
Defense Report

AUSA



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

*Selective Service, the Draft, Con-
scription, 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 ran-
domly 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 rela-
tive peace but the principle has re-
mained the same.

The United States is now in the
midst of one of those periods of "rela-
tive 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 ac-
tive military forces with volunteers who
are expensive to recruit and costly to
maintain. The lack of draft-based pres-
sure to join the reserve forces has left
them woefully under-strength. The
highly desirable concept of a Total
Force composed of instantly ready ac-
tive divisions backed up by well-trained
and well-equipped reserve units is fad-
ing further from reality with each pass-
ing month. Without the reserves and
without a ready, operable selective serv-
ice 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 continu-
ing weak condition of the Army Re-
serve and Army National Guard makes
them a questionable asset for rein-
forcement. 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 Selec-
tive Service System could not furnish
substantial numbers of trained person-
nel for at least seven months after the
United States begins to mobilize.

This last point is what many critics
of an improved Selective Service Sys-
tem fail to see—that in addition to
being a very necessary source of per-
sonnel once a war begins, a viable, effi-
cient system is a strong deterrent to
war because it symbolizes our deter-
mination 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 im-
mediate strong action is taken to stop
that slide. One of the most important
supports for volunteerism would be a
well-prepared Selective Service System.