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# Defense Report

AUSA



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## **If We Have a Military Draft, It Will Function Fairly**

No instrumentality of a government functions infallibly. Some people pay more taxes than they should, some pay less. The wheels of justice turn very slowly and grind very fine, but still they permit injustice to occur from time to time. When the selection of men to serve in our armed forces by means of a draft was carried out in World Wars I and II and during the Korean War the men and women charged with administering the draft operated fairly, far more often than not.

But when the United States needed an ever-growing supply of military manpower during the war in Vietnam the politicians who made the overriding policy for the Selective Service System decided to exempt young men in a plethora of conditions such as students, parents or critical employees. The result of this manipulation was that men who chose to answer when called, men who were too poor to stay in college or unable to enter in the first place, men unable to marry and produce children immediately and men who could not get certain kinds of jobs carried all the risk of being drafted. It was said, with more than passing accuracy, that the war in Vietnam became the province of those who were too patriotic, too poor or too dumb to avoid it. The reputation of the Selective Service System suffered severely during the Vietnam years and even the last-ditch effort of President Nixon to reestablish its fairness was lost in the public furor over the war itself.

Now we are facing the high probability of a return to the draft, not because a war is pending but because Congress and the Administration have been unwilling to pay the full price for attracting and keeping enough good people in our military ranks on a voluntary basis. As that probability increases the opponents of Selective Service reach back to the last ill-managed experience in the Vietnam period and contend that a draft—any draft, no matter how well managed—will be unfair. Even Senator Hatfield, who has the precise plan for a new draft at his finger tips, has filibustered against imagined plans to draft the poor and not the rich.

If the Selective Service System is permitted to operate without political or emotional interference the new draft won't function that way. There will be no exemptions for young men smart enough or rich enough to stay in college. Students who are selected to serve will be permitted to finish their current academic period but will be called when that period is concluded. The order of liability to serve will be established by completely random selection of birthdays and, barring a major war, that liability will expire after just one year. In this way young men will be able to make their plans for education, marriage or a civilian career with the assurance that the possibility of military service will quickly evaporate. Our armed forces will fairly reflect every segment of the society they defend.

Having created the situation that presses us in the direction of a renewed draft our political leaders must be impressed with the necessity for letting the Selective Service System function as it was designed—without the kind of manipulation that would again generate opposition and could imperil our national survival.