

THE PERIODICAL OBSERVER

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Goodbye to the Citizen-Soldier?

A Survey of Recent Articles

America's armed forces have been finding it hard to attract and keep all the people they need—and not solely because of the strong economy. In *Parameters* (Summer 2001), a publication of the U.S. Army War College, a cast of noted scholars and specialists analyzes the woes of a transformed military. For all the homage that Americans have lately been paying to World War II's "greatest generation," several contributors conclude, the first step in fixing the problems of the all-volunteer force may be to recognize that the military is different now, and that the day of the mythic citizen-soldier is over.

"Since World War II, the citizen-soldier has been on the wane, for a variety of reasons," writes Eliot A. Cohen, a professor of strategic studies at Johns Hopkins University's Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. Technological advances in weaponry made the need for a mass army questionable. "As military organizations shrank in size, it became more difficult to sustain conscription on a universal basis. . . . When most young men do not serve in the military, those who do are not fulfilling a common obligation of citizenship, but are merely unlucky."

Contrary to popular mythology, most American youths over the past two centuries have not been eager to volunteer for military service "out of a sense of patriotism

or political obligation," contends Peter Karsten, a professor of history and sociology at the University of Pittsburgh who served as a junior naval officer in the early 1960s. Most of George Washington's stalwarts at Valley Forge had joined "out of need, or for economic plums they could use as nest eggs." Today's far more affluent youths, Karsten notes, generally "do not want to surrender their personal freedoms for a stint of military service, be it involuntary or voluntary."

Between 1980 and 1999, the proportion of youths telling pollsters that they definitely would not serve in the military increased from 40 to 63 percent, observes Charles Moskos, a military sociologist at Northwestern University. Recruitment difficulties in the early 1990s were alleviated by the post-Cold War reduction in the size of the active-duty force (now at about 1.4 million). But as the drawdown ended, Moskos says, recruitment shortfalls began appearing in the late 1990s in all the services except the Marine Corps. Last year, recruitment goals for the active-duty forces were met—but only by the outlay of about \$10,000 per recruit, twice the amount spent in the late 1980s. Between fiscal 1993 and 1998, according to a General Accounting Office report, the army's annual advertising expenditures more than tripled—from \$34 million to \$113 mil-

lion. Even so, recruitment for the reserves has fallen short for several years.

A high attrition rate compounds the problem: Thirty-seven percent of enlistees in the 1990s did not finish their first term. Retention of junior officers, reports Moskos, is also a headache for the services: The number who quit after their first term increased by 50 percent in the mid-1990s.

The boom economy of the past few years is not the only culprit behind the recruitment and retention woes, in the view of Andrew J. Bacevich, director of Boston University's Center for International Relations, and Elliott Abrams, president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center. (The two cochaired the Washington conference last fall that gave rise to most of the *Parameters* papers.) Other factors may well have been "the cultural revolution touched off in the 1960s," a related narrowing in the definition of citizenship, and the post-Cold War use of military power for "humanitarian" purposes. Because of these changes, and the altered nature of warfare, "the mythic tradition of the citizen-soldier is dead," Bacevich and Abrams contend. Conscription is no longer an option.

But Moskos, a long-time proponent of national service, sees a way in which the citizen-soldier ideal might be brought back to life. Military recruiters, instead of focusing on high school graduates and, recently, high school dropouts, he says, should also pursue college students and graduates. "Today, some two-thirds of high school graduates go directly on to higher education," he observes. Instead of the prospect of military careers, shorter enlistment terms of 15 or 18 months—five or six months of training, followed by an overseas assignment—should be offered, along with generous postservice educational benefits linked to a reserve obligation of, say, two years. Such limited enlistments, Moskos believes, "could become the military equivalent of the 'junior-year abroad.'" Surveys he has done of his own students suggest that short-term service for peacekeeping and humanitarian missions would indeed appeal to a small but significant proportion of the collegiate young. "If the

military could recruit just five percent of the 1,200,000 who graduate from college each year . . . our recruiting woes would be over," he notes.

Bacevich and Abrams—who also favor ideas like Moskos's—argue that the traditional identity of the soldier as "warrior" needs to be updated. To be sure, "a traditional combat ethos" will still be needed, but a dwindling proportion of soldiers can expect to be put in harm's way. The current U.S. peacekeeping missions in the Balkans and the recent humanitarian deployments to Somalia and Haiti suggest that fighting wars will be only one of a soldier's functions in the future. "The reality of U.S. military history offers a rich trove of experience from which to forge just such an identity," they write, noting that American soldiers of old explored the West, governed colonies and protectorates, advanced the cause of public health, and built the Panama Canal.

In recruiting a force to serve as "a global constabulary," Bacevich and Abrams assert, the services should, insofar as possible, focus on 19- or 20-year-old males rather than men or women who are parents of young children. "Of course, since the creation of the all-volunteer force, the services have found it expedient to do just the opposite."

The trick, they say, is to set policies that "make military service more attractive to males without creating an environment antagonistic to women or formally restricting the opportunities available to [them]."

Army majors Kim Field and John Nagl propose that their service establish physical standards—the same for women as for men—in each of its occupational specialties now closed to women, and let only those men and women who meet the unisex standards serve in the specialties.

Bacevich and Abrams agree. It is important, they say, to shift "the 'qualifications' debate from gender to standards—from a losing 'culture war' battle to a necessary and winnable struggle to restore military professionalism. . . . 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."