
Defense Report

AUSA



We Must Have a Workable Draft

The Nation has paid a high price for the apparent success of the all-volunteer military establishment. Not only has the dollar price been high but it has cost us the awareness that some form of conscription has been an inescapable part of every major war the United States has fought since the Civil War and, if another big war comes, it will be needed again.

While it might be true that an all-out nuclear war would be over too fast to require any conscription, realistic military planners think that is an unlikely possibility. In their view another protracted war, with an initial violent exchange of conventional weapons, is more probable. It is also argued that an extended period of tension prior to actual hostilities would provide time to reactivate the Selective Service System. The counter-argument holds that a renewed draft at that time would be a warlike act, serving to heighten the tension.

But once a war began the need for trained replacements for members of the regular and reserve forces who become early casualties would be immediate. Without an operating draft mechanism there would be no way to get replacements in sufficient numbers. The very absence of draft pressure during the past few years has served to shrink the size of the Individual Ready Reserve to a pitifully small number.

The Fiscal Year 1977 budget for the Selective Service System is a very bare \$6.8 million. This level of funding, passed by Congress and approved by the President, reduces the system to little more than a planning group. By Presidential proclamation no young man born since 1959 will even need to register for a possible draft.

The White House Office of Management and Budget insists that enough muscle could be hung on the Selective Service skeleton to deliver the first inductees for training in 50 days. Under pressure, Selective Service Director Byron Pepitone told Congress a more realistic delay would be 110 days. The Defense Manpower Commission concluded that the delay would range between 180 and 270 days. In this worst possible case it would be a full year before the first inductees are trained and ready for combat.

The Army, which has always been the biggest customer of the draft, says it must have the first inductees at its training centers 30 days after a mobilization order is issued. Renewed registration and an \$18 million annual investment in Selective Service machinery could meet that goal.

It is wrong to expect our regular forces and our dedicated reservists to steadfastly hold the line in a new major war when a false economy has denied them the expectation of timely reinforcement.