
Defense Report

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A Workable Selective Service System— Administration Leaders Have Tunnel Vision on the Subject

A recent newspaper item reporting an interview with Dr. John P. White Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower, was headlined, "Military Manpower Chief Sees No Need for Draft." In the body of the story Dr. White consistently answered the interviewer's question in a way that reinforced the Administration's determination to fill the ranks of our armed forces with volunteers.

The Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force have done, and are continuing to do, an excellent job of recruiting volunteers into the active forces. Dr. White acknowledged there are problems in trying to recruit between 350,000 and 400,000 people each year and that the turnover of first term recruits was too high. He also forecast additional difficulty in the future as the pool of young people eligible to be recruited begins to shrink. He was correct when he said there is no reason now to abandon the volunteer active force in favor of a return to the draft or to create some form of national service. But the things he failed to say and the problems he failed to point out demonstrate tenacious refusal to admit that the lack of a workable selective service organization leaves large gaps in our ability to respond to a military manpower emergency.

Dr. White, and others, consider any attempt to put an assessment of volunteerism into the broad context of the total military force to be destructive criticism. They fail to point out that the present size of the Active Army is predicated on the assumption that the reserve units who make up the balance of the Total Army have enough people and equipment and are well-trained. This is not the case. The Army Reserve and Army National Guard are about 125,000 short of their peacetime authorized strength and 172,000 short of desired wartime numbers. The Individual Ready Reserve, the Army's only immediate source of trained individual replacements, is more than a *half million* short of needed strength. The shortages in the organized reserves are due in large part to the absence of selective service pressure. And in the event of a mobilization the skeletonized Selective Service System could not produce trained manpower in large numbers for at least seven months. And yet, in the entire lengthy interview there was not one word about the plight of the reserves.

It is time for the Administration to take off its blinders. Only one part of the volunteer force is working—and that under strain. Reserve enlistment and reenlistment incentives may help those forces but the only realistic source of bulk emergency manpower is a fair and efficient draft. We must put enough muscle on the selective service skeleton to make it work when needed.