

Report from the Center for

PHILOSOPHY & PUBLIC POLICY

University of Maryland • College Park, Maryland 20742 • Telephone: 301-454-4103

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.

In this issue:

Ten years after the end of the draft, questions are being raised about both the military effectiveness of America’s all-volunteer force, and its justice. Can the AVF do its job? Is our volunteer military as democratic, voluntary, and fair as it was hoped to be?.....p.1

Workplace injuries and illnesses continue to have staggeringly high economic and human costs. What practical steps should we take to improve workers’ safety and health?p.6

A philosopher supplies “Guidelines for Hardball” for those tragic—and rare—cases in which U.S. foreign policy may have to trespass against basic human rights.....p.9

Recent literature on the feminist crusade against pornography is reviewed.....p.12

Announcement of two new volumes in Maryland Studies in Public Philosophy.....p.15

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?

The AVF and Military Effectiveness

At the height of anti-draft agitation in the sixties, protesters wore buttons asking, "What if they gave a war and nobody came?" A somewhat similar question is being asked today, not by pacifists, but by military strategists: "What if we have an all-volunteer force and nobody volunteers?" If current military manpower levels are to be maintained, several hundred thousand young men and women must come forward each year, of their own volition, to sign themselves up for a job that is widely regarded as highly risky and regimented. Can our military needs really be met entirely by hoping that enough young Americans will walk in the door of their local recruiting office and announce that they have decided to serve?

So far, the AVF has had little trouble attracting the requisite numbers of recruits. As a general rule, dry years in the civilian labor market produce bumper crops of enlistees, while volunteering falls off as civilian employment opportunities improve. Yet the AVF has managed to meet its recruiting goals through good times as well as bad. The active force has been on strength every year except 1978, and that shortfall was made up the following year.

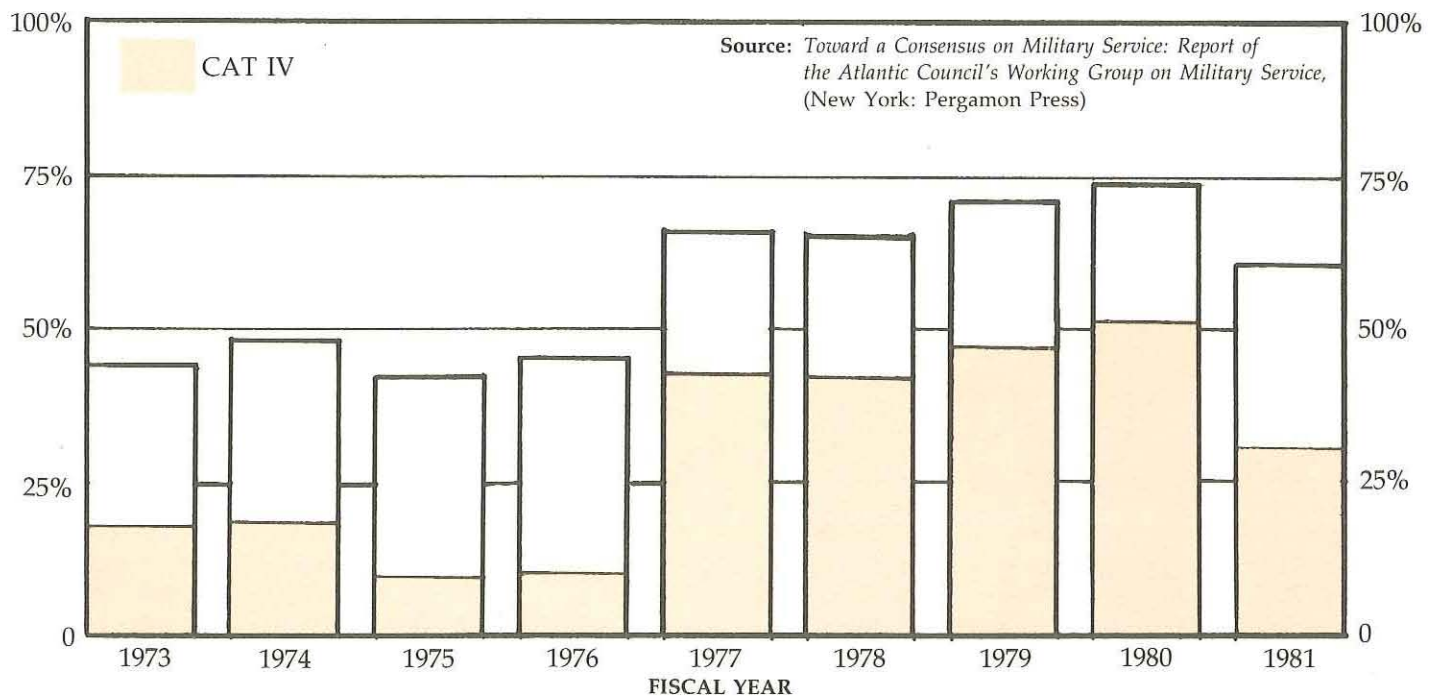
Where shortages *have* occurred is in the reserves, which are estimated to be 250,000 people short of optimal levels. But Richard Hunter, Senior Associate at the Systems Research and Applications Corporation, attributes these shortages primarily to the low priority assigned to the reserves by the Pentagon, and military sociologist David Segal suggests that it is

unclear "that the reserves continue to play a significant role in our defense posture. They were not used in the Vietnam engagement, and we currently lack the means to get them to a war in Europe. If they are merely an artifact of past conceptions of military organization, we might be able to stop wondering how to raise the manpower to fill them."

A more serious charge is that the AVF is not attracting the needed *quality* of recruits, as measured by education level and scores on a battery of intelligence and aptitude tests. During the all-volunteer era, the percentage of non-high-school graduates among recruits increased from draft-era days, averaging more than 40 percent between 1975 and 1979. Intelligence test scores of military personnel are increasingly compressed within a narrower range biased heavily toward the lower end of the spectrum. A very high percentage of Army recruits, in particular, score in the lowest mental category acceptable for service (category IV on the military scale, comprising the 10th through 30th percentiles) as the graph below indicates. David Marlowe, Chief of Military Psychiatry at Walter Reed Army Research Institute, notes that in 1977, "only 31 percent of Army recruits could read at the eleventh grade level, while 25 percent read at the fifth grade level or lower."

In Marlowe's view, this is a recipe for military disaster: "Studies carried out in past wars have consistently indicated a significant relationship between intelligence, education, and performance in combat." What was true in past wars will be even more grimly true on the high-technology, high-intensity battlefield

Percentage of Below-Average Army Accessions
(as measured by entrance examination scores)



of the future, where Marlowe predicts that new styles of continuous, echeloned combat employing ever more sophisticated weaponry and equipment will put a premium on "intelligence, complex skills, and individual initiative." Victory, quite simply, may well go to the smarter side.

Hunter, however, disagrees with Marlowe's stress on education and intelligence as decisive in combat. He maintains that "training in military skills and effective leadership are probably more important than high school diplomas and test scores in determining the effectiveness of an armed force. . . . Attitude, dedication to the cause, and motivation to fight are the real quality determinants."

"Training in military skills and effective leadership are probably more important than high school diplomas and test scores in determining the effectiveness of an armed force. . . . Attitude, dedication to the cause, and motivation to fight are the real quality determinants."

Assuming that both education/intelligence and dedication to the cause are important for a successful fighting force, can the AVF hope to do as well as a draft in recruiting bright and dedicated soldiers?

Marlowe argues that the Army's need for "soldiers of average and above-average intelligence, abilities, skills, and potentialities" cannot at present "be obtained through the marketplace, and it is questionable that any first-term personnel mix that approaches the optimal could ever be obtained through voluntary enlistment." Segal counters that it may be more effective "to attract [higher quality youth] with the carrot of educational incentives" than to "drive them with the stick of compulsion." That the AVF has not succeeded in attracting better educated youth shows at most that it has not been offering an attractive enough package, not that no such package could be offered. Indeed, once Congress began appropriating funds for substantial pay raises in the early 1980s, the armed forces began to enjoy banner recruiting years.

Paying more for recruits costs more for taxpayers, of course, and it can be argued that we want to trim skyrocketing defense budgets, not send them soaring ever upward. Many have estimated, however, that the budget savings to be reaped from a return to the draft would likely be negligible, on the order of half a billion per year. The real savings would be still less. As Segal explains, "a differential in compensation that favors the civilian labor force does not represent a saving, but rather a reallocation of cost, so that it is borne by those who serve rather than by the taxpayer." It seems to many, as it seems to Hunter, "patently unfair to levy upon those who serve in undesirable and risk-laden tasks an additional 'tax'" by using their forced service

as an opportunity to deny them a fair market wage for their labor.

If the AVF were to succeed in attracting better educated and more intelligent recruits by offering an enhanced compensation package, would this do anything at all to ensure getting high quality recruits in Hunter's sense: young people who are dedicated to the cause of serving their country? Or would it have precisely the opposite effect, attracting a mercenary force dedicated to the cause of picking up a fat paycheck every two weeks? Segal asks "whether soldiers motivated by the same factors that recruit workers for an automobile assembly line are any more willing to risk their lives for the nation, or to take the lives of enemy soldiers in combat, than are those assembly line workers." He doubts that they are and suggests that only "reestablishing the norm of service as a citizen duty" will rekindle the patriotic motivation needed for a truly effective fighting force.

Hunter maintains that military devotion will not be fostered by a draft: "A draft, especially a peacetime draft, does not make patriots." Any morale problems in today's volunteer military are, in Hunter's view, common to many peacetime armed forces who grow understandably restless and bored in garrison. If actually called upon to defend their country, volunteer soldiers should perform with as much, if not more, patriotic zeal as coerced conscripts, bearing arms against their will.

Democracy, Voluntariness, and Fairness

Suppose that the AVF is doing a reasonably effective job at providing for the nation's defense. Surely, it would seem, this should settle the question of its acceptability, for on moral grounds a volunteer system seems clearly preferable to a system of forced military service. If we can get the same job done just as well, or almost as well, with volunteers as with conscripts, why on earth would we opt instead for the massive incursions on individual liberty entailed by a draft?

"[Are] soldiers motivated by the same factors that recruit workers for an automobile assembly line . . . any more willing to risk their lives for the nation, or to take the lives of enemy soldiers in combat, than are those assembly line workers[?]"

Perhaps surprisingly, the AVF has recently become the target of some troubling moral, as well as military, objections. Critics have asked whether our volunteer policy, at least in its present form, is indeed as democratic, voluntary, and fair as it first appears when contrasted with the outright coerciveness of conscription.

The moral objections are prompted by the observa-

tion that a disproportionately high percentage of AVF recruits are members of minority groups and the lower socio-economic strata of society. By 1981 the enlisted ranks of the military were 22 percent black (30 percent minority), with the Army's enlisted ranks 33 percent black and 41 percent minority. Combat units that are 50 percent black are not uncommon. It appears that our armed forces are currently staffed to a disturbing degree by those who have few or no other options in the civilian labor market—the unemployed and the unemployable.

This overrepresentation of the poor and disadvantaged in the military has led some critics to charge that the AVF in fact ill serves the principles of democracy.



SSG Mi Seitelman, USAAVC, Pentagon

In a representative democracy, it is argued, the armed forces should be representative of the society they are called upon to defend. Such distinguished students of the military as Morris Janowitz and James Fallows, for example, have contended that "the racial composition of the military raises the questions of representativeness and political legitimacy of institutions that are at the core of a democratic society" (Janowitz) and that the young blacks who staff the military, though they "may well be first-class fighting men, . . . do not represent the nation" (Fallows).

The claim that democracy requires a representative military needs further clarification, however. In what sense exactly must our military represent us? Robert Fullinwider, Research Associate at the Center for Philosophy and Public Policy, answers that "to represent means to 'stand for.' . . . [W]e want the military to 'stand for' us in the sense that we want it peopled by soldiers and sailors who understand and endorse the same basic commitments and values reflected in the population at large. An 'alien' force would be com-

posed of individuals prepared to fight for pay but who do not understand, value, or subscribe to the goals and aspirations of the culture they protect and the political institutions they defend." If current recruits represent us in *this* sense, as Fullinwider believes they do, then it is irrelevant whether they also mirror the social, educational, economic, religious, regional, and other demographic patterns found in society as a whole. The AVF does not seem illegitimate on *democratic* grounds.

A different doubt is that the all-volunteer force may in morally important ways not be a *volunteer* force at all. For it seems not inappropriate to say that many minority youths are forced into the military by economic hardship and racial discrimination. When one's only

real alternative to military service is unemployment, what kind of genuine, open, voluntary choice does one have to enlist or not enlist? Thus the AVF has been accused of "conscription through poverty."

University of Arizona philosopher Jules Coleman offers one way of trying to decide whether or not some morally troubling agreement is entered into voluntarily: we can consider what remedy would be most appropriate to remove our moral qualms. When one party's consent to an agreement is non-voluntary, "the normal institutional response is to refuse to enforce the terms of agreement against [him] or to refuse in other ways to give legal effect to his decision." If the black youth enlists non-voluntarily, we should intervene to void his enlistment and prevent his coerced service.

Surely, however, this is the last thing the black youth himself desires. In joining the military, after all, he is making what seems to him the best choice he can among his limited alternatives. Fullinwider argues that if we take action to prevent black enlistments, "the net effect will be the denial to many young blacks of the

military opportunities they would otherwise choose. . . . The young blacks whom we worried were being 'victimized' by the all-volunteer policy because they were 'forced' to choose between service and unemployment are now reduced to one choice: unemployment. Under the circumstances, they may be unable to appreciate how they have been relieved of victimization."

Even if we are satisfied that AVF recruits enlist voluntarily, our original doubts about the conditions of their enlistment still seem, however, unallayed. Coleman explains that fully voluntary agreements, entered into with full knowledge of their consequences, are not thereby immune from further moral criticism. "While the absence of a more attractive alternative may be insufficient to render a choice involuntary, choices made against the background of limited options can reflect a general weakness in an individual's bargaining strength. . . . Agreements that involve one individual's taking an unfair advantage of another's relative bargaining weakness may be morally objectionable even if the agreement between them is a fully voluntary one."

Our real objection to the AVF, then, is that it *exploits* the underclass. Poor black recruits are desperate enough to sign up for distasteful work on terms that anyone less desperate would reject, and the government reaps considerable benefits from their desperation. Since it is unfair that poor blacks must negotiate from such a weak initial bargaining position, the bargain they end up settling for is likewise unfair.

The appropriate remedy for bargains that are unfair in this way, according to Coleman, is to correct for or nullify the difference between the parties' relative bargaining strengths. One way to do this, in the case of the AVF, is to weaken the bargaining position of the better-off relative to the underclass, by such measures as imposing a tax on eligible individuals who forgo military service in favor of more attractive employment opportunities. But this approach, Coleman notes, "simply puts more people in the same boat the poor already occupy. . . . The obvious effect is to create an expanded weaker class, all of whom share the same disadvantage in negotiating a desirable agreement."

A far-preferred alternative would be to strengthen the bargaining position of the worse-off, by reducing racial and ethnic discrimination in civilian society and offering poor and minority youth a fuller range of satisfying employment choices. "It is," Coleman says, "probably as hard to object to such a policy as it is to come out against trimming fat out of the budget." The massive and far-reaching institutional changes called for here may be desirable in themselves, and even clear requirements of anything approaching social and economic justice; they are arguably goals that we as a society are currently striving toward; but it seems less than practical to count on such major societal alterations as a near-term solution to military staffing problems.

A final alternative is to force the government to make military service more attractive generally; the government would retain its bargaining advantage over the poor, but it would not be able to capitalize on this advantage in deciding what package to offer recruits. But Coleman raises grave doubts about this approach as well. The more attractive military service becomes, the more the military will be able to pick and choose among middle-class as well as lower-class applicants. Given the imperative to boost recruit quality, many economically and educationally disadvantaged youth may well be rejected for service, as the very worst-off in our society are rejected now. After all, Marlowe reminds us, "the primary and essential role of the armed forces is to fight and win wars." The military should not be forced to neglect this central goal in order to shoulder more than its fair share of our commitment to achieve racial and economic justice. "In the end such a proposal might further reduce the range of desirable employment opportunities open to the poor," Coleman concludes, adding reluctantly, "It looks as if the poor must accept being taken advantage of—and they may well be prepared to do so."

Our best hope seems to be to work to attract the best military possible, so that our national security needs will not be compromised, and to work elsewhere in our society to correct the deep inequities that leave military service the only option for too many.

Conclusion

At the end of its first decade, the all-volunteer force seems to merit a cautious thumbs-up assessment. If we have real doubts about combat readiness, we can try to attract a brighter and better educated force by offering pay and benefits that keep competitive pace with the civilian sector. We cannot expect, nor have we any right to expect, a very much better force than we are willing to pay for.

It is true that the campaign to upgrade recruit quality may end up further constricting the employment opportunities of America's worst-off. But our best hope seems to be to work to attract the best military possible, so that our national security needs will not be compromised, and to work elsewhere in our society to correct the deep inequities that leave military service the only option for too many.

*The views of Richard Hunter, David Segal, David Marlowe, Robert Fullinwider, and Jules Coleman are drawn from their chapters in **Conscripts and Volunteers: Military Requirements, Social Justice, and the All-Volunteer Force**, edited by Robert K. Fullinwider, Maryland Studies in Public Philosophy (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983). To order, see page 15.*