

DRAFT | Strain on armed forces has more people pondering conscription

JANUARY 28, 2007
Detroit Free Press

Draft debate gains listeners

Iraq war spurs questions

By DREW BROWN
McCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS

WASHINGTON — The war in Iraq marks the first time in modern history that a United States has fought an extended conflict with an all-volunteer military.

The strain of fighting nearly four years a two-front war has put unprecedented stress on the Army and the Marine Corps which have borne the brunt of the fighting — and has raised serious questions about whether an all-volunteer force can be maintained over the long term.

Even if U.S. troops were to pull out of Iraq tomorrow, the United States faces a war of unknown duration against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Other threats include Iran and North Korea.

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The Iraq Study Group warned in its report last month that the war in Iraq has put the country in a bind.

"An extraordinary amount of sacrifice has been asked of our men and women in uniform, and of their families," the group wrote. "The American military has little reserve force to call on if it needs ground forces to respond to other crises around the world."

"I think America is on a collision course with itself because America has worldwide obligations," said Frank Schaeffer, coauthor of "AWOL: The Unexcused Absence of America's Upper Classes From Military Service — and How It Hurts Our Country."

"All it's going to take is one more conflict or one more world crisis," Schaeffer said, "and we would be very soon facing the fact that no matter what our position on these issues is, we're going to be facing a simple choice of act or don't act. And if we do, then we're going to have to have alternatives."

A call for national service

At least one lawmaker has proposed a radical alternative. U.S. Rep. Charles Rangel, D-N.Y., wants to reinstate the draft.

His proposal would require all U.S. residents ages 18 to 42 to perform 2 years of national service, either in the military or as civilians working in ports, hospitals or some other public-service role. The only people exempted would be high school students up to age 20, conscientious objectors and those who are too unhealthy to serve.

Rangel, an Army veteran who was awarded a Bronze Star in the Korean War, opposes the Iraq war and has put forth a draft bill every year since 2002. Critics accuse him of political grandstanding.

Some fellow lawmakers find his argument compelling. If the war in Iraq is the national security threat that the Bush administration says it is, shouldn't all Americans be asked to shoulder a part of the burden to defend the country?

"The answer to that question will be as varied as the people you ask," said Rep. Sanford

D. Bishop Jr., D-Ga. "I think it's a legitimate question to ask."

President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney define the war in Iraq as the central battleground in the global war on terrorism.

Bush said he'd considered a draft, but rejected it. "I think the volunteer army is working, and we've got to keep it strong," he said.

Charles Moskos, a military sociologist at Northwestern University and a longtime advocate of the draft, said statements such as these exemplified what he calls "patriotism-lite."

"It reflects badly not only on the national leadership, it also reflects badly on the American people," said Moskos, himself a former draftee. "They're not calling for the draft, either — you know, put my son in — but that's where it's got to start."

Draft had role in history

The United States hasn't had a military draft since 1973, when Congress eliminated conscription as the Vietnam War drew to a close. Five years earlier, Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman, a champion of free markets, had labeled the draft "inconsistent with a free society."

For most of its history, the United States has been without a draft. The North and the South conscripted forces during the Civil War. There was a draft during World War I and again in World War II. The last draft lasted from 1948 to 1973.

Many military officers, lawmakers and analysts oppose bringing back conscription, saying it would ruin the professionalism and quality that the all-volunteer force has built up over the last 34 years.

"The nature of decentralized tactics today demands a level of professional experience and competence far above what it was 30 and 40 years ago," said Rep. Geoff Davis, R-Ky., a former Army officer and West Point graduate who serves on the House Armed Services Committee.

The Army had 732,000 active-duty soldiers during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. It now has about 512,000 active-duty soldiers.

The Bush administration

recognizes that there's a problem and has promised to add 92,000 service members to the Army and the Marine Corps over the next five years.

But that means Army recruiters will have to sign up another 7,000 men and women every year, when they're already struggling and standards have been dropped to meet the current quotas.

Gen. Peter J. Schoomaker, the Army's chief of staff, has suggested that part of the answer is increasing the incentives to enlist. The Army already offers as much as \$40,000 to recruits, however, and personnel costs are taking a larger chunk of the defense budget every year.

In the meantime, Defense Secretary Robert Gates has outlined plans to call up the National Guard and Reserves more frequently. But the more the military relies on its citizen-soldiers to fight the war, the less attractive the Reserves become to those who don't want full-time military careers.

There are concerns that overusing the Guard and Reserves could strain those forces as badly as the active-duty ranks.

Running the numbers

The Pentagon estimates that it would cost about \$4 billion more a year to reinstate the draft. New facilities would have to be built to train and house the large numbers of inductees who'd be brought into uniform each year.

About 4 million men and women reach military age each year, but the military needs only a small fraction of that number. That's a fact that those who argue for a return to the draft tend to overlook, said Bernard D. Rostker, the author of "I Want You: The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force."

Draft proponents say that some people could work in homeland security guarding airports, seaports and borders or could work in understaffed hospitals or schools.

The Gates Commission, which President Richard Nixon created in 1969 to look at ways of ending compulsory service, considered a standby draft to be an integral part of an all-volunteer force, Rostker said.

Lack of draft may drain anti-Iraq war movement of Vietnam era's intensity

By DAVID CRARY

Associated Press

NEW YORK — America's current anti-war movement is resourceful and persistent, but often seems to lack the vibrancy of its counterpart in the Vietnam era when protesters burned draft cards, occupied buildings and even tried to levitate the Pentagon.

The biggest difference, say activists and historians, is the lack of a draft.

'Die-in' held in Calif.

Today's college-age youth face no threat of conscription to fight in Iraq, and campuses are more tranquil than during Vietnam.

"We're not as unified, not as hard-core, not as big," said Frida Berrigan, 32, a board member of the War Resisters League and daughter of the late peace activist Philip Berrigan. "There's a reason: There's not a draft."

Since Saturday, protests marking the fourth anniversary of the Iraq war have been held in hundreds of communities nationwide, ranging from small-town vigils in Maine to a "die-in" in San Francisco. Passions sometimes ran high and more than 100 protesters were arrested.

But attendance in many cities was modest, no national turnout figure was announced, and at no point did the events come close to dominating the national agenda.

"There is tremendous anti-war sentiment in the country that has not all found its way into activism," said Leslie Cagan, a student protest organizer during the Vietnam War and now national coordinator of the anti-war coalition United for Peace and Justice.

No generation gap now

With both Iraq and Vietnam, public opinion gradually shifted over the years until polls showed more opponents than supporters.

"We're not as unified, not as hard-core, not as big. There's a reason: There's not a draft."

Frida Berrigan
War Resisters League

But there are several key differences now: far lower U.S. casualties, less of the generational conflict that added fuel to the Vietnam protests, and a desire by many anti-war leaders not to demonize the military.

Troops not 'baby-killers'

James Carafano, an Army veteran and defense policy expert at the conservative Heritage Foundation, said the contrast in attitudes toward the military is stark.

"During Vietnam, the perception was that atrocities were everywhere — the military was looked down on," he said. "There is a serious effort now not to stigmatize the military — a conscious effort to say, 'This is not a bunch of baby-killers.'"

For Vietnam protesters, the military served as a prime foil. Students protested at draft centers, chanting "Hell No, We Won't Go." Four days of demonstrations at Kent State University ended disastrously when National Guard gunfire killed four students in 1970.

But the Vietnam protests failed to produce quick results, with U.S. troops pulling out six years after the first huge anti-war rallies in 1967. Comparing the movements, Berrigan suggested today's protesters perhaps have a broader sense of global awareness.

"A lot of the opposition to Vietnam was motivated by people's fear of going to war — maybe it was pretty self-centered," she said.

"With this movement, maybe it's not as big, but it comes from a deeper place than 'Hell No, We Won't Go.'"

LSJ MARCH 21, 2007