the performance of multiple items of equipment without moving around a lot. A closer look at what a lot of sailors did resulted in a reorganization that eliminated a lot of chores and reorganized others to take less time. Improved communications, particularly shipboard access to the internet, made it possible for a lot of administrative jobs to be done ashore. As a result of this, several destroyers and cruisers had their crews cut by about twenty percent. This is important, as the proposed designs for new classes of warships call for even smaller crews. Many ship designers are urging crew sizes of a hundred or so sailors for destroyers and cruisers. Even carriers are looking to shed about a quarter of their 5,000 sailors and aviators.

"Crew size has been falling ... [d]uring World War II, destroyers tended to have over a hundred crew per thousand tons of displacement. Even without the current reforms, the crew size is now half what it was during World War II. In addition, the Navy was forced to pay close attention to smaller crew sizes in one class of ships; submarines. While modern subs are four times the size of their World War II counterparts, and full of much more equipment, crew size has only doubled."⁸

⁶ For a discussion of these and other cost issues, see Walter Oi, "The Economic Cost of the Draft," *American Economic Review*, May 1967, pp. 39-62. For a discussion of the conscription tax, see Charles B. Knapp, "A Human Capital Approach to the Burden of the Military Draft," *Journal of Human Resources*, Fall 1973, pp. 485-496.

⁷ George H. Hildebrand, "Discussion," *American Economic Review*, May 1967, pp. 63-66.

⁸ James Dunnigan, "The Incredible Shrinking Warship Crew," November 24, 2002.

This new generation of equipment replaces people with machines where possible, lowering overall system costs while placing a premium on training and experience of the high-quality crew. These are exactly the attributes of the AVF; they are not the attributes of a conscripted force.

American Society Still Invested...

Some argue that conscription is essential to ensure that Americans feel a direct impact across the full cultural and economic spectrum – thus are more sensitive to – the nation’s commitment to military operations. With the AVF, the military represents mainstream America in that it relies much more on the contributions of the Reserve Components than it has in the past. Reservists deploy in larger numbers with the active force.

Today, the Reserve Components serve as a bridge between national security policy and the will of the people. Coming out of the Vietnam War, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird and Army Chief of Staff Creighton Abrams worked to make sure that the U.S. military would not again go into conflict without its citizen soldiers. The Persian Gulf War tested that concept, with all Reserve Components shouldering a large share of the mission, and performing that mission superbly. The Reserve Components continue to share in the military’s mission, including providing security at military installations, commanding peacekeeping forces in Bosnia, serving in Afghanistan, and preparing for contingencies in the Middle East and around the world.

This Reserve Component contribution serves to keep close bonds between the military and the civilian community. These reservists/guardsmen are construction workers, teachers, coaches, firemen, policemen, nurses, doctors, and lawyers in communities all across the nation. As Doug Bandow said in 1991, “The departure of reservists, who by and large have more political clout than the average 18-year old draftee, affects not only families and friends, but business associates, clients, and many others. For legislators and the president to carelessly send those people into war risks serious retaliation at the polls.”⁹

The AVF Reflects the Society it Protects...

The Gates Commission believed that sufficient numbers of qualified youth could be persuaded to volunteer by increasing military pay to levels competitive with civilian earnings. It disputed claims that reliance on volunteers would lead to a mercenary force consisting mainly of minorities, the poor, and the uneducated.

Notably, a Columbia University study reports that enlistees, “do not come from the more marginal groups on any of four dimensions: family socio-economic status, measured verbal and quantitative abilities, educational achievement, or work orientation.”¹⁰

⁹ Doug Bandow, *The Volunteer Military: Better than a Draft* (Washington, DC: The CATO Institute), January 8, 1991, p. 9.

¹⁰ Sue Berryman, *Who Serves? The Persistent Myth of the Underclass Army* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press), p. 4.

Black Proportion of NPS Active Component Enlisted Accessions vs. Proportion of 18-24 Year Old Civilians

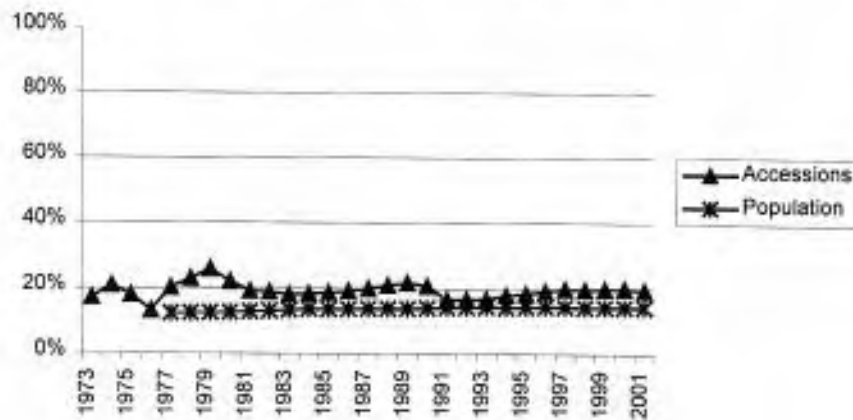


Figure 2

The Commission also addressed a concern raised in some quarters about a volunteer force becoming “too black.” Believing these fears were really unfounded, the Commission recommended that policy makers accept whatever proportion of minorities the market dictated. Today, black recruits closely parallel their representation among the youth population (Figure 2). As with all AVF recruits, these young men and women are high school graduates with above-average aptitude; they are not the “poor and uneducated.”

Minority Representation in Selected Career Fields

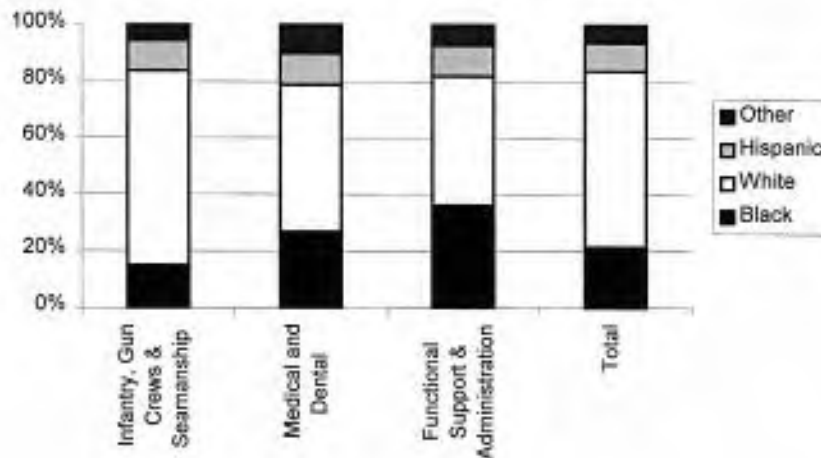


Figure 3

Figure 3 depicts minority representation in selected career fields. Notably, Blacks tend to be concentrated in administrative and support jobs, not in combat jobs. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in a draft force. Blacks today account for 21 percent of the enlisted force, but make up only 15 percent of combat arms (e.g., infantry, armor, artillery). In contrast, Blacks account for 36 percent of Functional Support and Administration and 27 percent of Medical and Dental career fields.

Blacks choose military service as a viable and often more lucrative career than a "civilian" job. The military provides opportunities for training and education as well as job stability and security, and most important, supervisory responsibility. This is, after all, what an all volunteer military is about – volunteers making choices through decisions to join and remain in the military, and to select certain occupations, including those associated with combat or those that provide skills more readily transferable to the private sector.

It is noteworthy that casualty trends in Desert Storm were consistent with occupational patterns displayed in Figure 3. While Blacks accounted for 23 percent of military personnel deployed to the Gulf, they comprised only 17 percent of the combat or non-combat deaths. Whites, who made up 71 percent of the U.S. forces in the theater accounted for 76 percent of the deaths. Hispanics, who were four percent of the forces, accounted for four percent of the deaths; and others – less than two percent of the force – made up two percent of the deaths.

Conclusions...

**"We will not waver, we will not tire, we will not falter; and we will not fall."
President George W. Bush, Oct 7, 2001**

The Gates Commission built a case for a volunteer military by pointing out the unfairness of conscription, establishing the feasibility of a volunteer force on economic grounds, and suggesting that a volunteer force could be more effective than a conscripted force.

The AVF has far exceeded the expectations of its framers. It has provided equal opportunities for young Americans to realize their potential and has demonstrated its superiority to a conscripted force by any reasonable measure. Not only has the All-Volunteer Force proved to be cost efficient; it is also combat-effective. The AVF has established a hard-earned record of success: from winning the cold war to restoring regional balance, to fighting non-state actors and being ready for an uncertain future. Americans oppose a return to conscription by nearly 3:1.¹¹

Today, more than 30 years later, we find that the Commission – and the Nation – got it right!

**"America will act deliberately; America will act decisively; and America will prevail because we've got the finest military in the world... We are ready. We're prepared. And should the United States be compelled to act, our troops will be acting in the finest traditions of America..."
President George W. Bush, Jan 3, 2002**

Attachments:

What Happens in a Draft?
Social Representation

¹¹ Gallup Poll, January 3-5, 2003.



Sequence of Events

Here is a brief overview of what would occur if the United States returned to a draft:

1. CONGRESS AND THE PRESIDENT AUTHORIZE A DRAFT

A crisis occurs which requires more troops than the volunteer military can supply. Congress passes and the President signs legislation which starts a draft.

2. THE LOTTERY

A lottery based on birthdays determines the order in which registered men are called up by Selective Service. The first to be called, in a sequence determined by the lottery, will be men whose 20th birthday falls during that year, followed, if needed, by those aged 21, 22, 23, 24 and 25. 18-year-olds and those turning 19 would probably would not be drafted.

3. ALL PARTS OF SELECTIVE SERVICE ARE ACTIVATED

The Agency activates and orders its State Directors and Reserve Forces Officers to report for duty.

4. PHYSICAL, MENTAL, AND MORAL EVALUATION OF REGISTRANTS

Registrants with low lottery numbers are ordered to report for a physical, mental, and moral evaluation at a Military Entrance Processing Station to determine whether they are fit for military service. Once he is notified of the results of the evaluation, a registrant will be given 10 days to file a claim for exemption, postponement, or deferment.

5. LOCAL AND APPEAL BOARDS ACTIVATED AND INDUCTION NOTICES SENT

Local and Appeal Boards will process registrant claims. Those who pass the military evaluation will receive induction orders. An inductee will have 10 days to report to a local Military Entrance Processing Station for induction.

6. FIRST DRAFTEES ARE INDUCTED

According to current plans, Selective Service must deliver the first inductees to the military within 193 days from the onset of a crisis.

Source: Selective Service System (<http://www.sss.gov/seq.htm>)



Those most concerned with the social representation of the military typically focus on two areas:

- **The representation of African-Americans in the enlisted force:** Blacks comprise about 20% of non-prior service enlistees and 22% of the enlisted force, as compared to 12-14% of the civilians of comparable ages.
- **The representation of youth from affluent or upper-middle class households in the enlisted force:** Contrary to myth, data show that the enlisted force is quite representative of the civilian population. Although there are some differences, they are "... not dramatic."¹ Examination of data on socio-economic status with respect to parents' education, employment, and occupation show only modest differences between military enlisted accessions and the recruit-age civilian population.

The top-line percentages comparing the military and civilian populations with respect to three important socioeconomic indicators are remarkably similar.

- For educational achievement for the two groups, the percentages are very close (Table 1)
 - o 84% of DoD enlisted recruits and 86% of the recruit-age population have a father who is a high school graduate or higher
 - o 84% of DoD enlisted recruits and 85% of the recruit-age population have a mother who is a high school graduate or higher
- Considering employment rates, fathers of enlisted recruits and recruit-age civilian youth are nearly identical

(Percent)	DoD Enlisted Recruits		Recruit-Age Population	
	Father	Mother	Father	Mother
Highest Level of Education of Parents				
Less than High School Graduate	16	16	14	15
High School Graduate	32	35	31	35
Some College	30	31	25	28
College Graduate or Greater	22	19	30	22
Employment Rate of Parents	90	79	89	74

Source: Population Representation in the Military Services, Fiscal Year 1999, November 2000

Appendix B

¹ Robert Goldich, *The Military Draft and a Possible War with Iraq*, Congressional Research Service, Washington, DC, December 31, 2002, p. 13.

- Considering occupation, the distributions are also quite similar (Table 2)
 - o 5% of DoD enlisted recruits (active components) have fathers in clerical and administrative support jobs compared to 5% of those in the recruit-age civilian population
 - o 25% of DoD enlisted recruits (active component) have mothers in the clerical and administrative support jobs compared to 24% of those in the recruit-age civilian population
 - o 26% of DoD enlisted recruits (active component) have fathers in production and craft jobs compared to 21% of those in the recruit-age population.

(Percent)	Father			Mother		
Occupation of Recruits' Parents	Active Enlisted Recruits	Reserve Enlisted Recruits	Recruit-Age Population	Active Enlisted Recruits	Reserve Enlisted Recruits	Recruit-Age Population
Executive, Administration, & Managerial	16	14	20	13	13	14
Professional	9	11	14	16	19	19
Technicians & Related Services	4	3	3	4	4	4
Sales	8	8	10	11	10	10
Clerical & Administrative Support	5	4	5	25	23	24
Protective Services	5	5	3	1	1	1
Other Service Occupations	4	5	4	19	19	16
Farming, Forestry, & Fishing	3	4	4	1	1	1
Precision Production, Craft, & Repair	26	27	21	3	3	2
Machine Operators	6	4	7	4	4	5
Transportation	10	9	7	2	2	1
Handlers, Helpers, Laborers	3	3	3	1	1	2
Military	4	3	< 0.1	0.6	0.4	< 0.1

Source: Population Representation in the Military Services, Fiscal Year 1999, November 2000

- Although Defense Department data suggest that the socioeconomic status of military accessions is slightly lower than that of the population, African-Americans in the Active Duty military have notably higher household income than do their civilian counterparts (Table 3). African-Americans recognize the greater opportunity offered by service in the military, when comparing civilian labor market alternatives.

	Active Duty Personnel*	Civilian Population
White	\$33,480	\$44,400
African-American	\$32,004	\$27,900

Sources: DoD data from Overview of the 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel, DMDIC Report No. 2000-008 February 2001. Civilian data from U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, September 2000. * Median interpolated from Table E.1 on page 375

- Beyond earning more than their civilian peers, Blacks in the military are better educated, more likely to come from two-parent households, and come from families in which both mother and father are better educated.
- If we pursue social representation in the military in its purest form, Goldich argues that: "...the force should have fewer blacks, and more whites, and many more less-qualified individuals than the Armed Forces currently accept. Others have suggested that a logical outcome of this latter belief could be the imposition of racial quotas (penalizing capable minority youth who may enlist due to lack of perceived civilian opportunities), or forcing the military to turn away high-quality recruits to make room for less capable ones."²
- Another example of how today's volunteer force may be more broadly representative of the American population than some volunteer force opponents suggest involves the inclusion of officers in an analysis of the issue. Members of the middle and upper socioeconomic classes whose military functions are more analogous to civilian leadership positions are present in the officer corps, thus, it is argued, including officers in the analysis of socioeconomic status would reduce difference between military and civilian indicators considerably.³

² Goldich, p. 14.

³ Goldich, pp. 13-14.