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MAKING THE ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE WORK: A NATIONAL SERVICE APPROACH

Since January 1973 the United States has sought to accomplish what it has never attempted before—to maintain an active-duty military force of over two million, along with an expanded reserve system, on a strictly voluntary basis. The effort has met with mixed reviews; in the nearly nine years since conscription ended, the All-Volunteer Force has been analyzed, attacked and defended in a seemingly endless series of books, reports, articles and congressional hearings. While the factual outlines of the AVF's performance are fairly clear, there is sharp disagreement regarding both its progress and potential as a tool of national defense. On one side, there are those who believe that the AVF is a success which requires only incremental changes in management policies and recruitment incentives to be fully effective. On the other, there are those who view the program as a costly failure, and see little prospect of a viable defense without some form of compulsory military service.

I place myself in neither camp. In contrast with both the proponents of the present AVF and the bring-back-the-draft traditionalists, I argue for a fundamental shift in our understanding of the AVF, anchored in the concept of voluntary national service. My proposal is premised not only on a moral preference for a socially representative military force, which the current AVF has shown itself unable to provide, but also on the practical desirability of a recruitment system which reaches beyond the one-dimensional incentives of the marketplace. By combining a voluntary civilian service plan, a renewed set of educational benefits similar

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to the old "GI Bill," and a new, two-track military personnel and compensation system, a national service AVF could be expected to address all of the major manpower difficulties which now face our military, and to do so within the limits of current spending.

II

Let us turn briefly to the facts of the AVF experience. Although it is rarely discussed, the most important single impact of the shift to an AVF has been on military force levels. While the end of the Vietnam War might have brought some reduction in any event from the overall active-duty force level of 2.6 million that obtained in the early 1960s, unquestionably the shift to the AVF has imposed constraints that have played a significant part in the reduction to the present level of slightly over two million in 1981.

Even at this reduced level, with attendant understrength units, AVF recruiters must strain to meet their quotas; the military must still recruit between 350,000 and 400,000 enlisted persons annually, and must do so, moreover, against new and higher rates of attrition. One in three service entrants in the current AVF does not complete initial enlistment obligations for reasons of job inaptitude, indiscipline, personality disorders and the like, and desertion rates are double those of the pre-Vietnam period. Growing numbers of essential skilled technicians are leaving the military for civilian jobs. And perhaps nowhere has the numbers dilemma hit harder than in Army reserve components, where force levels stand far below the manpower requirements set by Congress.

The effect of these numerical weaknesses has been compounded by an accompanying decline in the quality of manpower in the current AVF. In terms of mental aptitude, the number of military entrants who placed in the highest two testing categories fell from 39 percent in 1964 to 26 percent in 1980. Similarly, the number of recruits who placed in the lowest acceptable category rose from 15 percent in 1964 to 33 percent in 1980. This decline in quality is also reflected in the amount of education which new recruits bring with them to the service; less than half of the Army's male recruits in 1980 came in with a high school diploma, and the college-educated enlisted man has virtually disappeared.¹ Since

¹ Partial figures for 1981 show an increase in the number of recruits with a high school diploma, an outcome largely due to the high youth unemployment rate. Even without an upturn in the economy, two trends will make AVF recruitment more difficult in the near future. One is the Reagan Administration's plan to add an estimated 200,000 people to the active-duty force. The other is the shrinking cohort of males eligible for military service; from a 1980 total of 2.1 million reaching age 18, the number will drop to 1.7 million by 1990.

the draft ended, furthermore, the proportion of young marrieds in the junior enlisted force (now of course including a larger number of women) has about doubled. This shift is especially noteworthy in that it runs directly counter to national patterns, where the clear trend has been toward later marriage.

Perhaps the most frequently raised concerns regarding the current AVF involve questions of racial and ethnic representation. The various services differ in their racial composition; including both officers and enlisted personnel, blacks accounted for 29.7 percent of the Army in 1981, 20.4 percent of the Marine Corps, 14.3 percent of the Air Force, and 10.6 percent of the Navy. A disproportionately white officer corps with a disproportionately minority enlisted component will be one of the sociological considerations in the military leadership of the 1980s. The issue of racial content has been most prominent in the largest of the services, the Army. Blacks made up 11.8 percent of Army enlisted personnel in 1964, 17.5 percent in 1972, and 32.9 percent in 1981. Total minority content—blacks, other non-whites, and Hispanics—comprised 41.2 percent of the Army's enlisted ranks in 1981.

To move once more beyond numbers alone, it is revealing to examine the relative quality of recruits from the different racial categories. It is a well-recognized fact that the educational levels of blacks in America have trailed behind those of whites. But the intersection of race and education is quite different among entrants in the all-volunteer Army. Since the end of the draft, the proportion of male entrants with a high school diploma has been 64 percent for blacks compared with 53 percent for whites. In fact, the enlisted ranks of today's Army are the only major arena in American society where black educational levels surpass those of whites, and by a significant degree.² Whereas the black soldier seems fairly representative of the black community in terms of

² Corroboration of the finding that minority youth entering the AVF come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds than white entrants is found in an extensive survey of youth participation in the labor market. See Choongsoo Kim, et al., *The All-Volunteer Force: An Analysis of Youth Participation, Attrition, and Reenlistment*, Columbus: Ohio State University, Center for Human Resource Research, 1980, mimeographed.

An oblique though interesting datum on social trends in the AVF is found in prison statistics. From World War II through the Vietnam War, military veterans have comprised a much smaller share of the prison inmate population than their proportion in the general population. This historical pattern is reversed for those under age 24 years. "The age group that showed an overrepresentation of veterans in jail was composed largely of those who had joined the armed forces as volunteers *after* the end of the draft and the end of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. Black inmates were less likely to be veterans" (italics in the original). U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Profile of Jail Inmates*, National Prisoners Statistics Report SD-NPS-J-6, Washington: GPO, October 1980. I am indebted to Albert D. Biderman for bringing this information to my attention.

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education and social background, recent white entrants are coming from the least educated sectors of the white community. In other words, the all-volunteer Army is recruiting not only a disproportionate number of minorities, but also an unrepresentative segment of white youth, who are more uncharacteristic of the broader social mix than are our minority soldiers.

The rising minority content in the Army actually masks a more pervasive shift in the social class bases of the enlisted ranks. There can be no question that since 1973 the Army has undergone a social transformation in its enlisted membership; the real question is how high-powered commissions, well-financed studies, and Department of Defense assessments have come up with the opposite conclusion.³ To foster policies that accentuate the tracking of lower-class youth into the military, especially the ground combat arms, is perverse. This is not to argue that the makeup of the enlisted ranks should be perfectly calibrated to the social composition of the larger society, but it is to ask what kind of society excuses its privileged from serving in its military.

The military has always recruited large numbers of youth, of all races, who had no real alternative job prospects; it will always continue to do so. But present trends toward labeling the Army as a recourse for America's underclasses are self-defeating for the youth involved, because they directly contradict the premise that military participation is one of broadly based national service. Whatever success the military once had as a remedial organization for deprived youth derived largely from its association with positive ideals, such as national defense, patriotism, citizenship obligation, even manly honor. In other words, those very characteristics of military service which serve to resocialize poverty youth toward productive ends depend directly upon public perception of the armed forces as other than a welfare agency or an employer of last resort. It will be increasingly difficult for the AVF to avoid such a characterization, even if unfair, unless enlisted membership reflects more of a cross-section of American youth.

³ "There is no evidence to suggest that the armed forces are now or are in danger of becoming a 'poor man's Army.'" Defense Manpower Commission, *Defense Manpower*, Washington: GPO, 1976, p. 176. "The evidence presented here thus shows that the American military has not been nor is it becoming an army of the poor or the black." Richard V.L. Cooper, *Military Manpower and the All-Volunteer Force*, Santa Monica (Calif.): Rand Corporation, 1977, p. 231. "The quality of the active force is generally comparable with that of the draft era. . . . Concerns that the active force would not be representative of the society at large have not yet materialized." Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower, *America's Volunteers*, Washington, 1978, mimeographed, p. 162. "Current mental and physical standards for both enlistment and reenlistment are higher now than during the draft or the early days of the AVF." *Annual Report of the Secretary of Defense, FY 1979*, Washington: GPO, 1978, p. 331.

It can no longer be a question that the enlisted ranks of the AVF are much less representative of middle-class youth than the military of the peacetime draft era. It is, however, another kind of question whether this is good, bad or irrelevant.

The strongest evidence bearing upon the effects of social background on soldierly performance deals with enlisted attrition. The striking finding is that high school graduates are twice as likely as high school dropouts to complete their enlistments. Most revealing, this finding changes little when mental aptitude is held constant. Analyses of enlisted evaluation reports show the same pattern—high school graduates significantly outperform high school dropouts; higher mental levels do better than lower mental levels, but education is a much better predictor than measures of mental aptitude. Studies of unauthorized absences and desertions also show that such behavior is most likely to occur among those who have the least education, have come from broken homes, and have been in trouble with the law before service entry.⁴ The evidence is clear, furthermore, that on measures of enlisted productivity, higher educated service members do better not only in high-skill jobs, but in low-skill jobs as well.⁵

Easily the most crucial aspect of military manpower is the effect of social composition on combat performance. From a historical standpoint, the evidence is clear that military participation and combat risks were more equally shared by American men in World War II than in either the wars of Korea or Vietnam. (The draft per se is thus no guarantee that there will be class equity in military participation.) In fact, soldiers in World War II reflected a higher socioeconomic background than that of the general population. More to the point, careful studies of combat soldiers in World War II and the Korean War showed that, in the aggregate, soldiers with higher education were rated as better fighters by peers and immediate superiors.⁶

By no means does being middle class or educated make one braver or more able; there are many outstanding members of the

⁴ Timothy F. Hartnagel, "Absent Without Leave: A Study of the Military Offender," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, Fall 1974. D. Bruce Bell and Beverly W. Bell, "Desertion and Antiwar Protest," *Armed Forces and Society*, Spring 1977.

⁵ Those scoring higher on entrance tests are also more likely to pass the military skill qualification tests, which measure ability to perform common military jobs. U.S. Department of Defense, *Implementation of New Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery and Actions to Improve the Enlistment Standards Process*, Report to the House and Senate Committees on Armed Services, Washington: GPO, December 1980.

⁶ For the World War II data, see Samuel A. Stouffer, et al., *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949, pp. 36-41. On the Korean War, see Roger L. Egbert, et al., *Fighter Spirit: An Analysis of Combat Fighters and Non-Fighters*, Human Resources Research Organization, Technical Report 44, Washington, 1957, mimeographed.

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AVF who come from impoverished backgrounds. But our concern must also be with the chemistry of unit cohesion, which requires an optimum blend of talents and backgrounds. Research evidence serves to confirm the observations of commanders and non-commissioned officers (NCOS) who remember the draft period: middle-class and upwardly mobile youth enriched the skill level and commitment of military units in peace as well as in war.

III

The 1970 Gates Commission Report, which established the basis for the current AVF, was underpinned by a marketplace philosophy.⁷ A pattern was set and adopted by which primary reliance for manning the AVF was to be placed upon supply and demand variables in the labor force.⁸ This implied a redefinition of military service away from an institutional format to one more and more resembling that of an occupation.

Such a redefinition of military service must necessarily be based on a set of core assumptions. First, that there is no analytical distinction between military systems and other systems—in particular, no difference between cost-effectiveness analysis of civilian enterprises and military services. Second, that military compensation should as much as possible be in cash, rather than in kind or deferred (thereby allowing for a more efficient operation of the marketplace). Third, that social cohesion and goal commitment are essentially unmeasurable (therefore an inappropriate object of analysis). And fourth, that if end-strength targets are met in the AVF, notions of citizenship obligation and social representativeness are incidental concerns.

The fixation on end-strength figures is the hallmark of the econometric approach to military manpower. It is disconcerting to hear manpower policymakers assert that attrition is not a problem as long as end-strength goals are reached. This view has led the Department of Defense to adopt a sieve model of recruitment: those who cannot perform are screened after service entry on the grounds that this is more cost-effective than denying enlistment to some who might perform. Such a policy ignores the tremendous organizational costs on the military system caused by excessive personnel turbulence, not to mention the human costs of

⁷ *The Report of the President's Commission on the All-Volunteer Force*, Washington: GPO, 1970.

⁸ Representative of the marketplace viewpoint of military service are: Cooper, *op. cit.*; Sar A. Levitan and Karen Cleary Alderman, *Warriors at Work: The Volunteer Armed Force*, Beverly Hills (Calif.): Sage, 1977; Martin Binkin and Irene Kyriakopoulos, *Paying the Modern Military*, Washington: Brookings Institution, 1981.

accepting and then expelling marginal recruits. It is perplexing when policymakers attribute the difficulties of the AVF to congressionally set recruitment standards, rather than reexamining their own agnosticism on the correlation between manpower quality and mission performance.

Even on its own terms, there are serious questions as to the efficacy of such a market-oriented, econometric approach to the AVF. Large raises in military pay for lower enlisted personnel, a central Gates Commission recommendation, were envisioned as the principal means to induce persons to join the AVF. The real disposable income of junior enlisted members, as a result, is now two and a half times what it was during the peacetime draft. With the pay raises projected for the fall of 1981, a private first class who lives off base will be making over \$1,000 monthly. This has turned out to be a double-edged sword, however. Youth surveys show that pay motivates less qualified youth (for example, high school dropouts and graduates with poor grades) to join the armed services more than it does college-bound youth.⁹

Any policy based on increases in pay to the lower enlisted ranks will only aggravate the present trend to recruit at the margin (i.e., to get a higher proportion of less qualified youth). Moreover, this "front loading" of compensation toward the junior ranks has dramatically compressed the pay scale of the enlisted force. In the 1960s, the basic pay of a sergeant major with 26 years of service was better than seven times that of an entering recruit. Since the end of the draft, that same sergeant major makes only three and a half times the pay of the recruit. Non-commissioned officers could once measure their incomes and perquisites against those of the soldiers they led, and feel rewarded; now they see a relative decline of their status within the service and compare their earnings against civilians, and feel deprived.

The solution to the AVF's manpower problems will not be found in "catch-up" across-the-board pay raises. We confront the anomaly that retention was actually higher in the pre-Vietnam era, when the buying power of the career force was less than it is

⁹ According to surveys conducted by a research organization under contract with the Department of Defense, a hypothetical \$150 increase in monthly recruit pay (approximately a 30 percent pay raise) increases the reported enlistment propensity of high school dropouts by 24 percent compared with 13 percent for college students. Market Facts, *Youth Attitude Tracking Study*, Washington: 1978, mimeographed. In interpreting this survey finding, moreover, it must be remembered that *to begin with* high school dropouts are seventeen times more likely to join the Army than are those with some college. An excellent summary of the surveys pertaining to enlistment attitudes is David R. Segal, "Military Service in the 1970s: Attitudes of Soldiers," in Allan R. Millet and Anne F. Trupp, eds., *Manning the American Armed Forces*, Columbus: Mershon Center of Ohio State University, 1981, pp. 43-63.

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today. In addition, there is some question whether military pay at the junior enlisted level has in fact lagged behind civilian wages in the latter part of the 1970s.¹⁰ But it must also be kept in mind that service benefits and entitlements cannot be maintained at present levels if military salaries are really to be competitive with steadily rising civilian wages. The heightened concern of military members with compensation in recent years, moreover, can be attributed at least in part to the overtly monetary emphasis that has prevailed in the implementation of the AVF.

What about management steps to improve manpower utilization within the all-volunteer framework? Unfortunately, few proposals in this vein—a kind of sub-optimal approach—address the core issue: getting young qualified men into the combat arms and related tasks. Neither lowering physical or mental standards, nor increasing the number of women, nor greater reliance on civilian personnel or older military personnel, suits the imperatives of the combat arms, warships and other deployable units.

Underlying many of the difficulties of the AVF is a source of enlisted discontent that had no real counterpart in the peacetime draft era. This is post-entry disillusionment resulting from unrealistic expectations as to what the military would offer. The peacetime draftee never held high expectations about what he would encounter, and therefore was not unpleasantly surprised; indeed, he might often—at least in hindsight—find the Army favorable on its own terms. Recruitment for the AVF, however, has consistently stressed the self-serving aspects of military life—that is, what the service can do for the recruit in the way of pay and training in skills which are transferable to civilian jobs. Post-entry disillusionment speaks directly to the excessive attrition rate. The irreconcilable dilemma is that many assignments—by no means exclusively in the combat arms—do not have transferability to civilian jobs.

IV

The difficulties of the AVF have led to renewed talk of restoring conscription. Yet that prospect is filled with complications and uncertainty. To have a workable conscription first of all requires a national consensus as to its need, especially within the relevant

¹⁰ It has become part of accepted wisdom that civilian pay raises have exceeded those of the military during the latter part of the 1970s. A report of the General Accounting Office states, however, that from 1976 to 1980, enlisted military pay increased 45 percent versus 28 percent for civilians. *Preliminary Analysis of Military Compensation Systems in the United States and Five Other Countries*, General Accounting Office, 1980, p. 6.

youth population. Yet such a consensus does not presently exist, even in the wake of events in Iran and Afghanistan; a draft could lead to turbulence on college campuses, and might once again make ROTC units an object of attack as they were during the Vietnam War. If compulsion is used, moreover, many will attempt to avoid induction, and a host of additional problems will arise. Even under a seemingly "fair" system such as a lottery, decisions will have to be made regarding conscientious objection, the genuineness of physical disabilities, or special hardship factors; as experience has shown, inequities could be expected on a broad number of fronts. That the rate of non-compliance under the reintroduced draft registration of 1980 will probably never be known does not inspire confidence that a new system of conscription would be either fair or efficient.

A return to the draft, furthermore, would pose anew the question of who will serve when most do not. One of the factors that worked to legitimize the peacetime draft during the 1950s was that, due to a small youth cohort (the maturing "Depression babies") and the large size of the active force, over three-quarters of eligible men served in the military. In fact, a higher proportion of men were actually drafted in the peacetime 1950s than during the Vietnam War. Under present manpower requirements, on the other hand, only about one in five males would be drafted or otherwise serve in the military, and the question of who should go could be expected to call forth serious controversy; even the Reagan Administration's planned increase of 200,000 in the active-duty force, and the slowly dropping annual cohort of males eligible for military service, would not mean that the ratio of males serving in the military would rise above roughly 25 percent of the total cohort. Only a small and, by definition, unlucky group would ever be called to serve.

These two difficulties alone seem to me to make a return to conscription a highly dubious remedy. Although I am one of those former draftees who look upon conscription as a moral good, a bungled draft would leave us in even worse straits than the undesirable status quo. In a peacetime situation, we must make the AVF work, rather than find ourselves embroiled in a debilitating debate over conscription.

v

The central issue remains: *Is there a way to meet military manpower needs without direct compulsion or excessive reliance on cash inducements for recruits?* I believe there is. First, link all federal aid for higher

education to a program of voluntary national service, including military-reserve duty or civilian work. Second, introduce a renewed set of educational benefits—a new “GI Bill”—for the AVF. Third, construct a two-track military personnel and compensation system which differentiates between a short-term volunteer and a career service member who makes a long-term commitment. Together, these proposals deal with the “three R’s” of military manpower: recruitment, retention and the reserves. Their total cost, moreover, could easily be contained within present federal outlays, and would probably be lower.

The framework advanced here departs from the systems analysis and labor substitution approaches to the AVF. The starting point is not how empty spaces are to be filled, but rather how substantial and representative numbers of American youth can serve their country. To stretch a little and to borrow from the fashionable economic terms of the moment, I am suggesting a supply-side rather than a demand-side model of military manpower.

Relating Educational Benefits to National Service. Two major barriers to more effective recruitment have been the elimination of the GI Bill in 1976 and concurrent expansion of federal assistance to college students. Congress thus created a system of educational benefits which offers more to those who do not serve their country than to those who do. Under the Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP), which replaced the GI Bill, the government matches, within prescribed limits, voluntary contributions made by service members. It is estimated that governmental expenditures for VEAP will be under \$90 million annually. In comparison, federal aid to college students exceeded \$5.2 billion for 1980 alone.¹¹

The funds allocated to civilian students in major assistance programs in 1980 (in billions) were: Pell Grants (formerly Basic Educational Opportunity Grants), \$2.444; Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, \$0.301; College Work-Study Programs, \$0.550; National Direct Student Loans, \$0.301; and Guaranteed Student Loans, \$1.609. With passage in 1978 of the Middle Income Student Assistance Act (MISA), eligibility for Pell Grants can extend to families in the upper half of the income distribution. Also under MISA, there was no need requirement for the Guaranteed Student Loan Program; even with the restrictions on college aid just approved by the 97th Congress, students from families

¹¹ It is estimated that total expenditures for federal student aid will exceed \$9 billion for fiscal year 1981. Sharon House, *The Post-Vietnam Era Veterans Educational Assistance Program*, Washington: Congressional Research Office, May 11, 1980, mimeographed.

earning up to \$30,000 a year would still automatically qualify for federally guaranteed loans. Another federal program was started in 1981 known as PLUS or Parent Loans for Undergraduate Students; this, in combination with student loans, makes it possible to borrow up to \$5,500 for one individual in the same academic year with little or no need requirement. The Work-Study Program, in addition, is becoming a major source of graduate student support. Such governmental policies can hardly be thought of as part of a poverty program. In effect, we have created a GI Bill without the GI.

It is surprising that no public figure thought to tie such student aid to any service obligation on the part of the youths who benefit. On the contrary, the effect of present provisions for federal aid to college students runs, as we have just seen, exactly in the opposite direction, and this effect has not been significantly changed by the altered qualifications under the Reagan budget. To relate student aid at the college level to a service obligation is sound national policy from every standpoint, and indeed the higher educational establishment should take the lead in proposing such a linkage in order to legitimate student aid programs that vitally affect equality of opportunity for higher education.

Obviously, the program of voluntary national service proposed here would be a far-reaching step. Putting the necessary machinery in place probably should not be attempted initially on a full-scale basis. Rather, the program should be introduced step by step over, say, the next five years. In the interim, those who enlist in military reserve units or perform a term of civilian service would have priority for federal aid to college students; in time, participation in some form of national service would become a prerequisite for eligibility for federal post-secondary-school assistance.

The preferred conditions of such national service should be broad but light, rather than narrow but heavy. The aim is for inclusiveness in youth participation, but with maximum decentralization and minimum costs. The following is set forth as one way to meet these standards.

To be eligible for federal post-secondary educational aid, a young man or woman would be required to serve a short period—say three to six months, and perhaps not consecutively—in an unpaid capacity. Recruitment would be handled by voluntary associations, welfare agencies, nonprofit institutions, schools, recreational facilities, and the like. The range of tasks involved could include grooming care for the aged in nursing homes, teachers' assistance, monitoring safety on public transit systems, and even

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museum cataloguing. National service could also entail self-selected responsibilities, for example, driving the aged or handicapped to medical or shopping facilities.

Determining whether or not a specific task would meet service criteria would be the responsibility of local national service boards, whose members themselves would be volunteers (albeit not youth). Salaries would be received only by clerical help at regional board levels and staffers at a national headquarters office. The decentralized system of the old selective service boards is the obvious parallel.

From the viewpoint of the national server, the educational benefits would be substantial. Let us assume an annual outlay of five billion dollars (approximately the 1980 federal expenditures for college student aid) and one million national servers (a figure most likely too high). This would mean \$5,000 in educational benefits to each recipient. (In 1980, some 2.2 million college students received federal aid for an average of about \$2,500 each.)

To go a step further, one can envision a state of affairs in which national service, an earned attribute, would replace ascribed characteristics, such as race or sex, as the basis for affirmative action. At the least, persons who complete national service ought to have a priority in federal or other public employment. It may be that we can come to a realization that many of the things we need as a nation we can never afford to buy. If we are to have them, we must give them to ourselves.

Provisions of a GI Bill for the AVF. Along with linking federal educational assistance beyond high school to voluntary national service, we should introduce post-service educational benefits for members of the AVF along the lines of the GI Bill following World War II. In this way, maximum federal educational benefits would be allotted to those who serve on active duty. A person who enlists in the armed forces and completes an obligated period of active duty would receive three academic years of educational support for two years of service, or four academic years of support for three years of service. The entitlements of an AVF GI Bill would include the costs of tuition and fees up to \$2,500 per academic year, and a subsistence stipend of \$250 per month. Such entitlements would also require an appropriate reserve obligation, say three or four years, following active duty.

The maximum direct costs of such an AVF GI Bill would probably be under \$1.2 billion a year.¹² There would also be

¹² The sum of \$1.2 billion for total annual costs of the proposed AVF GI Bill is based on the following calculations. The sum to be received by each veteran who uses the GI Bill is estimated

substantial offsetting reductions in the net costs thanks to a lower attrition rate, smaller recruitment outlays for both the active forces and the reserves, an end to VEAP, less loss time for unauthorized absences and desertions, and, most likely, fewer lower-ranking service members with families.¹³ With these savings, the net costs of a GI Bill would be under \$0.3 billion annually. Moreover, because members would not be eligible for GI Bill benefits until completion of at least two years of active duty, there would be no outlays whatsoever in the first phase of an AVF GI Bill. In point of fact, the initial two years of a GI Bill program would result in considerable savings in the military manpower budget.

At present it is a virtual article of faith among manpower analysts that bonuses are a more cost-effective enlistment tool than educational benefits. In 1981 the Department of Defense is seeking congressional approval of a \$10,000 enlistment bonus—up from \$5,000—for recruits who meet specified educational and mental test score standards and who are willing to join the combat arms for four years. Yet estimates are that one billion dollars annually would be required in enlistment bonuses to meet the new manpower quality standards set by Congress.¹⁴ This is an expensive business. It represents in a particularly extreme form a reaching out for recruits for whom immediate and short-term economic incentives are paramount.

Even if costs are comparable, moreover, a GI Bill is still to be preferred over enlistment bonuses. Whereas a GI Bill carries with it the positive symbolism of one of America's most successful social

at an average of \$10,000. This was the estimate given by the Veterans Administration for S.2020, a GI Bill introduced in the 96th Congress which contained somewhat more generous entitlements than the one I have proposed. *Hearings before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, U.S. Senate, 96th Congress, 2nd sess., June 19, 1980, Washington: GPO, 1980, p. 25.* In steady-state recruitment for a two million active-duty force, about 375,000 enlistees are required annually (less if attrition were lowered). About 60 percent of first termers—or 225,000 persons—will leave active duty as regular separations. Assume half of these—or 112,500 persons—will matriculate in college (a proportion higher than the national average). \$10,000 times 112,500 approximates \$1.2 billion.

Comparative costs of the World War II GI Bill are informative. The GI Bill of that era paid up to \$500 per academic year for tuition, fees and books, plus a \$75 monthly stipend for a single veteran. The costs of the World War II GI Bill came to about \$2,500 per veteran (2,232,000 participants in higher education at a total cost of \$5.5 billion). Multiply this sum by four to take inflation into account, and we also come up with a figure close to \$10,000.

¹³ Potential countervailing reductions in the annual costs of an AVF GI Bill would easily reach \$0.9 billion. Each case of premature attrition costs the Defense Department \$12,000. *High Cost of Military Attrition Can Be Reduced*, Washington: General Accounting Office, 1979, p. 7. A halving of the attrition rate (60,000 fewer attritees annually) would alone result in savings of \$0.7 billion. If a lower-paid "citizen-soldier" track was introduced, there would be additional cost savings of several hundred million dollars annually.

¹⁴ Congressional Budget Office, *Resources for Defense*, Washington: GPO, 1981, p. 87.

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programs, enlistment bonuses crassly emphasize the cash-work nexus. A GI Bill recipient can receive his or her entitlement only after completion of honorable service, while there is no practical way to recover bonus money from one who fails to complete an enlistment. In theory and practice, enlistment bonuses are inextricably linked with the strategy of recruiting at the margin; a GI Bill, in theory certainly, in practice to be determined, seeks to attract youths heretofore not in the recruitment pool. Enlistment studies do show that GI Bill-type incentives hold greater attractiveness than enlistment bonuses among both high school and college youth.¹⁵ One way out of the conundrum of enlistment bonuses versus the GI Bill may simply be to offer enlistees an either/or choice.

One argument against the GI Bill is that it will reduce retention among first-termers the military would like to see remain in the service. It should be noted initially that retention losses in technical specialties have become more pronounced since the end of the Vietnam-era GI Bill in 1976. The obvious conclusion is that future pay raises should be aimed at the NCO grades rather than applied across the board. Furthermore, unlike enlistment bonuses, reenlistment bonuses are proper career incentives because they reflect demonstrated capabilities and past service. There is also historical evidence that some number of those who would not otherwise join the service except for a GI Bill would find themselves eventually entering the career force. A GI Bill could also create an entirely new source of prior-service entrants at the NCO or officer level: individuals choosing to return to active duty after college or technical training.

Special career provisions in conjunction with a GI Bill would complement, not undermine, retention incentives. There should be no cutoff date for GI Bill eligibility, thereby allowing career service members to take advantage of it. A career service member could use educational entitlements to take a "sabbatical" involving an engineering curriculum for future technical work in the

¹⁵ For surveys of high school youth, see Market Facts, *op. cit.* Surveys of undergraduates at Northwestern University (private and predominantly white) and Morgan State University (public and predominantly black) in 1980 found that a four-year GI Bill—full tuition and stipend—in exchange for two years of military service had greater enlistment appeal than \$2,500 monthly recruit pay. (The Morgan State data were collected by Professor Richard O. Hope of that university.) A discussion on the relative value of post-service educational benefits and high recruit pay is found in Jerald G. Bachman, John D. Blair, and David R. Segal, *The All-Volunteer Force*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977, pp. 145-148. An insightful formulation of the issue is Morris Janowitz, "The Citizen Soldier and National Service," *Air University Review*, Nov.-Dec., 1979. See also John H. Faris, "The Military Occupational Environment and the All-Volunteer Force," in Millett and Trupp, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-41.

military. Alternatively, a career service member might take out educational loans for college-age children which could be forgiven at certain rates in return for reenlistment commitments. Unlike straight GI Bill benefits which should be funded through the Veterans Administration, funding of in-service educational programs properly falls within the defense budget.

Two general principles should always be kept in mind when appraising recruitment and retention proposals. First, incentives for *initial recruitment* must be kept as simple as possible (almost as much for the recruiter's sake as for the recruit); "flexibility" in GI Bill proposals also means increased complexity for potential enlistees. Second, *reenlistment* incentives may be fairly involved with many choice points. One will never go wrong overestimating the grasp career service members have of compensation packages.

A GI Bill cannot simultaneously serve the purposes of both recruitment and retention. These two goals should be separated, lest we end up with a convoluted bill that serves neither. Recruitment must be the overriding intent of a GI Bill. It may help clarify matters to think of an AVF GI Bill as the functional equivalent of conscription. For even with a draft, retention problems would persist and have to be dealt with on their own terms; namely, by well-constructed career compensation and entitlement packages along with a public recognition of the service ethic in the armed forces. A GI Bill is not a cure-all for what ails the AVF. But it is a necessary step in the right direction.

Citizen Soldier and Career Soldier: Complementary Roles. The definitions of military service need overhauling as much as does the machinery of military recruitment. Under conscription, volunteers and those who were drafted served alongside each other in the enlisted ranks of the Army, although inevitably the peacetime "regulars," owing to longer terms of service, enjoyed a premium over draftees when it came to specialized training. Draftees took consolation mainly in that tours of duty were shorter. It is an illusion, however, to think that under the present AVF system there is a common basis of service. The need for special recruitment incentives has set up a built-in system of individual favoritism, as in the constantly changing enlistment bonuses and differential preferences for technical training based on educational level and test scores. We need to reduce the degree of committed specialization for single-termers to obtain an overall force whose members can be utilized more broadly. But at the same time, the definitions of service categories must both preserve the all-volunteer context and recognize that under a system of incentives, along the lines

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proposed herein, there will in fact be a difference in motivations between those who enter the military expecting to serve only a limited time and those who make a longer commitment.

To meet these needs the armed services should set up a two-tiered personnel and compensation system recognizing a distinction between a "citizen soldier" and a "career soldier." (Soldier as used here refers, of course, to sailors, airmen and marines, as well as Army troops.)

The career soldier would initially enlist for a minimum of four years. He or she would receive entitlement and compensation in the manner of the prevailing system, but there would be significant pay increases at the time of the first reenlistment and throughout the senior NCO grades. A basic purpose of the career track would be to decompress enlisted pay scales. Many career people would be trained in technical skills, though others would make up the future cadre in a variety of military specialties. In certain skill areas with extreme shortages, extra reenlistment bonuses will be required. Diverse educational options for the career force have already been mentioned. The career force must also be given improved housing and adequate reimbursement for reassignments that involve family moves. Steps such as these would go a long way toward the retention of the experienced and trained personnel required for a complex and technical military force.

The citizen soldier, on the other hand, would enlist for two years of active duty (the term of the old draftee) and be assigned to the combat arms, low-skill shipboard duty, aircraft security, routine maintenance, clerical work, and other labor-intensive tasks. Except for clerical work, these are the kinds of assignments in today's AVF where recruitment shortfalls, attrition and desertion are most likely to occur. Active-duty pay for the citizen soldier would be lower—say by one third—than that received by the career soldier of the same rank.* And, other than the GI Bill, the citizen soldier would receive no entitlements such as off-base housing or food allowances. This would reduce the frequency of marriage and single parents at junior enlisted levels and help restore unit cohesion in the barracks. With no presumption of acquiring civilian skills in the military, the terms of such service would be honest and unambiguous, thus alleviating a major

* *Editor's Note.* The proposed one-third differential has historical precedent that may be recalled by others as well as the Editor. In mid-1941, his pay as a drafted private was \$21 per month; when he shortly enlisted as a private in the Regular Army to enter a particular specialty, it was raised to \$30 a month. Even after adjusting for inflation, these pay rates are of course vastly lower than what would obtain now under the author's proposal.

source of post-entry discontent in the AVF. A college or graduate education, or vocational training, in exchange for two years of active duty would be the means to attract highly qualified soldiers who can learn quickly, serve effectively for a full tour, and then be replaced by similarly qualified recruits. There is also the consideration that lower paid citizen soldiers might make a generous GI Bill more politically acceptable to the public and Congress.¹⁶

One feature of the two-track system presented here is that, because of the higher active-duty compensation in the career track, some of the two-year joiners will opt for the longer commitment once in the service. This will further reinforce retention in the career force. But the overwhelming number of citizen soldiers will undoubtedly leave active duty after two years and, if they take advantage of the GI Bill, go on to the reserves—a preferred outcome. For without much greater reliance on prior-service personnel, there seems to be no way to salvage Army reserve components in an all-volunteer context. The dominant econometric model of the AVF relies on the mistaken notion that long initial enlistments are always to be preferred over short enlistments. Thirty-six percent of all enlisted entrants in 1964 signed up for four or more years, compared with 61 percent in 1980. Yet with the high attrition rate, the personnel turnover is *greater* now than it was in the peacetime draft era.¹⁷

VI

Current discussion of the AVF has taken an easy path by largely repeating the debate that surrounded the end of conscription. But

¹⁶ In August 1981, Lawrence J. Korb, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower, announced that the Reagan Administration would propose a GI Bill to Congress in early 1982 which would give maximum educational benefits to those who join the ground combat arms. This is a welcome initiative and reverses the Defense Department's previous resistance to an AVF GI Bill. Left unclear, however, is what enlistment length will be required for GI Bill eligibility and what the entitlements will be. An AVF GI Bill would have limited recruitment appeal unless two-year enlistees are eligible and the amount received significantly exceeds the federal college aid given to those who perform no national service. The proposal, moreover, would implement a partial GI Bill on top of large across-the-board salary increases and thus aggravate the present pay compression.

In addition, the proposal apparently limits GI Bill benefits to those enlisting in the ground combat arms, on the assumption that Air Force and Navy recruits acquire marketable skills. The underlying rationale is correct, but the particulars are questionable. It would be better to gear GI Bill benefits to all short-term volunteers who do not acquire marketable skills, regardless of branch or service. Most such enlistees in any event would be assigned to the ground combat arms, but many could serve effectively in non-technical positions in the Air Force or Navy. In the conscript-based forces of the Federal Republic of Germany and France, for example, draftees not only make up the majority of the army, but also comprise about 30 percent of the air force and 25 percent of the navy.

¹⁷ Congressional Budget Office, *The Costs of Defense Manpower*, Washington: GPO, 1977, p. 24.

the real choice is not between tinkering with the AVF status quo and bringing back the draft. The difficulties of the AVF do not stem from the absence of conscription; the crucial flaw is that the architects of the present AVF view military service primarily as a job to be filled by cash inducements. What passes for sophisticated econometric analysis cloaks an excessive reliance on simplistic market incentives. This has helped move the U.S. military from professionalism and institutional loyalty—the intangibles that sustain Americans in uniform—toward an organizational mentality more congruent with civilian occupations. It is this perspective which we must address; rather than looking backward toward the draft, we ought to look forward to a state of affairs where the model of the citizen soldier can be subsumed within a practical concept of voluntary national service.

The challenge for a viable AVF is to obtain the analogue of the peacetime draftee in the all-volunteer context. The AVF, if it is to survive, must attract middle-class and upwardly mobile youth who would find a temporary diversion from the world of school or work tolerable, and perhaps even welcome. This can be accomplished only if the AVF is placed in a new social and moral context, one which reconciles citizen rights with citizen duties. Rotating participation of middle-class youth would leaven the enlisted ranks and help reinvigorate the notion of military service as a widely shared citizen's role. At the same time, an increase in the representativeness of enlisted entrants and the regard in which military service is held by civilian society can only operate to enhance the commitment and self-image of the career force. Such developments would also clarify the military's role by emphasizing the larger calling of national service.

We do not want to be so overwhelmed with data, so bedeviled with rival sets of numbers, that the key policy choices are hardly understood, much less addressed. It is within our reach to establish a comprehensive youth program to serve national needs without compulsion, without creating a massive bureaucracy, and without burgeoning costs. An immediate task is to make governmental subsidies of higher education consistent with voluntary national service. A growing expectation of voluntary service among youth generally will improve the climate of military recruitment without resort to ever-higher compensation for recruits. The grand design is that the ideal of citizenship obligation ought to become part of growing up in America.