

The Case for the Draft

Expanding selective service to include women isn't enough. It's time to reinstate the draft.

By [Lawrence J. Korb](#) and [Eric Goepel](#) Feb. 11, 2016, at 10:37 a.m.



An all-volunteer force causes serious problems. (ISTOCKPHOTO)

With the formal lifting of gender restrictions in the combat arms specialties of the United States military, military leaders have recently made public statements advocating that women be added to the selective service roles. Currently, all male citizens and non-citizens in the U.S. are required to sign up with the selective service within 30 days of turning 18. Now that women are no longer barred from any position in the armed forces, the thinking goes, they should face the same obligation to serve in a time of national emergency.

While one cannot argue with the basic logic of the military leadership, the call to end the exemption of women from the selective service should raise some elemental questions about national defense. These questions, frankly, have long been ignored because they challenge the current paradigm of the all-volunteer force and the decision to end the draft.

An incredibly small percentage of the country will ever serve in the military. To put this in context, the Department of Veterans Affairs places the number of veterans since World War II at

roughly 22 million, roughly 7 percent of the total current population. Today, those on active duty or in one of the reserve components total just over 2 million, which represents 0.6 percent of the country.

This represents a sea change from the idea of military service as a public obligation to one of personal choice. In the formulation of the all-volunteer force, we abandoned one of the founding principles of the United States: that of the citizen-soldier. Where the country once mobilized millions to support the fight in World War II, conscripting everyone from Harvard professors to paper boys, we now have a self-selected professional military that has become increasingly divorced from the public.

After the moral disaster that was the Vietnam War, the draft was ended and the armed services worked to rebuild under the concept of the all-volunteer force in 1973. The military would no longer have to rely on the draft to fill its ranks during wartime, but would create a flexible, well-trained standing force of volunteers capable of protecting national interests. But professionalization had unintended consequences as it drove new thinking about the why, when and where of going to war.

Now that Americans were freed from the potential obligation of national service, the president and political leaders were free to commit the armed forces as they saw fit. The military became the first response to nearly every foreign policy issue, no matter how ill-thought, counterproductive or tangential to American defense. The result was a string of interventions around the world, from Somalia and the Balkans to our current involvement throughout Asia and Africa. Only the most cynical of observers would call any of these actions "successes." The justifications for war change, but the burden does not.

That burden has created a new generation of veterans scarred, physically and psychologically, by war. By refusing to activate selective service or reinstate the draft for the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, millions of volunteers found themselves on multiple, lengthy tours fighting in wars they could not win. Post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain damage and moral injuries dog them thousands of miles away from the battlefield. Faced with integration back into civilian society after their service, they are greeted by well-meaning but empty cliches as a nation collectively shrugs its shoulders and turns its attention elsewhere.

The time has come to draw down the active duty military and reinstate the draft. If the U.S. has an interest to protect, it should have to rely on calling on potentially all its citizens to serve. There is hope that when Americans have skin in the game once again, the choice to go to war

will not be a foregone conclusion.

We have seen what relying on a small percentage of our nation to fight our battles has accomplished: thousands dead, tens of thousands injured, trillions spent with billions more on the way, and a failure to accomplish even the most modest of objectives. Our leaders have proven unequal to the task of managing the conflicts they embroil us in. To shy away from our collective obligation to national defense is to assure that we will have war without end, with nothing to show for it but crushing debt and wasted lives.

<http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/world-report/articles/2016-02-11/reinstate-the-draft-dont-just-expand-selective-service-to-women>