

Report from the Center for

PHILOSOPHY & PUBLIC POLICY

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The All-Volunteer Force: Second Thoughts After the First Decade

To make its research readily available to a broad audience, the Center for Philosophy and Public Policy publishes a quarterly newsletter: *QQ—Report from the Center for Philosophy and Public Policy*. Named after the abbreviation for “questions,” *QQ* summarizes and supplements Center books and working papers and features other selected work on public policy questions. Articles in *QQ* are intended to advance philosophically informed debate on current policy choices; the views presented are not necessarily those of the Center or its sponsors.

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In 1973, in the bitter aftermath of a bitter war, the United States declared an end to the draft and adopted an all-volunteer policy of military service. It seemed to many a deep truth of democracy that a free republic should be defended by those who freely choose to defend it, and that a government which must use force against its own citizens to coerce their service thereby forfeits any claim to allegiance.

Ten years later, however, questions are being raised about both the effectiveness and, ironically, the justice of the all-volunteer force (AVF). In a world where conventional military strength may seem the best deterrent to nuclear confrontation, many think it imperative to marshal a force that is unambiguously capable of meeting our military needs. What if the next war is the war that really matters, the war whose loss could profoundly and permanently alter our political, economic, social—our national—life? Can a force composed entirely of volunteers do the job it may be called upon to do?

But many of the same concerns about equity and justice that motivated an end to the draft are now also motivating a reexamination of the democratic and moral legitimacy of the AVF. Concerns about the requirements of democracy, about voluntariness and coercion, about fairness to the disadvantaged are occupying a central position in the current debate. A nation’s military says a great deal about what kind of a nation it is. What kind of a nation are we?