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Abstract: Perhaps the most significant by-product of America's involvement in Vietnam was the decision to move from conscription to an all-volunteer force. The Gates Commission recommended this change, but identified several concerns regarding costs, quality, and the nature of the force that persist forty years later. This article examines the success of the All-Volunteer Force and its appropriateness for a democratic society

When America committed major combat forces to Vietnam in 1965, the United States had 2.66 million service members on active duty.[1] It was a mixture of professional volunteers, many of whom had combat experience in WWII or Korea, and conscripted citizens. At the time, President Lyndon Johnson made the political decision not to ask for authority to call up reserve forces; instead he relied on the existing armed forces to implement US national policy, augmented by draft calls, to fill the ranks as the commitment grew.[2] This decision and the violent reaction to the war prompted 1968 Republican nominee Richard Nixon to promise he would end the draft.[3] According to historian Lewis Sorley, Johnson's decision and growing anti-war sentiment in the United States motivated Army Chief of Staff Creighton Abrams to restructure the Army in a way that would force future presidents to mobilize reserves whenever the nation committed to a protracted conflict.[4]

The past fifty years have brought a dramatic change in the size, composition, orientation, and professional character of the US military. At 1.31 million, it is just under half the size of the 1965 force and completely composed of volunteers—though some call it a recruited rather than a volunteer force.[5] US forces are strategically mobile and are thus expected and trained to conduct operations anywhere in the world across a wide spectrum, to include humanitarian assistance. Women now

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1 Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 1965-1966* (London: Institute for Strategic Studies, March 1966), 23.

2 Lewis Sorley, "Creighton Abrams and Active-Reserve Integration in Wartime," *Parameters* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 35.

3 Donald Vandergriff, *Manning the Future Legions of the United States: Finding and Developing Tomorrow's Centurions* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008), 62.

4 Sorley, "Creighton Abrams and Active-Reserve Integration in Wartime," 42. Sorley's claim is disputed by a lack of direct evidence of General Abrams' intent.

5 Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)/CFO, *Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Request* (Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, February 2015), 21.

comprise nearly 15 percent of this force, and serve in roles not imagined in 1965.[6] The US Defense Department also created a robust and experienced special operations capability. Finally, and most significantly, the American military is trained and educated to a level unsurpassed by any other country's armed forces. This change took place in an era of extreme volatility and complexity, one that included the remainder of the Vietnam War, the Cold War, the first Gulf War, ethnic conflicts after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. There was an explosion in technological development; specifically, unprecedented advances in the speed of computer processors and precision-guided weapons. The international political environment shifted from the relatively stable bi-polar Cold War to what proved to be a less stable uni-polar world that is developing into a multi-polar dynamic with even greater uncertainty. Inevitably, the changes also took place in the context of natural American political and economic cycles. Many factors influenced the US Armed Forces' development over these 50 years. This essay focuses on the end of the draft and the institution of the All-Volunteer Force in 1973.

Two significant questions have accompanied the development of this military force. Is the All-Volunteer Force a success? A review of the forty years of experience since its inception suggests that it is. Is an All-Volunteer Force appropriate for a democratic society? This broader question defies easy answers, but it is important for all citizens of the United States to consider.

The Decision to End Vietnam-Era Conscription.

The story of America's increasing commitment to Vietnam during the Johnson presidency, the effect of more than 58,000 Americans killed in action, and the lack of popular support for the war are well known. Less well known are the events that led to the institution in 1973 of an all-volunteer military that forms the basis for the US armed forces of today. The use of the term "all-volunteer" implies America's armed forces have normally been manned with conscripted citizens. Throughout the country's history, this has not been true. Americans traditionally resisted the maintenance of a large standing army and relied on volunteers to fill the ranks of the active military with a robust militia to be mobilized in times of national emergency. The United States has relied on a draft only three times: during the mid-later stages of the Civil War, World War I, and for most of the period 1940-1972.[7]

In March of 1969, two months after his inauguration, President Nixon announced the creation of a Commission on an All-Volunteer Force to fulfill his campaign promise to end the draft.[8] Members included former Secretary of Defense Thomas S. Gates, Jr. as the chairman and such notables as Roy Wilkins (Executive Director of the NAACP), Milton Friedman, Alan Greenspan, Jerome Holland (President of Hampton Institute), and Theodore Hesburgh (President of the University of

6 Eileen Patten and Kim Parker, "Women in the US Military: Growing Share, Distinctive Profile," Pew Research Center, December 22, 2011, http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/12/22/women-in-the-u-s-military-growing-share-distinctive-profile.

7 George Q. Flynn, *The Draft, 1940-1973* (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 5-8.

8 *The Report of The President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, February 1970), vii.

Notre Dame).[9] In 1970, the Commission recommended an immediate end to conscription and the institution of an all-volunteer military. After relying on the draft to fill the ranks of its armed forces for the Cold War for more than 30 years, our defense leaders decided to do something for the first time in US history, maintain a significant military force with volunteers instead of draftees. After a lengthy debate, Congress allowed the statutory authority for the draft to expire.[10] The decision was controversial and despite its recommendation, the commission's report identified several concerns involving:

- the possible mercenary motivation of volunteers
- the creation of a separate warrior class within the society
- a greater propensity of political leaders to employ the force
- the possibility of a disproportionate percentage of volunteers being from lower economic classes and African-Americans
- the expense of a recruited military
- possible quality issues, and
- opportunity costs associated with expanding personnel expenses within a fixed defense budget.[11]

Ironically, even though the all-volunteer force was declared a success in the 1980s by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, many of these concerns persist.[12]

The Success of the All-Volunteer Force

Has the All-Volunteer Force been a success? What defines success for such a force? Eugene Bardach, a professor at the Goldman School of Public Policy at the University of California, suggests several criteria to evaluate policies or programs. They include efficiency (specifically cost-effectiveness or benefit-cost analysis), political acceptability, and robustness or improvability.[13] He also insists that outcomes be evaluated, not the policy or program itself. Of these, I will use performance (related to the most significant outcomes), sustainability (related to robustness) and cost. An assessment using these measures must compare the current force to its primary alternative, the conscripted force.

Performance is the most difficult measure to assess. It is impossible to know how well a draftee force would have performed under the circumstances of the four decades in question. That aside, the US military has been remarkably successful against other conventional military forces in the last 30 years. This success includes operations in Panama (1989), Iraq (1991), Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003).[14] While several factors and circumstances led to the collapse of the

9 Ibid., viii-ix.

10 Leonard Wong, *From Black Boots to Desert Boots: The All-Volunteer Army Experiment Continues* (Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute, May 2014).

11 *The Report of The President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force*, 12-20.

12 Mark J. Eitelberg, "The All-Volunteer Force after Twenty Years," in *Professionals on the Front Line: Two Decades of the All-Volunteer Force* (Washington: Brassey's, 1996), 66-67.

13 Eugene Bardach, *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving* (New York: Chatham House Publishers, 2000), 20-26.

14 United States Army Center for Military History, *Operation Joint Guardian: The US Army in Kosovo*, CMH Pub 70-109-1 (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, September 2007), 3.

Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, many partially attribute America's success in the Cold War to improved military capability.[15] Leaving strategic forces (nuclear) aside, since the end of the Cold War, America's military forces have been unchallenged at sea or in the air, and rarely challenged (conventionally) on land. This success has been the result of the resources the United States spent in pursuit of a powerful military. These include the development and fielding of more sophisticated combat equipment; e.g. the Abrams tank, the F-22 and the B-2 bomber, advanced precision munitions, and the construction and operation of advanced combat training centers like the National Training Center at Ft. Irwin, California. Currently, US armed forces are ranked as the most powerful military in the world based on a balance of trained manpower, quality and quantity of combat equipment, and expenditures on defense activities.[16] Would the US have committed the same resources to training and equipping a draftee force? More significantly, would the nature of US foreign policy have changed?

Measuring the sustainability of the All-Volunteer Force involves assessing the ability to recruit and retain the people of the quality necessary to provide the capabilities the nation needs to implement its foreign policy. The Gates Commission loosely defined "quality" as "mental, physical and moral standards for enlistment…"[17] Within the Armed Forces, this has come to mean education levels (primarily high school diploma or equivalent), minimum mental capacity as measured by score on the Armed Forces Qualification Test, absence of a serious criminal record, and physical ability (minimum fitness level and no disabilities).[18] The Gates Commission's fears about the quality of the armed forces have generally not been realized.

For a time between the end of the Vietnam War and the early 1980s, the US military (especially the Army) suffered from a "hangover" effect in that service in the military was not valued.[19] As a result, the military accepted and did their best to retain lower quality members in order to fill the ranks. This contributed to low morale, discipline problems, and, when coupled with poor equipment and training based on lower budgets, produced what Chief of Staff of the Army Edwin Meyer called a "hollow Army."[20]

The Army's response to this condition was to change its approach to war-fighting, training and readiness, convince Congress to boost soldier pay and benefits, and drastically improve the quality of the equipment and training facilities (discussed earlier).[21] Without these changes,

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15 Vojtech Mastny, "NATO at Fifty: Did NATO Win the Cold War? Looking over the Wall," *Foreign Affairs*, March 28, 2015, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/55003/vojtech-mastny/nato-at-fifty-did-nato-win-the-cold-war-looking-over-the-wall.

16 Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, 21-25

17 *The Report of The President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force*, 16.

18 Lawrence Kapp, R*ecruiting and Retention in the Active Component Military: Are There Problems?* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 25, 2002), 2.

19 George C. Herring, *Preparing Not to Refight the Last War: The Impact of the Vietnam War on the US Military in After Vietnam: Legacies of a Lost War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 83.

20 Testimony of General Edward C. Meyer before the Subcommittee on Investigations, House Committee on Armed Forces, May 29, 1980, 18.

21 Anne W. Chapman, Carol J. Lilly, John L. Romjue, and Susan Canedy, *A Historical Overview of the Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1973-1998* (Fort Monroe, VA: Military History Office, TRADOC, 1998), xv-xvi; and Wong, *From Black Boots to Desert Boots*.

successful operations in Panama and Iraq (1991) would not have been possible. The resultant strategic success in the Cold War led to a period of downsizing for the military, the harvesting of a "peace dividend," and a reflection on the relevance of the military in the absence of the global Soviet threat.

In the decade prior to September 2001, the military was reduced in size by almost 37 percent and largely brought home to the United States from Europe.[22] For the all-volunteer force, this meant a balanced approach that included a reduction in accessions (enlistments and officer commissions) and a combination of voluntary and involuntary incentives for career soldiers to leave the force. The effect of this was an increase in quality of the smaller force as the services were more selective in who they enlisted and retained.[23] A by-product of this drawdown was the transfer of experienced soldiers and leaders into the Reserves and National Guard, improving the quality of those forces as well.

However, the economic boom in the mid-to-late 90s, coupled with an end to the drawdown that resulted in an increase in enlistment quotas, created a period where the military struggled to recruit the number of quality soldiers necessary to fill its ranks.[24] The real test for the All-Volunteer Force came in the years after the 9-11 attacks. In the initial years of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the military services were able to meet both their quality and quantity goals for recruiting. Nonetheless, by 2005, they were hard pressed to recruit enough soldiers of the desired quality.

According to a 2013 Congressional Research Service report, this shortfall happened for a variety of reasons: the difficulty of recruiting during wartime, an upturn in the economic conditions in the US, and, in the Army and Marine Corps, an expansion of the recruiting mission in an effort to grow the size of the force to meet operational requirements.[25] When the mission in Iraq started to wind down, the expansion of the force was completed and the severe economic downturn took hold in 2008-09, the services began to meet recruiting goals once more. In the four to five years since then, the planned reduction in the size of the armed forces has made for an easier recruiting and retention environment, resulting in a high quality force.[26]

In general, other than two periods of time, the quality of the All-Volunteer Force has been very high. An increase of over 100 million people to the US population with a corresponding dramatic decrease in the size of the military, sizeable increases in pay, an insistence on high school graduates and higher test scores, the introduction of women into the ranks in much greater numbers (15-20 percent) and extensive use of enlistment and retention bonuses have allowed the services to select

22 Bernard Rostker, *Rightsizing the Force: Lessons for the Current Drawdown of American Military Personnel*, Working Paper (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, June 2013), 13.

23 Lawrence Kapp, *Recruiting and Retention: An Overview of FY2011 and FY2012 Results for Active and Reserve Component Enlisted Personnel* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, May 10, 2013), 4.

24 Ibid., 15.

25 Ibid., 4.

26 Ibid., 5.

their members more carefully from among the population.[27] The ability to sustain this quality force over time is a significant measure of its success as compared to a conscripted military force.

The most compelling argument against the success of the all-volunteer military is that it is unaffordable. In 1967, Milton Friedman addressed this issue by stating the hidden tax imposed on those young men who were drafted would be replaced with an explicit tax on society, thus exposing the real cost of defense. He also argued reduced costs would result from longer enlistments and less required training.[28] While this projection represented increased government expenditures (by initially 3-4 billion dollars a year in his estimation), it effectively reduced the overall costs which included the hidden tax on draftees.

The Gates Commission argued the increased taxes required to maintain the military would spur a broader debate about defense spending and the use of the military.[29] While Friedman and others included direct compensation in their calculations and analysis, they either did not anticipate or did not address indirect costs resulting from efforts to maintain an effective force in the face of changing demographics. These include increases in retirement costs for a recruited force more likely to make the military a career, the housing, family program and health care costs for a force more likely to be older and married, the direct cost of recruiting infrastructure and advertising, and the costs associated with increased usage of benefits like the Army College Fund and the GI Bill.

In the last decade alone, the costs per active duty member of the Armed Forces increased 46 percent.[30] If current spending trends continue, personnel costs could consume the entire DOD budget by 2039.[31] At the macroeconomic level, however, US defense spending was almost 20 percent of all government spending in 2008 (at the height of spending for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan) compared to 45 percent in 1968 at the height of the Vietnam War.

As a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), military spending decreased from 9.4 percent to 4.6 percent over the same time period.[32] While this is an academic discussion given the current budget environment, the reality is the level of defense spending is a matter of priorities, federal taxation and spending policy. The significantly increased personnel costs in maintaining an all-volunteer military are undeniable.

If Friedman is correct, however, this is just the actual cost of providing for the nation's defense, paid for explicitly by its taxpayers and not as an implicit tax on draftees. The relevant question is whether the United States is willing to pay the bill. If not, then the choices include reductions in military strength and capability, changes in military compensation or benefits, or both.

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27 US Census Bureau, "American Fact Finder," http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_13_5YR_B01003&prodType=table; and Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, 21-25.

28 Milton Friedman, "The Case for Abolishing the Draft—and Substituting for it an All-Volunteer Army," *New York Times Magazine*, May 14, 1967, 117.

29 *The Report of The President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force*, 152.

30 Dennis Laich, *Skin in the Game: Poor Kids and Patriots* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2013), 10.

31 Ibid.

32 Karl W. Eikenberry, "Reassessing the All-Volunteer Force," *The Washington Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 12.

As a result of this discussion, a reasonable conclusion is the All-Volunteer Force has been a success. The US military has performed admirably over the past four decades by most measures and America has shown a willingness to sustain its military over that time period. Whether the cost of this force is worth the benefit gained is, rightfully, always being debated.

Is a Volunteer Force Appropriate for a Democratic Society?

The Gates Commission raised several issues regarding the effect of the All-Volunteer Force on American society: possible mercenary motivations of recruits, development of a separate warrior class within the society, possible disproportionate representation of African-Americans in the force (resulting in a greater proportion of casualties), and a greater propensity to employ military force by the political class. A subject not addressed by the commission was the effect of this change on one specific group, women. In the limited space of this essay, all of these will be addressed except the African American issue. While the specific concern about casualties has never been realized, the complexity of the discussion and its place in American society's dialog on race requires its own essay. As scholar Beth Bailey noted: "In a democratic nation, there is something lost when individual liberty is valued over all and the rights and benefits of citizenship become less closely linked to its duties and responsibilities."[33]

Related to the question of mercenary motivation, and the creation of a "warrior class," is the issue of whether all citizens should be committed to securing the liberties of a democratic society, not just committed to paying someone else to secure them.

Beth Bailey's quote above can be viewed as a warning about the majority of American citizens avoiding this responsibility and duty to protect liberty by allowing volunteers, generally from the economic lower classes, to provide that protection while they are shielded from a draft. During the deliberations of the Gates Commission, members considered a statement made years earlier by noted economist, John Kenneth Galbraith:

> The draft survives principally as a device by which we use compulsion to get young men to serve at less than the market rate of pay. We shift the cost of military service from the well-to-do taxpayer who benefits by lower taxes to the impecunious young draftee. This is a highly regressive arrangement that we would not tolerate in any other area. Presumably, freedom of choice here as elsewhere is worth paying for.[34]

In effect, deciding to recruit an all-volunteer force was also a decision to compete fairly in the workforce marketplace. As such, monetary incentives have played a critical role in the recruiting strategy of the US Armed Forces over the years.

The decision to proceed with an all-volunteer force prompted Congress to immediately increase pay for enlistees by 61.2 percent as an

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33 Beth Bailey, *America's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 260.

34 Walter Y. Oi, "Historical Perspectives on the All-Volunteer Force: The Rochester Connection," in *Professionals on the Front Line: Two Decades of the All-Volunteer Force* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1996), 46.

enticement to join. This incentive, combined with rising unemployment at the time, resulted in a seemingly positive start for the experiment.[35]

However, the replacement of the GI Bill in 1977 with a less generous program, concerns among career enlisted soldiers about pay equity, and subsequent pay increases capped below private sector wage increases resulted in low quality soldiers and an exodus from the services of mid-grade officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs).[36] As the decade closed, the all-volunteer force experienced declining enlistments, an element of soul-searching as the military sought relevance post-Vietnam, lower quality soldiers, rising attrition and declining morale.[37]

The 1980s saw a renewed commitment to the all-volunteer force. Double-digit, across-the-board pay raises in 1981 and 1982, an early decade recession and highly successful recruiting campaigns (like the Army's "Be All You Can Be") helped the services begin to meet desired quality goals. Introduction of programs like the Army College Fund and the return of the GI Bill in 1984 helped in the recruitment of high school graduates looking for options to fund their college education.[38]

This influx of higher quality soldiers allowed the military to adjust its retention standards so it could separate those with lower test scores, the less educated, drug users, and malcontents. An emphasis on physical fitness and weight control also improved the health and overall fitness of the force. These improvements, coupled with increases in spending on modern equipment and training, and tactical successes in Grenada, Panama and Iraq improved the morale, standing and reputation of the force.

In the 1990s as America substantially reduced the size of the military resulting in a need for fewer recruits, monetary incentives were less important to meeting quality goals. After the 9-11 attacks, the US Department of Defense made decisions that significantly increased the total compensation of its service members to sustain the military during the long years of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.[39] These included substantial increases in enlistment and retention bonuses between 2005 and 2008 as the services struggled to meet recruiting quotas.[40]

Does this evidence indicate the creation of a mercenary force? Are monetary incentives the main factor in successfully recruiting the high quality young people needed to make this force effective? While many of the incentives used to recruit and retain service members are monetary, the primary reason (88 percent) cited in a 2011 Pew Survey by post-9/11 veterans for joining the military was "to serve their country." The second most common reason (75 percent) cited was "to receive

35 Wong, *From Black Boots to Desert Boots*.

36 Gary R. Nelson, "The Supply and Quality of First Term Enlistees Under the All-Volunteer Force," in *The All-Volunteer Force after a Decade* (Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1986), 25.

37 Wong, *From Black Boots to Desert Boots*.

38 Ibid.; and Maxwell R. Thurman, "On Being All You Can Be: A Recruiting Perspective," in *Professionals on the Front Line: Two Decades of the All-Volunteer Force* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1996), 56-61.

39 US Congressional Budget Office, "Costs of Military Pay and Benefits in the Defense Budget," November 2012, 16.

40 Laich, *Skin in the Game*, 65.

education benefits."[41] This was consistent with an earlier report (1987) published by the World Congress of Sociology about youth motivation for military service that listed "chance to better myself" as the number one reason for enlisting.[42] These survey results indicate that monetary benefits have a role in recruitment but that they are not the primary reason for choosing to serve.

These data mitigate the concern about mercenary motivations somewhat. An alternative narrative is the Armed Services are competing in the marketplace with a combination of pay and benefits and messages regarding opportunities for self-improvement, patriotic service to the nation, and inclusion on a values-based, winning team.

On the question of a separate warrior class, there is genuine concern regarding a divergence in values between the small portion of the US population that serves in the military and the society the military serves. In some ways, serving in the military has become "a family business," with children and grandchildren of career military members being more prone to military service than other citizens.[43]

Additionally, our civilian political leaders are unlikely to have military service on their resume. The percentage of veterans serving in Congress has dropped from (77 percent) in 1977 to (20 percent) today. This corresponds to an overall drop in the number of veterans in the population from 13.7 percent to 7 percent.[44]

The implications for civilian control over the military are significant. Resistance by the military establishment to major policy changes generally supported by the US population (repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and combat exclusion policy, for example) can be attributed in part to this divergence in values.[45] While the military eventually bows to the direction of its civilian masters due to strong cultural norms and an understanding of constitutional civilian control, the resistance sows distrust and tension between military and political leaders. A lack of military or national security experience on the part of political leaders can lead to a form of blackmail by military leaders and those who support them, pressuring politicians to acquiesce to military opinion through use of public and private media or the Congress. The more experience political leaders have in these areas, the less susceptible they are to this blackmail.

The third concern expressed by the Gates Commission pertained to whether political leaders might be more prone to commit troops to military action if they were volunteers. From 1973 to 1989, the US national

41 Pew Research Center, "War and Sacrifice in the Post 9/11 Era," October 5, 2011, Chapter 3, http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/10/05/war-and-sacrifice-in-the-post-911-era.

42 Paul A. Gade and Timothy W. Elig, *Enlisting in the US Army: The Citizen Soldier in an All Volunteer Force* (Munich: Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut Der Bundeswehr, 1987), 33-41.

43 V.A. Stander and L.L. Merrill, *The Relationship of Parental Military background to the Demographic Characteristics of 11,195 Navy Recruits*, Naval Health Research Center Report No. 00-14 (San Diego, CA: April 2000), 4.

44 Drew Desilver, "Most Members of Congress have Little Direct Military Experience," Pew Research Center, September 4, 2013, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/09/04/members-of-congress-have-little-direct-military-experience.

45 Craig Whitlock, "Marine General Suggests Repeal of "Don't Ask" Could Result in Casualties," *Washington Post*, December 15, 2010, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/14/AR2010121404985.html; and Kori Schake, "Women Soldiers Confront not just Enemy, but a Range of Political Issues," in *Strategika*, Hoover Institution, June 1, 2013, http://www.hoover.org/research/women-soldiers-confront-not-just-enemy-range-political-issues.

security establishment was focused on the Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union. The threat of major military conflict with the Warsaw Pact may have suppressed the urge to engage in the use of force in pursuit of other national interests. In the period since the end of the Cold War and breakup of the Warsaw Pact, the absence of this suppressant may have contributed to two decades of what could be called US military adventurism (Iraq-1991, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq-2003, Libya).

Although there is no direct correlation between the number of military operations in this period and the advent of the all-volunteer force, the increase after the end of the Cold War calls into question whether this factor had a bearing on decisions to commit US armed forces. As an illustration, the US deployed forces 19 times in the draft years between 1945 and 1973. Since the end of the draft, the Unites States engaged forces overseas 144 times.[46] If this pattern continues after the United States withdraws combat troops from Afghanistan, it might be reasonable to conclude that American leaders see fewer political consequences to employing all-volunteer military forces than they would while using conscripted forces. This outcome would certainly be a significant negative consequence of having an all-volunteer military.

The discussion of these three issues raises serious concerns about the strict use of volunteers to fill the ranks of our military. While mercenary motivations seem to be less of a problem, the existence of a "warrior class" in society and the possibility elected officials will be more prone to use the volunteer force should spark meaningful debate about the composition of the US military.

Women in the All-Volunteer Force

The experience of women in the All-Volunteer Force and the subsequent expansion of opportunities for them is worth specific mention. The significant changes in policy and attitude toward women in the Armed Forces began with implementation of the All-Volunteer Force. Since 1972, the percentage of women serving in the military has increased from 1.9 percent to 11 percent in 1990, to 14.6 percent in 2012.[47] The implications of this dramatic increase were not considered by the Gates Commission because it assumed the percentage of women in the force would continue to be capped at 2 percent and women would remain in clerical, administrative and medical specialties.[48]

In 1972, however, the realization of an inability to recruit a high-quality force due to a shrinking population of qualified men, prompted then-Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird to develop a task force "to prepare contingency plans for increasing the use of women to offset possible shortages of male recruits…"[49] By 1976, the number of women in

46 Eikenberry, *Reassessing the All-Volunteer Force,* 10.

47 US General Accounting Office, *Composition of the Active Duty Forces by Race or National Origin Identification and by Gender* (Washington, DC: February 1991), 1-4; and US Department of Defense, *2012 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community* (Washington, DC: US Department of Defense Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Communities and Family Policy, 2012), 19.

48 *The Report of The President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force*, 82.

49 Central All-Volunteer Task Force, *Utilization of Military Women* (Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, December 1972), i.

the military had more than doubled and they could be assigned to all but "combat-associated specialties."[50] During that period, some institutional barriers were lifted that inhibited opportunities and restricted roles for women. These included:

- Allowing women to command mixed-gender units
- Allowing women to enter aviation training and military academies
- No longer requiring the discharge of pregnant women or those with minor dependents
- Equalizing the family entitlements for married men and women[51]

Looking back, these changes signaled the existence of significant cultural and legislative barriers that women had to overcome. The most significant impediment to their advancement was the combat exclusion policy that barred women from positions with the likelihood of direct physical contact with the enemy. This policy initially flowed from a 1948 legislation restricting women in all services except the Army (there were specific Women's Army Corps restrictions in place already) from assignment to aircraft or ships that were engaged in "combat missions."[52]

By 1987, the statute had been amended and the service policies had evolved to allow women to be assigned to all but selected specialties where the likelihood of direct combat or capture by enemy forces was high.[53] For military women, this progress was encouraging but painfully slow. The excluded specialties were those, culturally, afforded the most respect and most important to career advancement.[54] In some cases where statutory restrictions did not exist, service policies still restricted their range of assignments based on a probability of being involved in direct combat.[55]

In all of the services, these restrictions resulted in fewer opportunities for women and acted as an obstacle for advancement and promotion to senior rank. As doctrine and organizing principles changed over time and the services realized there was inherent inconsistency in these policies (e.g. there were some women who were excluded from positions due to likelihood of direct combat while others were in positions where they were exposed to enemy fire), a steady erosion of the combat exclusion took place. The deployment of over 40,000 women to support the first Gulf War in 1991 heightened public awareness of the role of military women.[56] In 1992, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) repealed the limitations on the assignment of women to combat aircraft.[57] Similarly, the 1994 NDAA repealed the ban on assignment of women to combat ships and the Army opened attack aviation positions

50 Martin Binken and Mark J. Eitelberg, "Women and Minorities in the All-Volunteer Force," in *The All-Volunteer Force After a Decade* (Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1986), 85.

51 Ibid., 85-86.

52 US General Accounting Office, *Combat Exclusion Laws for Women in the Military*, Testimony of Martin Ferber (Washington, DC: US General Accounting Office, November 19, 1987), 2.

53 Ibid., 4.

54 Ibid., 4-6.

55 Ibid., 8.

56 US Department of Veterans Affairs, *America's Women Veterans: Military Service History and VA Benefit Utilization Statistics* (Washington, DC: US Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, November 23, 2011), 3.

57 United States Congress, *National Defense Authorization Act*, amendment to sections 8549 and 6015 of Title 10 US Code, section 531, sub-para. (a) and (b), December 5, 1991.

to women. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the twenty-first century featured the continuous exposure of women to enemy fire and capture, in spite of the policy excluding them from direct ground combat.

In March 2011, a Military Leadership Diversity Commission created by the 2009 NDAA recommended the combat exclusion policy be eliminated, women in career fields already open to them be available for assignment to any unit, and the services and DoD take "deliberate steps in a phased approach" to open career fields and units involved in "direct ground combat" to qualified women.[58] In January 2013, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta made the announcement of the rescission of the combat exclusion policy.[59] This opened another chapter in the integration of women into the armed forces that is still on-going. After the military services conducted the "deliberate steps in a phased approach" recommended by the Military Leadership Diversity Commission with a focus on the ability of women to meet the physical demands of the specialties involved, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter opened all military positions to women in January 2016.

Arguably, the advent of the All-Volunteer Force changed the discussion of women's roles in the military. In order to find enough volunteers of the appropriate quality to fill the ranks, the Department of Defense had to include more women in the recruiting pool. To recruit and retain those women, it had to give them opportunities for success and advancement. This led to changes in policy and a much slower change in culture that has paralleled the society's changing view of the role of women in the workplace.

Conclusion

One of the legacies of the Vietnam War is the all-volunteer military force. It has proved resilient in the face of US involvement in conflict across the world, budget reductions, economic prosperity and stagnation, demographic changes in the makeup of the force, and changes in social policy and attitudes. A return to conscription and the resulting effect on American society seem unimaginable.

I have tried to answer two fundamental questions about the choice America made in 1973. Has the All-Volunteer Force been a success? And, is an All-Volunteer Force appropriate in a democratic society? However, several other fundamental questions persist. Is the all-volunteer military representative of our society and its values? Does its existence allow our citizens to avoid the hard discussions about the use of military force in pursuit of national objectives? Is the burden of service borne disproportionately by members of the lower economic classes? What costs are American taxpayers willing to bear to sustain the excellence of this force? All US citizens should contemplate the implications of these questions as the country struggles to make decisions about the size and nature of the armed forces.

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58 David F. Burrelli, *Women in Combat, Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, November 8, 2011), 7.

59 Claudette Roulo, "Defense Department Expands Women's Combat Role," US Department of Defense press release, January 24, 2013.