

Carol Rivers

Dr. Chrzanowski

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Reinstating Compulsory Conscription

World War II marked the last war that received full American support. The draft, known today as compulsory conscription, was an integral part of that war. Seventy percent of American men aged 18 to 35 served. The common experience shared amongst these men created lifetime friendships for an entire generation. No other conflict since then has come close to producing such national unification and pride of citizenry. So states Charles Moskos, late professor of sociology for Northwestern University, recipient of the Distinguished Service Award for the U.S. Army, and a draftee for the U.S. Army Combat Engineers (Moskos). Currently, however, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the official estimate of the American veteran population is approximately 24,816,000 ("Veteran"). Total U.S. population exceeds 301 million people ("The New Boomers"). In other words, the ratio of veterans to the total U.S. population is less than 10%. Comparison of these figures reflects that American enlistment ratios in the U.S. Armed forces have decreased dramatically since World War II. The U.S. is a dominant military force in the world today; however, it also has allies that it must help protect and defend in the name of democracy. As a result of the above, American forces are involved in multi-theater (or diverse worldwide) roles, both simultaneously and continuously, thus spreading out our troops over diverse areas. Additionally, the extended war on terrorism continues to deplete American military forces, and international news reflects American discord and varying

degrees of enthusiasm in continued war efforts. Consequently, since only one in ten Americans has served in the armed forces, American understanding of military requirements is diminishing, right along with the unity that comes with such knowledge. Thus, the realization that American safety walks hand in hand with a strong military never hits home to the majority of today's American citizens. Compulsory conscription needs reinstating to reestablish true American citizenship and national unification of the people, thereby resulting in the expansion of U.S. troops and increased homeland security.

Nonetheless, one of the worries of Americans in reinstating the draft is that the educated, the rich, and the children of political officials will still be able to avoid military service. Critics of the draft complain that full-time students will continue to defer their military service to continue their education, and therefore conscription largely affects those not able to afford to attend college ("National"). During a census in the late 70's, only six college graduates joined the enlisted ranks during the entire year of the census, reports author Alan Greenblatt (380). Another factor brought up against the draft is the continued avoidance of serving in the military by the rich. Certainly, this may still be the case if the draft were to be reinstated and the rich continued to move. David Segal, Director of the University of Maryland's Center for Research on Military Organizations, agrees that wealthy society members were exempt during colonial times and during the Cold War. They paid others to replace them in the enlisted ranks (Greenblatt 380). Additionally, James Quinlivan, senior analyst for the RAND Corporation, asserts that the rich moved to areas beyond the reach of the draft rather than serve in the militia (Greenblatt 380). A 1960's historian by the name of Myra Macpherson also contends that as much as the country was against the Vietnam War, avoiding military service during that time was considered a badge of honor (380). Additionally, portions of the American public contend

that exclusion from compulsory conscription will also include certain political factions. These American citizens feel that foreign war commitment of the public is not strong because the children of elected officials do not serve (Greenblatt 381). In fact, the overall percentage of congressional children in the military of service age continues to fall, states William Galston, former Deputy Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy (214). Indeed, looking through the Iraq casualty list over the years on CNN supports that the majority of the casualties are the poor, middle-class, or blue-collar workers. Clearly, these worries about the privileged members of society being exempt from conscription are indeed a valid concern of potential draftees.

Undoubtedly, worry about the exemption of privileged members of society from the draft is a matter of concern. However, if compulsory conscription would be reinstated according to New York's United States Representative Charles Rangel's proposed bill, it would replace the Selective Service law and introduce a system in which ALL American men and women, including legal permanent residents, ages eighteen to twenty-six would be subject to compulsory military service or an alternative civilian service (Rangel 206). The bill vests the President with the authority to determine the numbers of draftees needed and the selection method. Deferment would be limited to those completing high school, up to the age of twenty. Moreover, there would be no exemptions for college or graduate school (206). Rangel also asserts that politicians would more readily feel the pain of war conflict and sacrifice if their children were also on the front lines. He discloses that four only members of the 107th Congress who voted in favor of the Iraq war had children in the military (206). Similarly, if Rangel's mandatory military service becomes reality, the government will put more consideration into troop deployments, and the American public will be more accepting of the resultant casualties if the economically advantaged as well as politicians' sons and daughters are placed in combat situations

("National"). The majority of Americans will feel the ramifications of war. Therefore, reinstating compulsory conscription will result in American unification.

Furthermore, those who oppose the draft feel that in a free society, the choice to serve or not to serve in the military is a constitutional right, and mandatory military service is an infringement upon this right. In other words, a draft will raise ethical issues by forcing Americans to join the armed forces against their will. Low morale will ensue, and the military's all-around quality will decline ("National"). Furthermore, enforcement of military service by the government upon citizens implies a grantor-grantee relationship and that the government is not a true protector of American rights warns Doug Bandow, former special assistant to President Reagan and his Military Manpower Task Force. He also observes that freedom is not a gift from a king or the state requiring the paying of homage, as this would reflect a feudalistic, fascist, and socialistic point of view (371). In other words, a free American's rights are not a privilege bestowed by the government, but the rights of a free society. In comparison, especially if military service is life threatening, forcing Americans into service might not fit the definition of a free country ("National"). Consequently, some Americans consider reinstatement of the draft to be unconstitutional, as allowing its future implementation is in direct conflict with the definition of a free society. Given, if taken at face value, enforcing the draft upon the "free" society of America may indeed appear to be an infringement of American rights. Nevertheless, these same free Americans should want to defend themselves, their homes, and their country in the very name of freedom. Their freedom is a direct result of the draft during the War of Independence (Kestnbaum 24). American citizens should be proud of America's hard-won freedom and the privileges that result from that freedom. Therefore, doesn't it follow that continuation of freedom be underscored by implementation of the draft? Indeed, if citizens construe national service as a

duty they owe to their country, why not enforce its implementation the same as contractual duties? Additionally, Jim Lehrer, a former Marine Corps soldier during the 1950s, gratefully comments that his forced service to his country changed his life. He insists his service permanently reconnected him to the rest of the world outside of himself and, furthermore, that these connections are essential for the continued success of a democratic society (“National”). Obviously, reinstating compulsory service is a benefit to the United States by not only reintroducing citizen pride in defending America, but also by unifying America as a whole.

Moreover, draft opponents contend that compulsory national service will be too costly for an already severely economically challenged United States. Americans can learn how economically challenged the country is simply by watching television or taking a quick look at the newspapers. The economic situation is all over the news every day. Compulsory conscription will result in the need to train more soldiers and in America spending billions of dollars that it can ill afford. In support of this analysis, Lawrence Korb, Senior Advisor to the Center for Defense Information, states that the average enlistment period is four years, and most draft proposals call for no more than a two-year enlistment (217). It makes sense that if soldiers turn over more rapidly, more training is required. Korb also determines that the resultant mixed draft and volunteer force would be more expensive to the United States than the all-volunteer force because the large influx of draftees would result in an increase in training costs (217). Similarly, implementation of the draft would result in a large number of these shortened enlistments, and the cost of opening more training bases would be significant, warns the Defense Department. Additionally, draft opponents believe that lowering the enlistment time requirement will significantly increase permanent change of station costs because of the resulting shortening of overseas tours (Bandow 380). To illustrate further the increase in costs resulting from the draft,

comparing recent military personnel costs with those of the draft in 1973 yields an 8% decrease in Pentagon spending (Korb 217). Admittedly, today's forces are much smaller than they were back in 1973, but it is reasonable to conclude that savings of any significance will be nominal at best (217). Consequently, compulsory conscription may prove to be too costly and detrimental to America's economy.

Certainly, the United States is suffering a severe economic recession. However, institution of the draft would lead to positive economic consequences. For example, the draft would provide a source of full-time income for otherwise jobless Americans, thus reducing America's high unemployment rates. Supporting this, Galston observes that this was certainly the case during the 1974–75 recessions and the recession of 1982–83 (219). Similarly, the increased number of training posts would open up countless numbers of jobs for civilians, thus also succeeding in reducing unemployment rates. Additionally, the economic crisis would have the effect of retaining those already enlisted in the armed forces. In fact, a research group found that for each one percent increase in the unemployment rate, retention rates went up two percent in the military (Marshall). Additionally, an economist at the University of Chicago, Gary Becker, argues that the financing of a large volunteer army during a long war increases tax rates, and the draft would directly affect lowered budget costs per soldier (Marshall). Therefore, reinstating compulsory conscription would not only aid America through this economic crisis, but would also increase our force strength during America's global war on terror.

Additionally, what opponents fail to understand is that compulsory conscription is necessary to reintroduce to American citizens what the true concept of citizenship is. In order to be a United States "citizen" and have certain rights, one should also have a military service obligation. Unfortunately, just being born here is adequate to be a "citizen." As General George

Washington so eloquently observed, "... it must be laid down as a primary position and the basis of our (democratic) system, that every citizen who enjoys the protection of a free Government owes not only a proportion of his property, but even his personal service to the defense of it" (qtd. in "Learn"). To understand what citizen obligation means, addressing where exactly the term "American citizenship" originates is essential. Meyer Kestnbaum, assistant professor of sociology and research and associate of the Center for Research on Military Organization at the University of Maryland, conducted extensive research on its origins. To begin with, the Continental Army was established in 1775, commanded by General Washington during the War of Independence. Originally, the militia was comprised entirely of men entering freely as citizens of state (17). Unfortunately, their lack of training and discipline coupled with prolonged conflict resulted in a serious reduction in ranks (18). This reduction threatened the states' potential successful outcome in their fight for freedom. Consequently, George Washington and the Continental Congress initiated the call for compulsory service in the army by citizens of the states if the war for its freedom were not to be lost (22). Summarized, the authorization of federal military conscription by national legislature was based solely upon American citizenship (29). This new Continental Army of conscripted citizens finally secured America its independence on the battlefield (24). Moreover, the people as a whole understood that the draft had been essential to their success in the War of Independence and that citizenship required certain military responsibilities.

Unfortunately, in today's United States most Americans have lost touch with its history and the meaning of Washington's definition of citizenship. Carol Grigsby, a graduate of the National War College and previously holding positions in the State Department, U.S. Agency for International Development, and the U.S. Senate, asserts that waving the flag and enjoying a

peaceful environment is hardly the definition of citizenship. She insists that an examination of America's value systems is in order to reestablish this essential principle. Moreover, she adds that the American people now have the greatest opportunity to recapture the true meaning of being an American and that our successors will have a strong foundation of comprehension of the challenges they will face as citizens (111). The requirement of young Americans to put in a brief period of national duty would go a long way to familiarize Americans with the obligations of citizenship (118). Similarly, a 1986 Ford Foundation study conducted by Richard Danzig, a member of the Obama transition team, and Peter Szanton, a policy analyst, observes that in today's America, virtually the only true sense of citizenship as an ideal to be earned rather than simply received is held by military veterans, Peace Corps alumni, and ironically enough, immigrants (Greenya 13). Americans should understand the implications of history on the United States' current freedom and should accept certain military responsibilities as its proud citizens.

Additionally, the loss of the essence of citizenship due to lack of compulsory conscription has resulted in the degradation of national unification. The United States contains two distinctly separate worlds, one civilian and one military. There is no cohesion between the two.

Immediately preceding the calamitous events of 9/11, Robert Putnam, political scientist and professor of public policy at Harvard University, wrote a book about the American lack of social cohesion (Grigsby 111). Furthermore, Grigsby adds that although the 9/11 tragedy led to emergency personnel response and personal sacrifice, as well as a surge in patriotism and an increase in American interest in service to country, it did not result in any notable increase in volunteering or other support services (111). Even today, relatively few Americans have been a part of wartime service or any other form of national programs (110). Without military service by the majority of the people, the armed forces concerns, responsibilities, and understanding are

lost. Consequently, the loss of the draft is also resulting in American loss of national unity.

Today, the all-volunteer military force continues to be the United States' backbone and strength in protecting United States homeland security. Since the conclusion of the Vietnam War and the end of the draft, the U.S. military has been comprised of all volunteers. The all-volunteer army's 35-year commitment, professionalism, and enhanced cohesion due to the strains of military combat are the very core of unity (113). Each troop is responsible not only for his own actions and survival, but for his neighboring soldier's as well. Grigsby concludes that this enhanced cohesion, although essential to combat environment, has the undesired effect of civilian and troop inability to be part of the other's world. The military views the average American as leading a soft life, and the civilians have no comprehension of the values and realities of the soldier. Oftentimes, the only connection they have with one another is through family (113).

I can attest to this military-civilian divide through my own experience as a soldier. I was a 10th Mountain Division soldier working in the same building with civilians, with both sides serving computer operations of Fort Drum. Very little communication existed between civilians and soldiers. Although my unit worked in that building for the better part of five years, most of our soldiers didn't even know the civilians' names, or even what their roles were in relation to ours. Likewise, the civilians had virtually no communications with the soldiers. Even more frightening, several of my coworkers today express exasperation with my continued devotion to watching CNN. They complain, "International news doesn't apply to us. Why don't you watch the local news instead? That's what's important here." They express these comments during our global "war on terrorism," with troops dying by the hundreds in Iraq and Afghanistan and North Korea's attempts at proliferation of nuclear arms. They do not realize that the U.S. armed forces need public support now more than ever at this critical point in America's continued fight for

freedom and safety. Yet they celebrate July 4 as if it is a right due them as citizens when they do not even know the true meaning of the word. Clearly, compulsory conscription is necessary to unite America as one nation.

Ultimately, the absence of a draft and the resulting lack of national unity and support have led to a serious decrease in our troop levels. The U.S. Armed Forces are operating at alarmingly low levels, threatening America's safety. U.S. troop involvement in multi-theater engagements reduces the level of troops ensuring homeland security and therefore exposes America to possible infiltration or military action from enemies. Supporting this view, politicians, both Republican and Democrat alike, are worried that American troops are spread too thin globally (Prah 664). Very importantly, retired general Barry McCaffrey, a professor of international security studies at the U.S. Military Academy, agrees that civilian support for the war is dropping alarmingly along with recruitment. Worse, our U.S. Army and Marine troops, both active-duty and National Guard, are undermanned and disintegrating (664). Shawn Brimly, writing for the U.S. Army War College, and a Fellow at the Center for a New American Security in Washington, also finds that with the number of U.S. troops engaging in overseas commitments, the Armed Forces' ability to respond to other strategic surprises is seriously limited. He quotes Joint Chief of Staff Chairman Admiral Mullen, "The pace of ongoing operations has prevented our forces from training for the full-spectrum of operations and impacts our ability to be ready to counter future threats. This lack of balance is unsustainable in the long term" (28). Obviously, the inadequate strength of the United States military needs addressing, with counteractive measures. Moreover, General Chiarelli, the Army's vice chief of staff, states that the Army's goal is to expand its active-duty troops to 547,400. This would be an increase of 65,000 troops. Approximately 148,000 troops, almost one third of our forces, were occupying

Iraq alone in late 2008 (“Bush”). Indeed, the United States needs more troops in its ranks to ensure American safety and success in international affairs. Currently, the Pentagon is trying ways other than the draft to supplement American armed forces. These include enforcing extended enlistment contract times when troop deployment is imminent. This is known as “stop-loss,” also known by many as the “backdoor draft.” A personal interview with a government headquarters employee of a military installation, who works almost exclusively with soldiers, reveals that this stop-loss technique is draining physically and mentally on the soldiers and their families (Anonymous). He states that soldiers deploy to hot spots such as Iraq or Afghanistan five, six, or more times during one enlistment (Anonymous). Another technique the Pentagon is utilizing to supplement U.S. forces is drawing heavily from all reserve and National Guard units (Prah 665). Prah’s statistics from the Department of Defense show that members of these units constitute approximately half of the men and women serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. The usual role of these units is as part-time soldiers for one weekend a month and two weeks of the year only. They are also the ones who respond to state emergencies. Now, because of the decrease of troops in the Armed Forces, they have to spend months, if not years, overseas. They must leave behind jobs and families, thus creating heavy emotional and financial burdens (665). Moreover, state governors are worried that the heavy reliance of the military upon these units will leave the nation vulnerable to emergencies such as wildfires, floods, and earthquakes.

Additionally, recruitment quota levels are not being met (665). The Government Accountability Office (GAO), otherwise known as the investigative arm of Congress, analyzes and audits for Congress. Its audit of troop levels revealed low numbers. Congress was informed and countered with the authorization of a pilot program called the National Defense Authorization Act for 2006 (Farrell 1). This act encourages increased enlistment by offering

recruitment incentives. These incentives include bonuses up to \$8,600 per year for recruiters exceeding their recruitment quota, fund up to \$40,000 for home ownership to the soldier, and waive required service obligations from eight years to two years to fill the shortage of medical professional and chaplains (5). These incentives reflect the importance Congress is attributing to expanding U.S. forces. This expansion must be sufficient to maintain multi-theater activities and national security. I watch CNN, as previously noted, and the assessment there too is U.S. troop strength is still thin, even with the measures taken to supplement the forces. Moreover, if a simple college student such as myself can access this critical national information, so can potential enemies of the United States. America's international relations and activities hinge upon international (both enemies and allies) perception of U.S. military strength. Therefore, America's armed forces need to expand soon, or foreign perception of the United States as a dominant military force will weaken. The Obama Administration faces very serious times indeed, and these issues need resolution yesterday. Compulsory conscription should be a part of that resolution.

In conclusion, while there is dissension, the United States needs to reinstitute compulsory conscription. The increase in American citizen participation in the army will broaden their understanding and acceptance of military responsibilities and concerns. Eventually, military volunteerism will result once the public understands the true meaning of citizenship. Once again, the public will be a well-informed public. Unification between the military and the American civilian worlds will occur, and American national pride will increase. The resultant expansion of the U.S. armed forces will ensure American safety. However, Congress and the Pentagon need to act on draft implementation before it is too late. Today, the world recognizes the United States as a dominant military force, and its citizens live in a free nation and enjoy many rights and

comforts as a part of that recognition. Very shortly, this may no longer be the case, as freedom needs continuous protection made difficult by a war-torn and depleted army. Unfortunately, the low number of American military forces threatens the freedom of American society. Without increasing military personnel, freedom will become a thing of the past. Future generations of America will no longer live in the same United States. Oppression, violence, and the loss of civil rights will become their reality. As Ronald Reagan's words of wisdom confirm:

Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States where men were free (qtd. in "Learn").

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