
Defense Report

AUSA



Selective Service—It's More than it Appears to be

Selective Service, the Draft, Concription, Impressment—in descending order of public acceptance these are all terms meaning essentially the same thing, required military service. The United States has traditionally exercised the concept of citizen service by randomly selecting young people who are needed in the armed forces in times of emergency. There have been some aberrations in the random selection process over the years and selective service has been used as a cheap source of military manpower in times of relative peace but the principle has remained the same.

The United States is now in the midst of one of those periods of "relative peace" and draft calls have been set aside for more than six years. The selective service machinery is mostly gone and the nation is manning its active military forces with volunteers who are expensive to recruit and costly to maintain. The lack of draft-based pressure to join the reserve forces has left them woefully under-strength. The highly desirable concept of a Total Force composed of instantly ready active divisions backed up by well-trained and well-equipped reserve units is fading further from reality with each passing month. Without the reserves and without a ready, operable selective service mechanism the active forces would be left to fend for themselves until the reserve and selective service shortfalls could be corrected—probably a period of several months rather than the 30 to 60 days mobilization plans are based on.

Our likely adversaries in a future war are not blind to our predicament. It is obvious to them that the continuing weak condition of the Army Reserve and Army National Guard makes them a questionable asset for reinforcement. It is obvious too, that we have little in the way of a pool of trained individual replacements to keep up the fighting power of the units in combat and that the skeletonized Selective Service System could not furnish substantial numbers of trained personnel for at least seven months after the United States begins to mobilize.

This last point is what many critics of an improved Selective Service System fail to see—that in addition to being a very necessary source of personnel once a war begins, a viable, efficient system is a strong deterrent to war because it symbolizes our determination to react to aggression with all our power.

At this point no one is prepared to say that the Volunteer Armed Force and its accompanying Total Force concept have failed. What many people are saying, however, is that both ideas are on the slide toward failure unless immediate strong action is taken to stop that slide. One of the most important supports for volunteerism would be a well-prepared Selective Service System.