

THE ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE--TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE
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THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MANPOWER AND PERSONNEL

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Background

In the late 1960s, the volunteer force emerged as one of the very few alternatives for dealing with the growing inequities of the selective service draft. The increasing numbers of young men reaching military age each year and relatively constant (or decreasing) force sizes meant that a smaller proportion would have to serve in the military. Since the pay for junior military personnel was substantially below what comparably aged and educated civilian workers earned, those not forced to serve--about 80 percent of the military-aged male population--therefore benefited substantially at the expense of those who were.

The Gates Commission argued persuasively that those forced to serve should not have to pay a large financial price in addition to the other burdens of involuntary servitude, and thus recommended that first-term military pay be raised to a level comparable to that found in the civilian sector for people of that age and skill level (i.e., 18-21 year-old high school graduates). Congress concurred and raised first-term pay effective November 1971. Interestingly, by raising pay to this level, the Services could attract enough volunteers such that the draft would not be necessary. In other words, the substitution of a volunteer force for a mixed force with draftees, reluctant volunteers, and true volunteers did not require any extraordinary measures, merely the payment of a fair wage for junior personnel.

Early Experience with the Volunteer Force

The All-Volunteer Force has worked. The first few years without conscription have shown that the military services can attract a socially representative mix of the desired quantity and quality of new recruits without the pressure of the draft and at a cost substantially less than commonly assumed. Moreover, the success of the volunteer

force is not the result of high unemployment rates, though these clearly aided the recruiting effort, but rather because military service continues to be seen as an attractive employment option by a broad cross section of American youth.

Quantity. With the exception of modest Army and Marine Corps recruiting shortfalls during the first year of the volunteer force (and again during the transition quarter), the Services have successfully met their quantitative recruiting objectives since the removal of the draft. Moreover, because these recruiting shortfalls can be shown to be largely the result of shortages of recruiters in the field, unnecessarily restrictive quality standards, and unusually large accession requirements, the first-year recruiting difficulties are not indicative of longer run recruiting problems.

Enlisted accession requirements. The key AVF issue is therefore not manpower supply, but enlisted accession requirements. As a result of Service policies such as limiting the flow into the career force, enlisted accession requirements are actually higher under the volunteer force than they were under the draft, when we would expect just the reverse. The key to the long-run success of the volunteer force, as well as to more cost-effective management of enlisted manpower, therefore rests in reducing enlisted accession requirements--and, hence, reducing personnel turnover rates. In other words, the central AVF issue is one of management--specifically, reducing enlisted accession requirements.

Quality. The quality of new recruits, as measured by such indicators as mental aptitude and educational attainment, has actually increased since the removal of the draft, and substantially so since about fiscal 1975. The real quality issues instead concern whether the Services' current quality-maximizing philosophy yields standards that are too restrictive (rather than too lenient) and whether the right balance among individual quality criteria such as mental aptitude and educational attainment is being maintained. Specifically, the evidence suggests that current quality standards are too strict and that the Services should accept more Category IV personnel.

Unemployment. High unemployment rates, though certainly aiding the recruiting effort, are not responsible for the success of the volunteer force. The military services have used high unemployment to achieve unusually high quality standards, but since statistical estimates indicate that a 10 percent increase in the unemployment rate for young males results in only a two to three percent increase in the number of enlistments, the

expended for draft avoidance. Thus, not only are the budget expenditures for the AVF less than generally assumed, but the real costs of manpower have declined.

Problems. To be sure, there have been certain problems, such as the first-year recruiting shortfalls previously mentioned, but these have been largely problems with the way that the transition was managed, not with the fundamental concept or policy. Other problems remain, such as reserve forces and physician manning. However, these problems are more a result of finding the right management and force structure solutions than of the volunteer force. For example, although the reserve forces have historically been structured as a "mirror image" of the active forces, common sense would seem to argue for alternative solutions such as a more experienced force (where capability is maintained but not developed). Thus, whereas the narrow application of the volunteer approach to the reserve forces has led to manning difficulties, the real problem is that the "right" manning configuration and personnel policies have not been implemented.

Systems Implications

Although it has perhaps been most common to view the volunteer force in the narrow sense of such items as recruiting objectives and advertising budgets, the real implications of ending the draft are much larger. The nearly three decades of postwar conscription encouraged the military to develop and maintain patterns of manpower utilization and management that are neither cost-effective nor equitable and, as a result, add needless billions of dollars to the defense budget.

The basic problem is illustrated by the way that the volunteer force was achieved, since rather than reexamining the demand for manpower as manpower costs increased, the personnel managers were charged with the responsibilities for obtaining the "required" numbers and types of personnel. Though personnel policy remains an important element of the manpower management problem, the more substantive questions related to costs and efficiency are determined in the requirements process. As a consequence, defense policy and defense costs are today driven largely by manpower policies, which, though perhaps sensible under the draft, add needless constraints and unnecessary costs to defense planning and budgeting.

The problem centers on the fact that manpower--especially junior personnel--was viewed as a "free good" until the implementation of the volunteer force. Since the draft always provided adequate numbers of personnel, there was less need to question the efficiency of manpower utilization. *Thus, one of the most important byproducts of the AVF has been to provide a framework for addressing the efficiency of manpower management and utilization policies.*

By putting previously hidden costs "up front", the AVF has made manpower problems more visible, a visibility that has been heightened by markedly increasing costs in other, non-AVF related areas of manpower. To date, however, the possible efficiency gains (and corresponding cost savings) have gone largely unrealized. To achieve these improvements, we must not just understand the AVF, which provides the context for improved management, but must address the major areas in need of reform: requirements; compensation, retirement, and tenure policy; and training.

