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# A Symposium on Citizenship and Military Service

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In October 2000, we served as co-chairs of a conference titled "Citizens and Soldiers: Citizenship, Culture, and Military Service." [1] The inspiration for this event can be stated briefly: a decade after the Cold War, the United States is finding it increasingly difficult to sustain the all-volunteer force, the foundation on which American military power rests. Although problems with recruiting and retention are commonly attributed to a booming economy, it was our belief that other factors could well be of equal or even greater importance. Among the additional factors meriting consideration, in our view, were a narrowing definition of citizenship and its responsibilities, changes in American culture, and changes in the purposes for which the United States employs its military power.

In convening a small group of scholars, military experts, and policy analysts to address these matters, we identified three sets of issues for detailed examination:

. *The American tradition of the citizen-soldier.* What is the essence of that tradition and how has it changed over time? What has been the value of that tradition? How has the establishment of the all-volunteer force affected it? Given the cultural, technological, and geopolitical changes of recent decades, does the tradition retain relevance today?

. *The identity of the all-volunteer force.* Are members of today's military professionals? Are they citizen-soldiers like the G.I.s who fought the major wars of the last century? A hybrid of both? Something altogether different? What are the political and civic implications of "contracting out" national security to a small cadre of long-service volunteers?

. *Prospects for and alternatives to the all-volunteer force.* Apart from the greater economic opportunity currently available in civilian life, what other factors may be contributing to the difficulties that the Pentagon faces in recruiting and retention? What policies should the Administration consider to sustain, modify, or replace the existing all-volunteer force?

The essays that constitute this symposium derive from the presentations made at the conference. In addition to those presentations, the conference featured extensive give-and-take among participants of diverse background, experience, and outlook. Although the conference was not intended to reach a consensus--nor did it do so--the discussion did bring to light certain insights that we offer here as informal "findings." In doing so we emphasize that we speak strictly for ourselves, not for other conference participants.

Two convictions underlie our views. The first is that if American military institutions cannot and should not be isolated from American society, neither should they be treated as a sociology laboratory or a handy venue through which to transform that society in accordance with either a liberal or a conservative agenda. In short, there is a compelling need to extract the services from the ongoing *Kulturkampf* in which they have become increasingly enmeshed since the end of the Cold War.

The second conviction is that an era of high-tech warfare has not obviated the need for a traditional combat ethos--the mix of physical and mental toughness, discipline, raw courage, and willingness to sacrifice that was the hallmark of effective militaries in the wars of the 20th century. Granted, not *all* American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines in the present century will be required to manifest such qualities in the course of accomplishing their assigned duties. Indeed, over time the proportion of soldiers who spend their tours of duty staring at computer screens will continue to

increase while the proportion of those expected as a matter of course to venture into harm's way will dwindle. But when called upon to fight, that combat remnant will be required to manifest qualities not dissimilar from those of the soldiers who landed at Omaha Beach or went to war in the Ia Drang. Unless it devotes considerable attention to doing so, a society in the grip of a consumerist mentality and postmodern values is likely to find it increasingly difficult to sustain such an ethos in even a minority of its soldiery.

With that as background, our findings include the following:

. *First, the mythic tradition of the citizen-soldier is dead*, its fate sealed by changes in the nature of modern war, in the aims of US national security strategy since the end of the Cold War, and in the aspirations and expectations of American citizens. Given the changing relationship between the individual and the state, spurred particularly by the cultural revolution touched off in the 1960s, the federal government has effectively forfeited its ability to compel citizens to serve in the military. Conscription has become and will remain implausible. To an increasing extent, the individual, not the state, determines the terms under which service is rendered.

. *Second, the identity of the "soldier as warrior" has become obsolete*. It does not adequately describe the actual function--or, more accurately, the broader range of functions--of American military men and women in the aftermath of the Cold War. As such, it misleads citizens, creates false expectations among would-be recruits, and breeds cynicism among those already in uniform. Certainly, the US military establishment must retain the ability to "fight and win the nation's wars." But warfighting as such is not the task immediately confronting those dispatched to succor hungry Kurds or Somalis, occupy Haiti, separate ethnic groups in the Balkans, or pursue a "strategy of engagement" in places like the former Soviet bloc, Central Asia, Latin America, or, indeed, Yemen. Even the limited bombing campaigns that over the past decade have become the preferred US means of employing force--although providing airmen personal experiences approaching something like "combat"--are quite distinct from war as such.

Some more relevant identity--a refashioning of what it means to be an American soldier--is in order. The reality of US military history offers a rich trove of experience from which to forge just such an identity. For the greater part of that history, the American soldier's assigned role has not been the passive one of holding himself in readiness to wage war, but the active one of attending to the nation's existing priorities. Over time, those priorities changed, but they included fighting Native Americans, exploring the West, developing the nation's economic infrastructure, opening markets abroad, governing colonies and protectorates, advancing the cause of public health, and building the Panama Canal. The relevance of this history to the current quasi-imperial role of US forces is all but self-evident. In the experiences of bluejackets and blue-coated and khaki-clad soldiers of old lies an identity as servants of the nation that may convey more accurately and more compellingly the vital role that the present-day military plays, however much traditionalists may bridle at that role.

. *Third, the force needed to perform the functions of a global constabulary ought to be, to the maximum extent possible, unencumbered by personal responsibilities and obligations*. To state the matter simply, in filling the junior enlisted component of that force, the services should recruit mostly 19- or 20-year-old single males and few if any parents, whether single or married, with young children. In short, to the maximum extent possible, the services should abandon their efforts to make military service "family friendly." Toward that end, the Marine Corps and the Army should adopt the policy proposed in 1993 by General Carl Mundy: that is, enlist only young men and women without family responsibilities. Doing so will oblige the services to reduce their reliance on young single mothers to fill their recruiting quotas. Several benefits will accrue as a result. The number of nondeployables will decline. The perception that women "get over" when it comes to eligibility for long deployments will dissipate. The number of children being raised by caregivers in childcare facilities will diminish.

Of course, since the creation of the all-volunteer force, the services have found it expedient to do just the opposite, expanding to unprecedented levels the percentage of female soldiers and of soldiers with children in the force. The Army in particular has long since concluded that it cannot fulfill its recruiting missions if it relies on the available pool of single males without children. The feasibility of the recommendation expressed above, therefore, rests in part on overturning that perception. Doing so will require efforts to "de-feminize" the force--instituting policies that will make

military service more attractive to males without creating an environment antagonistic to women or formally restricting the opportunities available to those women who do continue to serve.

Our remaining three findings suggest ways to do just that.

. The fourth finding proposes shifting the "qualifications" debate from gender to standards--from a losing "culture war" battle to a necessary and winnable struggle to restore military professionalism. Specifically, the services should *open all specialties to women while simultaneously instituting specialty-specific single performance standards--physical, mental, psychological--*specifying what it takes to be an infantryman, a fighter pilot, a submariner, a mechanic, etc. The aim here is to eliminate the existing doublespeak and double standards that are eating away at the military's tradition of integrity and destroying the confidence of junior officers in their seniors. In light of the research conducted by Charles Moskos, Laura Miller, and others, such a policy will not flood infantry units or submarines with women, few of whom are even interested in combat specialties. But it could contribute to rejuvenating a profession that would once again tell the truth about combat standards and manifest a serious commitment to what it takes to prevail on the battlefield. Such an institution would be more likely to attract and retain serious, high-minded young people.

. Fifth, in a society in which male adolescents find it increasingly difficult to discern what it means to be a man or how to become one, we should *promote military service as a rite of passage to manhood*. Young males yearn to leave boyhood behind and to become men. But in a society in which fathers are increasingly absent, in which gender roles have blurred, and in which adolescents increasingly trade activities once thought to be "manly" in favor of becoming mere spectators, opportunities for the individual to demonstrate to himself that he is indeed a man have dwindled. The rigor and purposefulness of military service can offer just the opportunity to do a man's work, something that the Marine Corps has long recognized and effectively exploited. The other services and above all the Army need to do the same. There are more than enough men out there to fill the services' needs.

. Finally, the demise of the citizen-soldier should not mean that the enlisted force should come predominantly from the poorest and least educated elements of American society, as is increasingly the case. Nor should the officer corps be drawn largely from the offspring of serving officers. Such practices deprive elites of any firsthand knowledge of military affairs and insulate them from the consequences of *their* decisions about the use of force. Citizens of a democratic superpower should view the first as an invitation to ill-advised policy and the second as creating a dangerous gap between those who rule and those who serve. Therefore, the services should *redouble their efforts to provide opportunities for college-bound youth and college graduates to serve*. Offering a wider range of short-term enlistment options, particularly for those specialties that do not require lengthy technical training, could well do just that. In a society where many young people seek an alternative to the consumer culture, we should promote military service to college students as a way to serve the nation. The same impulses that lead to joining the Foreign Service or the Peace Corps should be tapped for recruiting today's military.

We live in an era in which the phrase "military power" conjures up images of high-tech gadgetry. In fact, however, the resources constituting the foundation of present-day US military superiority are first of all human and only secondarily technological. We do not pretend that the findings offered here or the essays that follow offer the last word on how to preserve that foundation. But we are convinced of one thing: to pretend that pay raises, ad campaigns, and new headgear will fend off the forces that threaten that foundation is an illusion. The all-volunteer force is in jeopardy. Bold, imaginative, and courageous action will be required to preserve it.

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## NOTE

1. Sponsoring the event were the Institute for the Study of Economic Culture and the Center for International Relations, both of Boston University, and the Ethics and Public Policy Center located in Washington, D.C. The conference itself was held at the National Press Club in Washington. Select papers from the conference are published in this issue of *Parameters*. A complete transcript of the proceedings is available on the website of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, [www.eppc.org](http://www.eppc.org). We would like to express our gratitude to the Lynde and Harry Bradley

Foundation for funding this conference and to Peter Berger, director of the Institute for the Study of Economic Culture, without whose support the event would not have happened.

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Reviewed 7 May 2001. Please send comments or corrections to [carl\\_Parameters@conus.army.mil](mailto:carl_Parameters@conus.army.mil)