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Retaining the All-Volunteer United States Military

Volunteers founded the United States' military during the Revolutionary War in which they fought to defend the concepts of freedom from their British rulers. Over 225 years later, and through numerous conflicts, this country still prides itself in the concept of voluntary military service to protect and defend those same concepts. While there have been times in which the government has called up or drafted men to help defend the country, such as World War II and the Vietnam Conflict, this sense of pride and selfless service has been paramount in what Americans hold dear. The fight to defend freedom and democracy through a smaller, skilled volunteer force with the use of advanced technology sets this country apart from many others, such as the Chinese People's Liberation Army and the Iraqi Revolutionary Guard. While military numbers may pale in comparison to these other countries, the U.S. military has proven superior to them many times. While a draft, or mandatory call to military service, may be essential during times of national emergency, the American techniques proven through two hundred years of military science show that mandatory service has never been essential to winning a conflict. In fact, we have shown the opposite through observation of foreign military forces in their own wars. A large conscripted military develops issues stemming from financial and logistical degradation. While this is enough to cripple an entire army, it also suffers from a lack of motivation and discipline. A conscript is very different from a volunteer simply because a volunteer wants to serve in the military; a conscript has been forced. Education and training

for a large conscripted military force also suffer because a conscripted soldier may not have an education level to match that of a volunteer. These issues clearly demonstrate that mandatory military service is not necessary for the American military.

Financial issues are systemic through a large conscripted force. As many of these larger, non-volunteer militaries demonstrate, as officials add more troops, the need for equipment and soldier support increases exponentially. The use of one soldier on the battlefield requires a much larger support chain. One must feed, clothe, and arm a soldier so that he may be useful in a theater of war. Other hidden costs include deployment and transport; initial and continued training; and administrative costs for medical care, paperwork, and legal issues. As the government conscripts more troops, the dollar amount to make soldiers battle ready also exponentially increases. This problem of supporting large troop levels financially was clearly evident during the Vietnam Conflict. As the United States drafted a very large force, a larger defense budget was necessary for overall support. From the start of the war in 1965 to its decline in 1972, the personnel costs associated with the draft increased from \$21 billion to \$42 billion. However, as the military was moved to a volunteer force after Vietnam, the direct costs of the war decreased from \$22 billion to \$7 billion (Griffith 183). This reduction in financial spending directly led to an appropriation of funds, which allowed the U.S. to create an all-volunteer force. Military science studies after the Vietnam Conflict have also proven a financial reduction. The Gates Commission studies show that, even with enlistment bonuses and compensation to volunteers, the hidden costs of mandatory service are offset considerably. This set of compensation to volunteers also leads to a much lower turnover rate for new soldiers, leading to lower costs of retraining and higher productivity (Congressional Budget Office 8). American conflicts have proven that financial burdens of conscripted militaries are much heavier on the

country while the volunteer force remains more efficient and more financially viable.

Soldiers who volunteer for military service have shown that they have a desire to serve their country, versus mandatory conscription, in which an individual is forced into service. This desire to serve has very drastic consequences on the overall military performance. Conflicts arise when personnel have not chosen a military career. An individual that volunteers generally shows a more pro-military stance revolving around his accomplishment of the mission and support from his superiors. While this level of commitment may vary from a first-term enlisted soldier to a career-focused commissioned officer, there is a definitive increase in positive opinion over that of an average civilian (Bachman et al 109-114). This lower rate of positive military support will most likely carry over into a civilian-turned-conscript in the event of a draft. This also leads to judging moral judgment of a volunteer force against mandatory military service. When asked how military service should be judged, Brigadier General Sidney B. Berry said, "I would prefer that decent people fight the wars, rather than . . . immoral people" (qtd. in Ackley 316). This has a direct impact on the ethics of warfare based on the method of military service. While one can place selection criteria on those who volunteer, mandatory military service forces all of those who might have a negative or opposite moral view to become conscripts. A person who wants to serve will generally show a higher order of discipline, focus, and moral standing than one who was forced into service.

The focus for the modern soldier is on that of proper initial training and continued education. After receiving proper instruction through basic training and an entry school of service, personnel must continue that education to stay effective. As technology and its impact on warfare changes, a military force must continue to educate personnel to have a maximum impact on the battlefield. Overall education of the population entering military service also

contributes to the average education level of personnel. A basis for entry into the United States military has been the AFQT (Armed Forces Qualification Test) and baselines the average education level for a new recruit. This selection criterion for volunteers allows the Department of Defense to screen incoming personnel against current education requirements. This is especially important because studies have shown that a higher score on the AFQT will reflect a higher number of soldiers who complete initial training and advanced technology training such as operation of the Patriot missile defense system (Congressional Budget Office 13). On the other hand, conscripted soldiers do not require this same system of selection and generally show a lower education level, which impacts overall military performance. One notices the difference as the United States' military made the transition from conscription to volunteer service after the Vietnam Conflict. Data that was processed during this transition from the draft to volunteer service shows that AQFT scoring was lower among draftees versus volunteers after the change (Congressional Budget Office 16). By simply changing from mandatory military service to an all-volunteer force, American forces were also able to obtain a higher average education across the board.

While mandatory service has a place, such as during times of great conflict and national emergency, many factors show that a volunteer service is a much more effective fighting force. During the final transition after Vietnam from the draft to volunteer service, the United States' military became much more selective about whom they allowed to serve. This generated a much lower financial drain on the economy, a higher order of discipline and moral standing from troops at all levels of organization, and a higher average education level. These factors have allowed modern American forces to become a highly efficient military organization, while cutting required troop levels and increasing the use of advanced technology. As the statistics

prove, since 1973, this combination of elements showed no more need for a mandatory military service requirement under normal circumstances.

Works Cited

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