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KEEPING THE ALL - VOLUNTEER FORCE HEALTHY

INTRODUCTION

The volunteer system has been the exclusive provider of manpower for the U.S. armed forces since 1973. Its record has been spotty. In 1979, for example, the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) produced only 93 percent of the military services' recruiting goal. In 1980, only 64 percent of first-term enlistees possessed high school diplomas. Yet things improved so much by last November that Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger labeled the AVF a "huge success."¹ To some extent the improvement is the result of better management, greater public interest in and concern for military affairs, and increased military budgets and pay. Major credit, however, belongs to the 1979-1982 economic slump, which made a job in uniform look very appealing. If this were in fact the case, then the current economic recovery could renew the difficulties in recruiting and retention.

At least three supplements to the current AVF package are essential if the AVF is to be kept healthy and provide for the nation's defense manpower needs--in good times as well as bad. First, the AVF must be made less susceptible to fluctuations in the economy. This means flexibility in the use of fiscal resources--such as banking extra funds during periods when recruiting is easy, for quick-response use when the job is more difficult. Second, the AVF must tap new sources, particularly the college-bound youth. A post-service "GI bill" (as an alternative to current high pay structures) would serve well here. Finally, the AVF must be backed by a secure system of mobilization, including Presidential authority to order limited inductions.

¹ Army Times, November 21, 1983, p. 10.

QUANTITY AND QUALITY IN THE ACTIVE FORCE

In general, the services achieved their active duty recruiting objectives between 1973 and 1983, with the help of a reduction in overall authorized end strength of about 200,000. Except for 1978, the services achieved or came very close to achieving their quantitative accession goals. The success of the AVF can be only partly measured on this basis, however.

The picture is less rosy in terms of quality, as measured by educational level and mental aptitude. Education level is measured by whether or not recruits received high school diplomas. (Those with diplomas (HSDG) have proved more likely to complete an enlistment.) Training aptitude is measured for various military occupations and assignments. Based on uniform tests administered by all the services, applicants are ranked into five categories: superior (I), above average (II), average (III), below average (IV), and unacceptable (V).

Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) Test Categories and Distribution of 1980 Youth Population

AFQT Category	1980 Youth Population Distribution (Percent)
I	4
II	33
III	32
IV	24
V	7

Source: National Youth Survey

The services are prohibited from enlisting Category V youths, and they attempt to enlist as many from Categories I through III as possible. Since 1982, Category IV enlistees have been limited by law to those possessing high school diplomas. Further, by law, no more than 20 percent of new recruits in any service may be in test category IV.

Over the last ten years the quality of active force accessions has fluctuated widely, but with the exception of the Army, the services have not done badly with respect to quality enlistments.² Moreover, in the last three years even the Army has been

² All DoD mental aptitude test scores for 1976-1980 were found to be invalid due to errors in the system used to convert raw test scores to AFQT percentiles. As a result of this "misnorming" the services accepted more Category III and IV recruits than normally would have been enlisted.

attracting a very large number of quality recruits. This does not necessarily signal a new trend. Indeed, a number of studies over the past ten years have suggested that recruit quality is influenced by the economy.³ Historical evidence that such a relationship exists between the economy and peacetime enlistments can be found as far in the past as the 1830s, and during the nation's last sustained experience with an all-volunteer force, the period between the World Wars, a clear link between unemployment levels and voluntary enlistment has been demonstrated.⁴

But there is more to the economic factor and the decision to enlist than the mere availability (or nonavailability) of jobs. Indeed, surveys conducted for the Army suggest that perceived opportunities for self-improvement attract more recruits than the simple desire for employment. Higher test category recruits interviewed listed money for a college education as their most important reason for enlisting. Lower test category recruits indicated they joined to receive skill training. In both cases the recruits saw the Army as a vehicle for self-improvement. This behavior is consistent with historical experience over a wide variety of economic conditions.⁵

QUALITY AND QUANTITY IN THE RESERVES

The quantity and quality of personnel in the reserve components are equally important and often overlooked indicators of the health and vitality of the AVF. This is particularly so considering the growing requirement for the early use of the selected reserves in even a partial mobilization.

The Reserve Components consist of two major groupings, the Selected Reserves and the Individual Ready Reserves (IRR). The

³ The strong link found between the economy and recruiting in an Army study by Charles Dale and Curtis Gilroy ("The Economic Detriment of Military Enlistment Rates," USARI technical Report #587, September 1983) has been questioned. Critics point out other factors also played a role in these results. This linkage in other services--particularly those which have traditionally been able to rely on volunteers--is less clear, and may not be not as strong as it seems to be in the Army.

⁴ The pre-World War II all-volunteer Army was well aware of the economic influences on enlistments. See Major E. N. Woodbury, "A Study of Desertion in the Army," unpublished, Morale Branch of the War Plans Divisions, General Staff, September 15, 1920. The title of Woodbury's study is misleading. It examines the factors influencing enlistment, reenlistment, and desertion from 1830 to 1920. For the interwar period see the author's Men Wanted for U.S. Army: America's Experience with an All-Volunteer Army Between the World Wars (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1982).

⁵ "Education Lures Recruits, Studies Show," Army Times, August 1, 1983, p. 4; General Maxwell Thurnon, "Sustaining the All-Volunteer Force, 1983-1992: The Second Decade," paper presented at the USNA/OASD CMRA&L Conference on the AVF, November 2-4, 1983, p. 12.

strength of the Selected Reserves, which are organized into equipped units and train on a regular basis, declined from 919,000 at the beginning of the AVF to a low of 788,000 in fiscal 1978. Some of the decline was a deliberate reduction dictated by policy changes, but much of the drop resulted from Department of Defense (DoD) and Service neglect of Reserve Component recruiting/retention problems.

In the early years of the AVF, attention focused on the active forces. By 1977, however, the plight of the Reserve Components could no longer be ignored. Since then recruiting has been reemphasized, incentives--such as educational benefits, and enlistment and reenlistment bonuses--added, and Selected Reserve strength has increased to 1,004,500, the highest since 1961 and only 2,200 short of the 1959 all-time high. Moreover, the percentage of high school diploma graduates in the Selected Reserves, which had declined significantly following the end of the draft, has mounted sharply in recent years. By the end of fiscal year 1983, 92 percent of nonprior service volunteers for the Selected Reserves scored in Categories I-III.

RETENTION IN THE ACTIVE FORCES AND SELECTED RESERVES

Just as there is some link between the economy and enlistment, there is a relationship between the economy and retention--the ability to keep people in the force. When the AVF was instituted, there was a major entry-level pay increase. The pay of a newly enlisted member (E-1) went from \$143 (plus room, board, medical care, uniforms) to \$268/month immediately and is now almost \$600 (nearly a 420 percent increase since 1971). Raises for career personnel were held back by budget caps and between 1971 and 1980 averaged about 186 percent, while inflation (Consumer Price Index) rose more than 200 percent. With relatively high employment potential and declining military purchasing power, many career personnel left the service. The double-digit inflation of 1979 and 1980 left the career force even further behind. Pay raises of 11.1 and 14.3 percent in fiscal 1981 and 1982 helped restore some of what had been lost and improved retention and reenlistment rates. The current high reenlistment rates in all the services (85.6 percent in fiscal 1983 as compared with 68.2 percent in fiscal 1979) would seem to ratify the wisdom of the "catch-up" raises, but the high unemployment of the last two years may have played a part.

Similar forces operated during the period to influence the decision to enlist in the Reserves. Retention problems also plagued the Reserve Components, especially the Selected Reserves, in the 1970s. Indeed the decrease in the Selected Reserves following the end of the draft--from 933,000 in 1974 to 799,000 in 1978--was due as much to the decline in reenlistment (among reservists whose initial services may have been motivated by draft avoidance) as it was to poor recruiting. In 1977, Reserve Component manpower issues began to get attention and total strength

figures have improved. Still, retention in the Selected Reserve has remained problematical.⁶

Interviews with enlisted reservists indicate that, for younger, lower-ranking members of the Selected Reserves, the attraction of the duty is more a function of job skill training than supplementary income.⁷ The primary reason for entering the Selected Reserves was the promise of acquiring a skill, such as mechanic or heavy equipment operator, transferable to the civilian world. These persons usually drop out after one enlistment. Although the findings of one survey cannot be considered definitive, its implications cannot be ignored. As the job market improves, fewer men will be attracted by the promise of marketable skills. The up side of this, of course, is that those who join will be more highly motivated toward service and will be more likely to stay.

THE AVF: COSTS OF RECRUITING

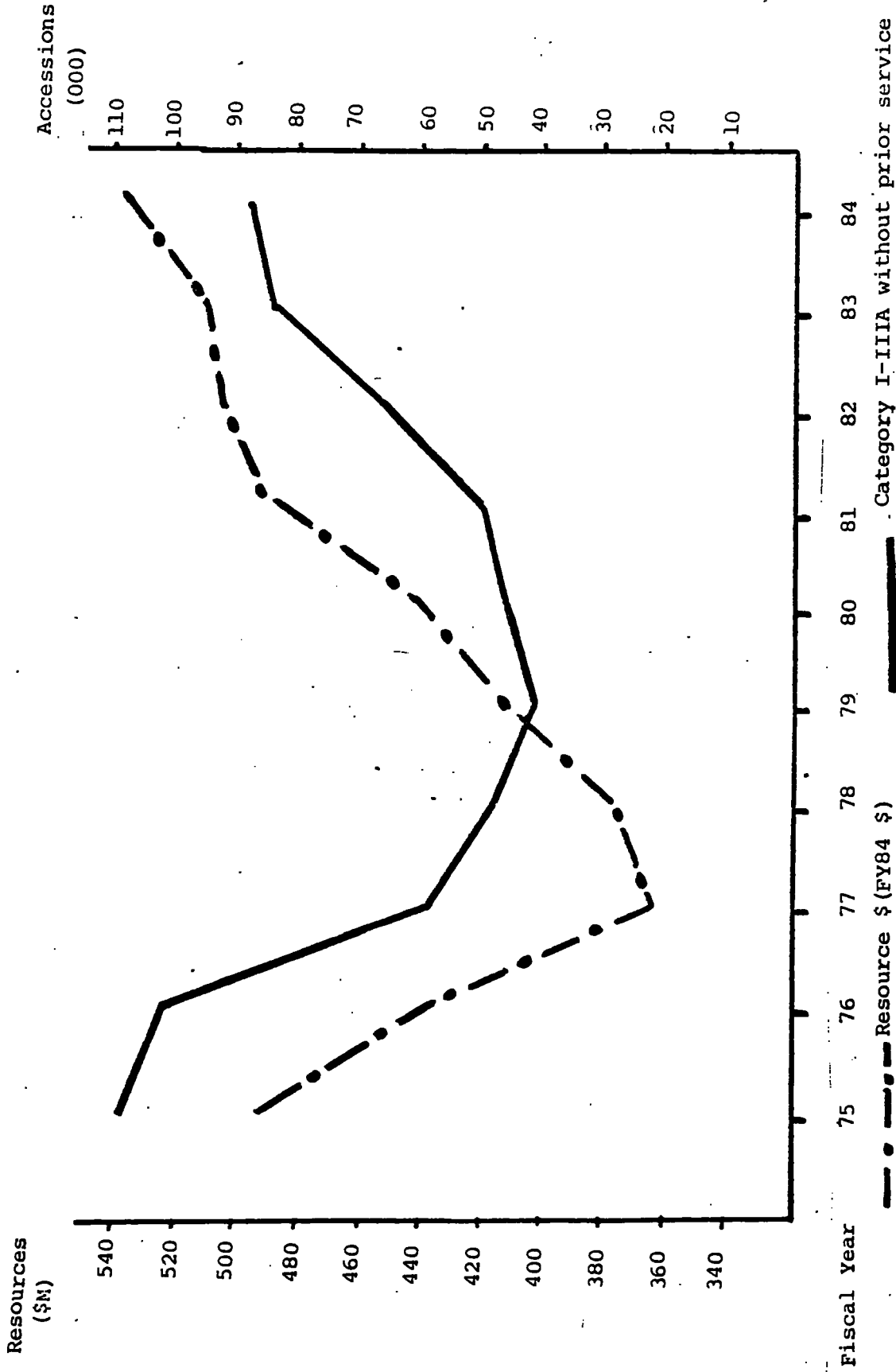
Willingness of the services and Congress to direct resources at manpower problems seems to be the key to the success or failure of the AVF. It is no secret that the All-Volunteer Force costs somewhat more than its early proponents forecast, although returning to conscription may be even more costly. What is less well understood is how dependent the AVF actually is on funds for recruiting activities. Chart I, which relates recruiting expenditures to the quality of active duty Army enlistments, shows a clear pattern. When recruiting money falls off, so do enlistments. It also suggests that the relationship between resources and recruiting success may be even stronger than the relationship between the economy and recruiting. Moreover, it reveals a lag in the effort of expenditures of at least a couple of years.

This should raise a warning flag. In the 1980 and 1981 recession, increased recruiting budgets, substantial pay raises, and a change in the public attitude toward the military all combined to promote the recruiting effort. In the three years since, recruiting has been so easy that all the services have had the luxury of selecting the best of an array of candidates. This could breed overconfidence at the Pentagon and in Congress. With growing pressure to reduce deficits and make defense cuts, the

⁶ Military Compensation Background Paper, 2d. Ed. (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 1982). Statement of Dr. Lawrence Korb, Assistant Secretary of Defense (MR&L) before the Military Personnel-Compensation Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, March 8, 1982, updated with data furnished by DoD.

⁷ William J. Taylor, Jr., "U.S. Army Selected Reserves: Incentives/Disincentives to Join/Remain," Defense Manpower Planning: Issues for the 1980s (New York: Pergamon Press, 1981).

Chart 1
 Relationship Between Resources
 and Quality Arm Recruits



Adapted from: "Sustaining the All-Volunteer Force, 1983 - 1922: The Second Decade",
 Gen. Maxwell R. Thurmon, Paper Presented at the USNA/OASD (MRA&L) Conference on the AVF,
 2 - 4 November 1983.

Resources are defined as all monies appropriated for recruiting purposes including
 recruiter pay and allowances, advertising, incentives.

temptation to reduce recruiting costs is strong. However, a contraction in recruiting resources or a failure to address military compensation issues adequately, especially in a period of economic recovery, could push the AVF back into a recruiting crisis similar to the one it faced in the late 1970s.

THE INDIVIDUAL READY RESERVE: ACHILLES HEEL OF THE AVF

Reserve Component requirements are based on mobilization needs--particularly for full mobilization. In such an event both the Active and Selected Reserves would be built to wartime strength through an infusion of individuals from the Pretrained Individual Manpower pool. Members of this pool have served in the military in one capacity or another and remain on inactive status subject to recall in an emergency. The largest such group is the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR). Its members have served less than six years on active duty or in the Selected Reserves and are completing the remaining period of their service obligation in inactive status. In an emergency IRR would provide the personnel to bring existing units to wartime strength, constitute new units, and replace casualties until the Selective Service System and training base began to deliver volunteers and draftees to fill these requirements.

The strength of the IRR, like that of the Selected Reserves, declined between 1973 and 1978--from 1.2 million to 342,000. Part of the decline was deliberate; defense manpower analysts concluded that the numbers could safely be reduced. Nonetheless, the major reason for the decline was the loss of the draftees who would serve a portion of their six-year military service obligation in the IRR. Since 1978 the strength of the IRR has risen, but at the end of FY 1983 still stood only at 417,000. The Army's slice of the IRR dropped from 759,000 in 1973 to 240,000 ten years later. Under current worst-case mobilization assumptions, virtually the entire Army IRR would be required to bring the active forces and Selected Reserves to wartime strength. Most assumptions about any war in Europe indicate that U.S. forces would run out of IRR casualty replacements well before the first trained draftee or volunteer could reach the theater, and this assumes that all IRR personnel are interchangeable. In fact, a serious mismatch between available and required skills exists in the IRR. Assumptions governing the use of IRR personnel do not provide time for retraining.

The Pentagon recognizes the IRR problems and has begun a series of low-cost/no-cost solutions that are expected to reduce the deficiencies by 1990. For example, this year the service obligation for new recruits will be lengthened from six to eight years. (The extra two years will be added to their reserve obligation.) And ultimately it should eliminate the most serious shortages in mobilization manpower.

The Army's requirement for pretrained individuals in the early stages of a conflict is critical. For example, the Army projects a need for over 1.9 million personnel for mobilization by 1985. Drawing on all of its manpower sources (active, Selected Reserves, IRR) the Army projects a shortfall of 2.1 percent. While this may appear manageable, the aggregate numbers mask two serious problems. First, the system the Defense Department uses to determine mobilization manpower requirements contains many untested assumptions. Second, while the aggregate shortage may be low, shortages in combat skills are acute. Indeed, the Pentagon admits, "In addition to shortages in total manpower, the Army also has in FY 1985 a chronic shortage of combat arms enlisted personnel ninety days after mobilization, a situation that is projected to worsen through FY 1989."⁸

MOBILIZATION ASSUMPTIONS

The Defense Department bases its estimate of the manpower shortfall on several critical assumptions. It begins by computing the number of trained service members present for duty on M-Day when mobilization begins (essentially the services' present-for-duty strength). It then assumes a 95 percent responsiveness rate from the Selected Reserves and 70 percent IRR responsiveness. These rates are crucial, for they represent the number of reservists, individually or in units, who will show up when called. Implicit in the responsiveness figures are assumptions concerning the physical fitness and state of training of those answering the mobilization order. Initially, existing units are brought up to strength, but once hostilities begin, casualties will also have to be replaced by individuals from the IRR. The shortage is calculated by figuring the gap between the rate at which the IRR becomes available and the rate at which casualties occur.

Under assumptions concerning a war in Europe today, U.S. forces would be short of trained manpower by as much as 179,000 troops before the first volunteers and newly trained draftees began to arrive. And this supposes that initial assumptions about responsiveness, casualties, and casualties capable of returning to active duty are correct. If the current assumption that 70 percent of the IRR would respond is high, even greater shortages would result--and they would result early on. Even if the 70 percent show rate assumption does hold, there are likely to be greater shortages than the Army is willing to concede. Some 75 percent of the Army's anticipated casualties in a European war will be among the combat arms personnel, yet only 25 percent of Army IRR personnel have these skills. This problem has never been adequately addressed. The Marines can assume that every Leatherneck is an infantryman, the Army cannot

⁸ FY 1985 DoD Manpower Requirement Report, February 1984, pp. viiii-7-8, 24-25.

The U.S. has not mobilized a significant number of Selected Reserve units or individual reservists for more than 20 years. During the Vietnam era, very few reserve units or personnel were called up. Experience, however, suggests that DoD's current assumptions about reserve responsiveness and deployability are optimistic, to say the least. The best data may be from the Berlin crisis in 1961. During that crisis a total of 113,254 reservists and National Guardsmen were called to active duty in the Army, either as members of units or as individual replacements. In the two divisions activated nearly one-quarter of the men called up for duty applied for deferments or delays. Three weeks were required for administrative shakedown and processing before intensive combat training could begin. Army plans assumed that three to five months would be sufficient to bring such units to satisfactory levels of operational readiness, but many needed five or six months of additional training.⁹ Only 37,000 reservists were called to active duty during the Vietnam war. Of these, 17 percent were totally unqualified to serve in their assigned position, and nearly 50 percent had deficiencies that affected their availability for mobilization or assignment according to their skill.¹⁰

Experience teaches that planners always encounter unanticipated problems. The friction of war and Murphy's Law can raise havoc with the best laid plans. Today's mobilization blueprints assume responsiveness rates unprecedented in American mobilization history. Even if the anticipated numbers arrive at the mobilization sites on time, there is ample historical evidence to suggest that reorganization, retraining, and additional preparation for deployment take longer than currently assumed. Unless present mobilization schemes flow more smoothly than ever before, the Reserve Components will not arrive in time to fulfill their vital roles as part of the total force.

THE ROLE OF SELECTIVE SERVICE IN MOBILIZATION

Although the Selective Service System was allowed to atrophy during the mid- and late-1970s, it has been revitalized since draft registration resumed in 1980. Current DoD plans for mobilization call for the Selective Service to deliver the first inductee to the Army's training base on M+13 (thirteen days after mobilization is ordered) and to deliver 86,000 by M+30. Selective Service can probably meet this requirement, but training raw recruits and conscripts takes time and is dependent on the capabilities of the training base. Shortfalls are almost a certainty under the current

⁹ "U.S. Army Expansion, 1961-62," Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington, D.C., 1963; Herman Boland, "The Reserves," in studies prepared for the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force, Vol. II (November 1970).

¹⁰ "Improving the Readiness of the Army Reserve and National Guard: A Framework for Debate," Congressional Budget Office, February 1979.

worst-case scheme, and if ground forces ran out of reserve replacements before post-mobilization trainees arrived in the combat theater, the United States would be faced with unacceptable alternatives: using untrained levies as combat replacements; drawing from existing units; escalation to tactical nuclear war; or surrender.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND THE AVF

How will the economic recovery affect the All-Volunteer Force? History suggests that quality enlistments will fall off and reenlistments, especially among highly skilled personnel, will also decline. Already the Army reports a 22 percent decline in test category I-III A male applicants for enlistment during the first quarter of fiscal 1984 compared to a year ago.

But the future of the AVF need not be bleak. Intangibles, such as the positive portrayal of soldiers in television advertising and the revival of the "war toy" market, suggest that negative attitudes related to Vietnam have softened. Popular satisfaction with the Grenada operation boosted the military's stock, and Marine Corps applicant testing rose briefly after the bombing of the peacekeeping force barracks in Lebanon. Whether this improved image will sustain recruiting and retention of highly qualified people in prosperous times is hard to tell. Furthermore, if the United States again finds itself in a hostile environment that results in small but sustained numbers of casualties among volunteer servicemen, the acceptability of a military enlistment among those who view service as a vehicle for self-improvement could decline.

It would seem that, under the present system, the only way to alter the current patterns and trends in enlistments is with money. Pay will have to keep up with prevailing wages in the private sector, and special incentives will be necessary to attract high quality personnel with special skills. Intensified recruiting will also be necessary--and expensive. If Congress is unwilling to provide the resources necessary to allow the AVF to compete when the economy is healthy, then the American people may be forced to consider alternative systems of manpower procurement and retention. While the AVF has proved capable of sustaining its present strength in the aggregate, it is obvious that the present system lacks flexibility and is highly resource dependent.¹¹

¹¹ Opponents charge that the AVF is too expensive, inflexible, draws disproportionately from the poor and minorities, and does not attract or retain enough quality personnel. The successful recruiting and retention of recent years silenced most of the critics, but some are returning to the debate. Most see little hope for the existing system and prefer radical change to reform. Some suggest a form of national service, others argue for a return to selective service, but numerous studies by public

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PROPOSALS

The AVF should be improved in three areas:

1. The AVF must tap the college-bound market of high quality youths on a regular basis. This cohort has been largely ignored by recruiters. The Army's College Fund was one such effort. It is a program in which the enlisted soldier participates with the Army to build an individual college education fund, which could amount to \$20,000 in three years. The services also should return to a nonparticipatory "GI bill," with the following two enlistment options. First-term volunteers could choose either: (a) a short period of service at low pay and reduced benefits but with significant post-service education benefits (typically, such enlistees would receive no benefits for dependents and would be required to leave them behind); or (b) service at current pay and allowances with no special after service education benefits. The former would appeal to the college-bound youth; the latter to the enlistee seeking to acquire skill training while supporting a family. Enlistees considering a career in the service should be offered the option of transferring their accrued educational benefits (then or later) to their dependents. This option would be important to the high quality recruits brought in under option (a), who later choose to make a career in the military.

2. Ways must be found to make the AVF less vulnerable to fluctuations in the economy. Annual pay raises, enlistment and reenlistment bonuses, and generous deferred compensation packages to volunteers for hard-to-fill specialties have become the accepted norm for the AVF. There is, however, a built-in lag in fulfilling military pay and recruiting resource requests. It takes months and sometimes years to bring them on line. Appropriations for recruiting incentives should be retained through good recruiting and retention times, but the Services should be allowed to bank these monies if not needed immediately. In this way a recruiting fund could be built up for use when recruiting production and retention drops--such as in periods of economic recovery. Congress needs to be more sensitive to the relationship between recruiting, retention, and the economy and must avoid the temptation to slash recruiting resources just because they are not currently needed.

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and private groups show that these alternatives would neither eliminate all the problems nor be more cost effective. See "National Service Programs and their effects on Military Manpower and Civilian Youth Problems," Congressional Budget Office, January 1978; Charles Moskos, "Making the All-Volunteer Force Work: A National Service Approach," Foreign Affairs, Vol. 60, No. 1, 1980; Kenneth J. Coffey, "If the Draft is Restored: Uncertainties, Not Solutions," and A. John Simmons, "The Obligations of Citizens and the Justification of Conscription," in Conscription and Volunteers: Military Requirements, Social Justice, and the All-Volunteer Force, Robert K. Fullinwider, ed. (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983).

3. The AVF must be backed up by a more secure mobilization system. The system is being improved piecemeal by the Defense Department's recent receipt of authority to increase the Individual Ready Reserve through a collection of no-cost/low-cost methods. These programs may eliminate the aggregate IRR shortage by 1990, but will not eliminate the skill shortages. At least two additional steps are needed: (a) Preclassification, whereby all youths would be tested and classified upon registration to eliminate immediately those who are unfit for active service, and ease the burden on military induction centers in event of mobilization; and (b) limited emergency induction authority. Currently, the President cannot order inductions into the military without congressional approval. As it now stands, in any emergency requiring an immediate build-up of the active forces short of full mobilization, the National Command Authority has to mobilize elements of the Selected Reserves and hold them until draft legislation is approved. The President should be given authority to induct 100,000 draftees for six to twelve months training and service without prior consent from Congress. Such authority would not increase the President's power to use forces--only to call them--but it would greatly improve the flexibility of the All-Volunteer Total Force.

CONCLUSION

These changes, shifting to a two-tiered enlisted corps, creating a recruiting resources revolving fund, preclassification and a limited standby induction authority require legislation and structural changes in the AVF and Department of Defense. None, however, would add significantly to personnel costs. Indeed, the shift to a two-tiered enlisted corps should help hold future costs down. Preclassification would add only \$8 to \$10 million annually to the Selective Service System's modest \$28 million budget proposed for FY 1985.

The requirement for limited standby draft authority is crucial. Current plans to resort to conscription only in the event of maximum danger are unrealistic. In the lesser contingencies, which are more likely to confront the U.S., full mobilization is an unrealistic and possibly provocative response. The use of a rapid deployment force pulled together from elements of the strategic reserve would be more likely, but would strip the U.S. of conventional active reserve units. A limited call-up of Selected Reserve units in conjunction with a limited peacetime draft, similar to the system used during the Berlin crisis, would serve to reconstitute the strategic reserve with the least disruption.

These reforms of the AVF could be accomplished now with little additional expenditure. The current interest in military reform means that the timing is right to address unresolved personnel issues and consider new approaches to their solution. What is more, the issues should be attended to while recruiting and retention are healthy, or at least before they become critical

again. If the nation waits for another manpower crisis like that of the late 1970s, the rush to find solutions could cloud judgments and result in little more than ad hoc policy.

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SUGGESTED READINGS

In addition to the sources cited in the text of this report, the following recent studies of the manpower issue are recommended:

Anderson, Martin, ed., The Military Draft (Stanford University: Hoover Institution Press, 1982).

Goodpaster, Andrew J., et al., eds., Toward a Consensus on Military Service: Report of the Atlantic Council's Working Group on Military Service (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982).

Margiotta, Franklin D., et al., eds., Changing U.S. Military Manpower Realities (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1983).

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Scowcroft, Brent, ed., Military Service in the United States (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1982).

Sherraden, Michael W., and Donald J. Eberly, eds., National Service: Social, Economic and Military Impacts (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982).