The Breaking Point: The All-Volunteer Force

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Abstract

In the strategic environment of the 21st Century, the United States (U.S.) must plan and prepare for potential major conflict against a near peer adversary. Simultaneously, the U.S. must calculate its ability to confront a near peer adversary while also supporting limited conflicts against violent extremist organizations across the globe and defending the homeland. In today’s complex strategic environment, it is imperative to acknowledge that the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) faces significant challenges that represent a foundational strategic risk in the nation’s ability to provide sufficient combat manpower in a protracted major regional conflict. This research analyzes the vulnerabilities in the All-Volunteer Force’s ability to support a protracted near-peer adversary conflict and requirements to expand the force through examination of its inherent characteristics in capacity, affordability, and societal influences. These factors will likely contribute to debate on implementation of the draft forcing the AVF to carry the burden of major conflict to the maximum extent possible, increasing strategic manpower risks. This examination also provides recommendations on actions to consider maximizing the ability of the AVF to support a successful surge toward sustaining mobilization for a protracted major regional conflict until a functional draft is in progress.
The Breaking Point: The All-Volunteer Force

Since the establishment of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) in 1973, this modern man-power generating model has never faced a national emergency that requires total mobilization in a protracted conflict. In the complex strategic environment of the 21st Century, however, the United States (U.S.) must consider how it would prepare for a potential major regional conflict against a near peer adversary that would require significant mobilization and expansion of U.S. military forces. Simultaneously, the U.S. must calculate its ability to confront a near peer adversary while also supporting limited conflicts against violent extremist organizations across the globe.

This potential scenario places incredible stress on the AVF for providing man-power. Evidence of the vulnerabilities in the AVF are apparent when examining the last fifteen years of conflict supporting the Global War on Terrorism. Often referred to as a small war, this protracted conflict at its peak demanded 187,900 military personnel and revealed potential weaknesses in the foundations of the AVF model.

It is important to understand these weaknesses given current U.S. political, economic, and societal influences that will challenge senior U.S. Government leadership strategic decisions on how and when to expand the military force during a major regional conflict. These influences would shape the debate on implementing the draft, forcing the AVF to carry the burden of providing manpower in a major conflict for as long as possible. Once the U.S. Government decides to implement the selective service system, it still requires 193 days (six and half months) to deliver the first inductee to the military. This forces the AVF model to support any interim requirements to sustain or expand manpower requirements. The U.S. has never made the transition
from the AVF back to conscription and senior leaders in the U.S. Government have made comments that indicate political resistance to this option.⁴

In today’s complex strategic environment, it is imperative to acknowledge that the All-Volunteer Force faces significant challenges that represent a foundational strategic risk in the nation's ability to provide sufficient combat manpower in a protracted major regional conflict while simultaneously protecting the homeland and combating violent extremist organizations. This research analyzes the vulnerabilities in the All-Volunteer Force’s ability to support a protracted regional conflict and requirements to expand the force through examination of its inherent characteristics of capacity, affordability, and societal influences. By identifying these risks, it is possible to determine AVF breaking points that can inform strategic decision-making in implementing the draft to support force expansion. This examination also provides recommendations on actions to maximize the AVF’s ability to support a successful surge for sustaining mobilization during a protracted major regional conflict until the implementation of a functional draft occurs.

Key Assumptions and Background

Prior to analyzing AVF vulnerabilities, it is necessary to identify key assumptions and establish historical background. These assumptions provide context for the specific focus in this AVF analysis. The background explains why the U.S. implemented the All-Volunteer Force, differences in mobilization levels, and provides a reference point of historical major mobilization events in past U.S. conflicts.

As strategic planners consider how to best employ the AVF, two assumptions address the process of mobilization and the AVF. First, the current AVF must successfully support the initial manpower requirement for a partial mobilization to
support limited war. Second, U.S. military logistics capabilities must possess adequate means to support the movement of personnel at all levels of mobilization.

Focusing on total mobilization and the specific requirement to rapidly expand the force in response to a major near-peer adversary conflict, planners must identify a decision point to transition and implement a draft. Senior leaders must assess, balance, and mitigate the strategic risks that will complicate decision-making on when to shift from the AVF to the draft and how to bridge that transition through AVF augmentation. This is distinctly different from the myriad of research on the merits of the AVF and its ability to provide a well-trained and quality force during peacetime and partial mobilizations. Transition from the AVF to the draft will be tenuous as military leaders wrestle with concepts that will challenge both political and social norms.

Finally, strategic planners must consider two assumptions in a constantly evolving threat environment when faced with a near-peer adversary conflict. First, U.S. military leaders must assume and prepare for the conflict to occur across multiple domains in land, sea, air, and cyberspace. Second, the conflict will likely occur globally and across multiple U.S. geographical combatant commands to include the U.S. homeland. The domain and geographical locations are critical to assessing and planning for the potential impact on the AVF’s ability to support a major near peer adversary conflict.

After careful considering these assumptions, strategic planners must also understand the AVF’s historical background to include why the AVF exists, the various levels of mobilization, and the magnitude of a large-scale expansion to the AVF.
First, the AVF existence remains exposed to the same vulnerabilities since its inception. The modern-day AVF is the policy by which the U.S. military generates the personnel to support mobilization. The development of the AVF policy occurred during the final phases of troop withdrawals from the Vietnam War and concluded with its formal establishment in 1973.⁶ The political and military reasons for the switch from a draftee army to an all-volunteer force remain subject to debate; however, two leading arguments contend the political sensitivity and negativity to the draft experienced during Vietnam and the strategic necessity for the U.S. to maintain a larger peace time force.⁷ The AVF model launched following studies in the quantity, quality, cost, and social implications in the 1968 Butler Study and the 1970 Gate’s Commission. These four factors remain relevant pillars in the foundation of today’s AVF. A measurable decrease in force quality occurred during the AVF policy initial implementation. Military leaders working with Congress overcame these challenges through increases in pay, quality of life improvements, and benefit programs.⁸ These same pillars represent the levers that leaders continue to manipulate to create growth in the total military force structure in the AVF era.

Second, understanding the levels of mobilization and the history of military force expansion methods from past major conflicts helps shape future models for manning. The different levels of mobilization have different implications for manpower requirements with varying levels of demand from the AVF. The history of military force expansion provides context for the potential requirements that a major regional conflict can demand from the military. Joint Publication 4-05 defines mobilization as, “Assembling and organizing personnel and material for active duty military forces,
activating the Reserve Component (RC), surging and mobilizing the industrial base and training bases, and bringing the Armed Forces of the U.S. to a state of readiness for war or other national emergency.”

There are specific levels of mobilization defined by Title 10 U.S. code that include partial, full, and total mobilization and do not require execution or activation in a sequential order. In more recent conflicts, the nation relied upon partial mobilization enacted through Presidential declaration of national emergency and authorizing the use of up to one million members of the Ready Reserve for up to 24 months. To execute partial mobilization there is no Congressional decision requirement. Full mobilization requires a Congressional declaration of a national emergency to authorize activation of all existing active and reserve force structures. The final level is total mobilization that authorizes activation of all existing active and reserve forces and includes authority for force expansion. The process of full and total mobilization, including a requirement for expansion of the force, ultimately pushes the AVF to the breaking point. The vulnerabilities of capacity, cost, and societal influences can combine to accelerate this breaking point and senior leaders must understand how to strengthen the AVF against these risks.

The last total mobilization of U.S. forces was during World War II. Following World War II, the U.S. employed a mixture of levels in mobilization and expansion methods to generate manpower. The Korean War included partial mobilization and force expansion through conscription while the Vietnam War did not involve any official level of reserve mobilization and relied solely on conscription for force expansion. The Persian Gulf War build-up occurred through partial mobilization while the current War on
Terrorism utilized partial mobilization and minor expansion of the AVF.\textsuperscript{11} Historical examples and context provide insight and lessons learned helpful to analyzing the potential implications of full or total mobilization associated with the over-reliance on today's modern AVF force.

Third, in the context of total mobilization and today's force, senior leaders and planners must understand the potential magnitude of force expansion that a full or total mobilization event requires. At the most basic level, it is relatively simple to see that the size of today's U.S. military is at its lowest level compared to its recent history in the 20th Century. The 2017 *Defense Manpower Requirements Report* by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs states that Department of Defense (DOD) Military force end strength is 2,083,000 for FY17 with roughly 1,281,900 on active duty.\textsuperscript{12} The number includes each service (except the U.S. Coast Guard) and their respective active duty, National Guard, and reserve components. As an added perspective, consider the peak size of the U.S. military forces mobilized in each major conflict in the 20th Century and the amount of time required to reach peak strength displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. All-Volunteer Force 2017 compared to the peak active-duty levels of all services and forces in major conflicts.\textsuperscript{13}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Total Size on Active Duty -1st Year</th>
<th>Peak Total Size on Active Duty (Year)</th>
<th>Total Growth/Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam War (1965-1975)</td>
<td>2,685,782</td>
<td>3,546,071 (1968)</td>
<td>860,289/3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean War (1950-53)</td>
<td>1,459,462</td>
<td>3,635,912 (1952)</td>
<td>2,176,450/2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War II (1941-1945)</td>
<td>1,801,101</td>
<td>12,055,884 (1945)</td>
<td>10,245,783/4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War I (1917-1918)</td>
<td>643,833</td>
<td>2,897,167 (1918)</td>
<td>2,253,334/1 year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The depicted statistics speak to a simple order of magnitude for manpower that major conflict can potentially demand. In examining this data, history indicates, on average, the U.S. military must be able to grow by 3.8 million personnel in an average period of 2.5 years to support a protracted major conflict. The drastic growth in force structure presents both leaders and planners with a major strategic vulnerability of the AVF’s capacity to support force expansion during total mobilization.

**The All-Volunteer Force Capacity Challenge**

Capacity is a challenge for the AVF’s ability to raise sufficient manpower for the military’s requirements and to sustain that manpower through the duration of a conflict. The recent 2016 National Commission on the Future of the Army explains the importance of capacity versus capability stating, “Capability represents all of the many tasks the Army can do, while capacity is how often and for how long (and perhaps where) the Army can do those tasks.” Understanding risks to the ability of the AVF to establish and sustain manpower capacity underscores the impact of failure to provide sufficient force at a critical point in a conflict and jeopardizing decisive action and success in a military campaign. Two interrelated risk factors inhibiting the AVF’s capacity in a total mobilization scenario requiring force expansion include the readiness of the AVF and that a near-peer adversary will likely contest future mobilization and movement into the homeland and throughout the force projection process. The combination of these risks will create conditions where the requirement to expand the force will likely occur earlier than planned and will challenge strategic leaders and planners on the timing of their decision point to expand the force.

Prior to an order for any level of mobilization, the AVF is at a disadvantage in terms of capacity due to the current small size and force structure. The AVF is a smaller
more capable military than past U.S. draftee militaries as advanced technology and weapon systems expand into training and operations. However, from a historical perspective, the requirements shift from an increase in capability to additional capacity when the U.S. engages in a near-peer conflict.\textsuperscript{15} For example, the active Army force end-strength is approximately 476 thousand soldiers. Current force management estimates of the Active Duty force indicate that approximately 89.3 thousand (18\%) are generating forces to support the mobilization process and another 62.3 thousand (13\%) of forces are in transient or trainee status.\textsuperscript{16} These forces, approximately 31\% of the active Army, are not available for combat. National Guard and Reserve components face similar generating force challenges. Additionally, the U.S. Army has approximately 182,000 Active, Guard, and Reserve Soldiers deployed in over 140 countries. The likelihood of these forces to mobilize in support of a major conflict in another region is extremely limited.\textsuperscript{17} Due to this limitation, many consider and employ the reserve components as an operational force.\textsuperscript{18} Any full or total mobilization process quickly consumes the entire deployable force and effectively removes true U.S. strategic reserve capability.

The recent 2017 index of U.S. military strength by the U.S. Heritage Foundation uses a scale of \textit{very weak}, \textit{weak}, \textit{marginal}, \textit{strong}, and \textit{very strong} to evaluate military power. The Heritage Foundation rates the capacity of the U.S. Army as \textit{weak} and the U.S. Air Force, U.S Navy, and U.S. Marine Corps capacity as \textit{marginal} in their ability to support major regional conflicts due to force structure and manpower levels. The U.S. Army \textit{weak} rating in capacity was the result of measuring the current number of 31 total U.S. Army brigade combat teams (BCTs) against an estimated requirement of 50 BCTs
to support two major regional conflict near simultaneously.\(^\text{19}\) While this estimate accounts for two major regional conflicts, there is a strong possibility that the current leading potential near-peer adversaries will require military responses across multiple regions across the globe. Acknowledging these risks, General Mark Milley, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, testified to Congress in May 2017 that the current size of the U.S. Army was insufficient to meet its various missions.\(^\text{20}\) This assessment reinforces the concern over the vulnerability in the AVF’s capacity and the ability to sustain sufficient manpower in a major regional conflict.

Additionally, the U.S. military is not the largest in the world in terms of manpower and must be a consideration as the U.S. military plans for potential adversaries. In 2017, the U.S. total active forces of 1.3 million ranked third in the world. China maintains a force at 2.2 million and India at 1.4 million with other key countries such as Russia, Pakistan, and North Korea rounding out the top six countries with large military forces.\(^\text{21}\) To remain competitive, the U.S. military depends on advanced capability over capacity to maintain a strategic edge. The U.S. military continues to rely on a concept where advanced weapons and rapid force projection can compensate for shortfalls in manpower despite our most recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.\(^\text{22}\) Even these two limited conflicts ultimately led to requirements in force expansion.

Framing the capacity vulnerability in terms of mobilization, a planner can fairly assess that partial mobilization remains supportable and low risk. However, when considering full or total mobilization and the need to rapidly grow the force, there is significant risk. Estimates from the U.S. Heritage study do not account for the other risk factors of force personnel readiness, combat attrition, and contested mobilization that
will further degrade the capacity of the AVF to sustain and expand manpower in a major regional conflict.

A second component of readiness that will impact manpower capacity is the status of personnel that make up the current AVF. Analysis from a recent article from the U.S. Army War College focusing on the U.S. Army, estimates that potentially up to 10 percent of the mobilized Army may be non-deployable due to medical conditions. This adds up to a total 40 percent loss of available soldiers due to medical conditions in addition to those personnel in schools, training, or supporting the mobilization process.\textsuperscript{23} While these risk factors are inevitable and impossible to predict, the U.S. can be certain that there will be a loss in manpower through the mobilization process. The percentage of personnel losses would likely reduce over time but remain persistent through the duration of any level of mobilization. Another critical factor to consider is if the mobilization and deployment occur under contested conditions.

The new 2017 \textit{National Defense Strategy} indicates that the enemies of the U.S. will attempt to contest the U.S. military in every domain and in the homeland.\textsuperscript{24} The U.S. can no longer depend on uncontested force movements and secure staging areas to support force build-up like past experiences in the Persian Gulf War or Operation Iraqi Freedom. Considering the evolving character of war, it is likely that a near-peer adversary will contest any large-scale U.S. mobilization and movement through cyber methods, non-kinetic offensive effects and tactics, or physical intervention. Occurring at any point during the mobilization or movement process, U.S. forces remain vulnerable targets in the homeland or at the point of debarkation. Degradation in material support, casualties, and personnel attrition represent a new level of conflict to the U.S. military
that requires identification of methods to mitigate their impact. The loss of personnel through the movement process reduces AVF capacity to provide sufficient forces to enable decisive action in a major regional conflict, while likely producing significant casualties and combat losses.

Large scale combat losses cripple the AVF model, rendering its force generation element unable to meet capacity requirements in a major conflict. A 1996 study by the U.S. Army Concept Analysis Agency reveals that during the four major conflicts of the 20th century, the combined battle-related deaths and non-mortal wounded as a percentage of the number of personnel serving were as follows; World War I at 5%; World War II at 6%; the Korean War at 2%; and the Vietnam War at 2%. Battle deaths include killed in action, death from wounds, and death while missing or captured. The percentages fail to include other factors such as losses from sickness, injury, nor does it differentiate between combat and non-combat forces which dilutes the risk to combat units. The raw percentage merely demonstrates that in a similar scale conflict that lasts on average 21.75 months, the U.S. military could estimate around 3% (62,490 personnel) in losses from the total force of 2.083 million if fully mobilized. The gravity and scale of such major losses rarely enters today’s political and public discourse, and represent a challenge that our military and society have not dealt with in nearly fifty years. While it is impossible to anticipate the timing of these losses, the AVF model has never encountered the reality of a near peer adversary conflict where casualty rates are high. A significant surge in losses from a specific battle or campaign could generate an urgent requirement for replacement of thousands of personnel. This level of personnel
replacement might deter voluntary enlistment and could overwhelm the AVF capacity to provide new forces.

The AVF model is best at providing steady state replacement of personnel and faces significant challenges in addressing manpower losses due to high casualties. A recent RAND study from May 2017 offers insight on the ability of the Army to regenerate active duty end strength. The RAND study reveals that simple requirements such as the growth of army enlistments by 95,000 or 127,000 could take 3-5 years. The study accounts for the use of bonuses, retention policy adjustments, and acceptance of lower quality personnel to meet those demands. In fairness, this study reviews the peacetime requirements for force expansion and while it may be possible to accelerate the process, it demonstrates the inefficiency and lack of capacity of the AVF manpower model. The study concludes with recommendations stating that, "In the past, the Army has considered different approaches to expansion such as establishing cadre formations, drawing manpower from the generating force, etc. The Army should explore which of these approaches, or what combination thereof, best positions it to expand rapidly." The U.S. military must identify new methods to respond to an urgent demand for manpower in time of crisis. Even if the initial mobilization of the AVF is successful, a series of campaigns or battles creating a spike in casualties exposes the AVF’s inability to sustain the flow of manpower. Another component in terms of contested mobilization that bears consideration is potential interference from cyber-attacks combined with enemy information operations.

The U.S. military in its quest to become more technologically advanced and interconnected provides ample opportunity for adversaries to disrupt or degrade
systems and infrastructure that support mobilization, forces movement, and even the recruitment process. The recent events of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election and Russian offensive cyber-attacks in Georgia and Ukraine are evidence of this potential new capability in today’s conflicts. In a recent article on the state of mobilization, experts from the U.S. Army War College identify cell phone networks, transportation nodes, or mobilization facilities as potential targets.\textsuperscript{28} Even moderate success in these types of attacks could create delays that disrupt critical timelines to regenerate forces in a protracted near-peer conflict. This vulnerability would affect any manpower generation capability whether it is the AVF or a draft, however, the AVF is more susceptible due to the smaller quantities of personnel it generates and its reliance on informational marketing to drive recruitment.

Considering all the potential risk factors inherent to AVF readiness and the mobilization process. AVF capacity faces a steep climb to combat disruptive enemy influences aiming to degrade U.S. military responsiveness. These capacity risks will likely occur concurrently during the chaos of war resulting in difficulty discerning their potential cumulative impact during time of crisis. This supports the argument that the AVF model presents a strategic risk if the capacity fails to provide sufficient manpower during a full or total mobilization order and delays the application of a decisive level of force. It could directly impact the nation’s strategic calculus. In addition to capacity, another inherent characteristic of the AVF that requires consideration is its cost.

The All-Volunteer Force is Costly

Cost or affordability is the second vulnerability to the AVF’s ability support a major regional conflict. Regarding the AVF, there is an inherent relationship between quality and cost. The Department of Defense primarily uses pay and benefits to attract
and retain personnel. A large-scale conflict with significant casualties is likely to dramatically drive up the cost of the AVF. It is fair to assume that during a total mobilization requirement that all national resources will be supporting the war effort. However, at the strategic level it is necessary to consider the long-term economic implications that such a conflict will undoubtedly create. Additionally, competing cost considerations include ramping up the industrial base and supporting operations that make prospect even more daunting. Together, these cost demands suggest impactful second order effects to the economy if the AVF is expanding in a major conflict.

Historically, the first AVF budget in 1973 established the important precedent that the AVF is going to cost more than a drafted force. It also marked a transition in cost trade-offs between a conscripted force and a volunteer force. The most significant component of this transition was personnel pay. The move to the AVF marked a commitment to improve compensation for service and development of a larger standing peace time military force. This key pillar of the AVF has grown in cost as the military aims to keep pace with competition from private sector jobs and periods of U.S. economic prosperity. As the military continues to strive toward maintaining a highly qualified force, this cost has evolved beyond higher pay into greater benefits through health care and retirement. Also, both recruitment and retention bonuses remain the most commonly used tools for growing the force today, which are unique to the AVF policy. In comparison, the draft model is more cost effective when responding to crisis.

During the peak of the war on terrorism there were studies on the cost and performance of the AVF. Data from a 2007 article on the management of the AVF in time of war examined hypothetical scenarios of requirements to surge the force by
61,500 (small draft) and 127,000 (large draft). The assessment provides cost analysis on the AVF model of recruitment versus a small or large draft model. The data suggests that a small draft would provide a savings of $1.7 billion and estimates a larger draft savings at $3.4 billion as compared to the AVF model of recruitment for the same requirements. This assessment argues that draftees would likely only remain in service for the standard term of 2 years. However, this is precisely why the draft is likely to provide additional cost savings in the long term as it does not create a larger military population of careerists that are costlier. These are critical strategic level considerations in the viability of the AVF and the ability to surge its capacity to meet force expansion requirements during full or total mobilization.

Another powerful argument for the AVF over a conscripted force is that properly managed volunteer force would increase the quality of service members. However, considering a major conflict, the ability of the AVF to maintain the quality of the force is strained, and recent data from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan suggest support for this proposition. A deeper examination into the time around 2005-2009 where the demand on the AVF was the highest reveals observable signs of quality issues. Today’s AVF is undoubtedly a success in terms of its ability to provide quality manpower during peacetime. An article from the U.S. Army War College by Mr. Louis Yuengert in 2015 provides ample reasons to consider the AVF a success stating that the, “American military is trained and educated to a level unsurpassed by any other country’s armed forces.” However, a study from the Center of Naval Analyses, “Population Representation in the Military,” from 2015 reveals that there was a significant drop in percentage of high quality active component accessions at the peak of the conflict.
This trend in decline of the accessions of quality personnel is most significant to the Army where there was a drop to below 50% in high quality recruits that persisted until 2009. At a point of peak demand for military manpower, the U.S. military was paying more for a force that was declining in quality. This trend peaks in 2007, where one of every five U.S. Army recruits required a waiver. Historical data from the 1970s and recent studies by the U.S. Army Research Institute confirm that drops in quality lead to disciplinary issues and performance reduction.

Conversely, the draftee and conscripted forces would be more immune to these cost challenges just by the fact that it draws from a greater cross-section of the populace guaranteeing a relatively steady state of the quality in personnel. The draftee force cannot produce the same peaks in quality as the AVF, but it insulates the military
from dramatic drops that occur during conflict. Additionally, in the event of major regional conflict, it is likely the U.S. military will have to accept risks in quality of new recruits. This is counter to the U.S. military strategic calculus that prioritizes quality over quantity and could serve as a cognitive barrier to strategic-decision making on how to expand the AVF in a major regional conflict.\textsuperscript{36} The growing reliance on the AVF relates to the third vulnerability and the societal factors that create physical and mental barriers that could serve as obstacles for the AVF model to expand the force. Two societal factors that represent greater risk to the AVF include societal-military relations and the obesity epidemic.

The All-Volunteer Force and Societal Challenges

The history of the AVF reveals that the creators of this policy were concerned about the potential disconnect from the military force and the society it serves.\textsuperscript{37} Fast-forward a little over thirty years and this concern is now a reality. Recent data from Pew research reveals interesting trends, particularly in the millennial generation that is the primary source of recruitment for the military. The millennial generation represents the population born between 1981-1997. A statistic from recent Pew research data indicates that only 2\% of males in this generation are military veterans compared to 6\% of Generation X (1965-1980), 13\% of Baby Boomers (1946-1964), and 24\% of the Silent generation (1928-1945) at the same period of life.\textsuperscript{38} The growing unfamiliarity with the military appears related to another recent Pew survey question about whether the use of military force is the best method to maintain peace. In the most recent response to this question in 2009, Millennials agreement dropped to 38\%, below Generation X which rose to above 50\% agreement.\textsuperscript{39} A third metric is perhaps the most infamous millennial-military statistic from a survey in December 2015 when 60\% of 18-29 years
stated they support U.S. combat troops to fight ISIS, but that 62% of the same group would not be willing to join the fight.40

Generational data is subject to change over time, but these indicators should serve as caution to political and military leaders. The very portion of the population that will serve as the source for any major surge in military manpower does not understand the military and is likely to require significant recruitment incentives to volunteer for service. Perhaps more critical is understanding these generational atmospheric indicators in time of national crisis and the potential susceptibility of this population to foreign influence from information operations. History demonstrates that even in times of major regional conflict that the public understanding of the national interest and justification for conflict is contentious. These risk factors could prove to be a substantial obstacle to reliance on the AVF model to rapidly expand the military to support of total mobilization.

A second societal challenge unforeseen by the creators of the AVF is the modern-day epidemic of obesity. The epidemic of obesity in the American populace is effectively reducing the percentage of the population that is eligible to serve in the military. A recent study by Dr. Paul von Hippel and Dr. Nahhas from the University of Texas (Austin) that analyzed the body mass index of 1,116 children born between 1930-1993 supports the claim that obesity is a new and sudden reality.41 The impact is that when combining obesity with other factors like criminal record and failure to graduate high school it disqualifies 75% of the population ages 17-24. The Center for Disease Control confirms that 40% of the youth population in 2008 was obese.42 This percentage
is trending in the wrong direction and is the subject of numerous military reports on the future of recruitment.

While the obesity epidemic is a challenge to any method of recruiting military manpower, there is an advantage that the conscription process would have over the AVF. The selective service system supports a broader recruitment tool that, unlike the AVF, does not rely on individual recruiting commands. While both models would produce recruits that fail the screening process, the conscription process is able to generate a larger pool than the AVF. This societal factor represents a strain on the capacity to raise manpower, but it would have more impact on the AVF model of recruitment. These societal considerations must be part of the risk assessment in terms of force expansion during total mobilization.

Recommendations

The process of identifying vulnerabilities in capacity, affordability, and societal factors to the AVF enables opportunities to consider methods and policies to mitigate those risks. The U.S. military should consider methods to mitigate these risks through alternative methods to develop a strategic reserve to the AVF until a drafting process can generate manpower. It is important that DOD leadership seize the moment with the current focus on readiness to allow for experimentation in methods to bolster the AVF.

Experimentation in the 1970’s was a key component to the successful creation of the AVF, and it can serve a purpose to identify creative solutions today. Three potential methods to bolster the AVF include a deliberate contractor augmentation plan, creation of a new national service program, and a study to identify high risk military occupational specialties. An honest reform will require multiple new policies or programs and may only provide modest gains in the durability of the force. However, that may be
sufficient to extend the AVF capability and forestall conscription during periods of exceptional demand.

The first recommendation focuses on the reality that the U.S. military in the 21st Century is dependent on contractors. The reliance on contractors that continues today in the war on terrorism is not something the military relishes, especially as critics use inflammatory language to label them as mercenaries.44 In current conflicts such as Afghanistan, only around 10% of the contractors carry weapons, and appropriate contracting agreements allow them to provide meaningful impact to success of U.S military operations.45 Despite numerous issues in fraud, waste, and abuse that have occurred from the reliance on contractors, there is renewed focus on improving U.S. military operational contracting support. The U.S. military should continue to hone those practices and sustain the implementation of contracting support in the joint planning process. Lessons learned from the last several years of conflict can provide the critical information to establish contracting contingency plans in the context of large scale mobilization. The establishment of a strategic contracting plan will reduce the risk in the use of contractors in terms of cost and allow military commanders to understand in advance how contractors will enable their forces. The U.S. will continue to have heavy reliance on contractors and should account for their capabilities as a force multiplier. Another method of providing a bridge from the AVF to conscription is to develop another layer in manpower reserves.

The second recommendation is the establishment of another layer in the national service program that provides a basic level of military familiarization training that could serve as a source for rapid force expansion and allow the U.S. military to push more
experienced forces forward. In 2001, U.S. military sociologist, Charles Moskos, suggested the introduction of shorter enlistment agreements for 12 to 18 months that targets college students or new college graduates. At a minimum this period of short service establishes a link between a qualified portion of the populace and the military subject to recall at the point of total mobilization.

Today there is a growing emphasis on fitness and leadership development, the U.S. military could be an attractive “internship” program for today’s youth in college or just entering the work force. This still presents financial challenges to the incentivization of volunteers but merits consideration as in interim solution that provides a bridge of reserve personnel until a draft is functioning. To take this recommendation further, the U.S. military should experiment with techniques to target specific skills sets where the quality of the mental capability supersedes the physical requirement and consider that potential trade-off. This implies more liberal use of physical waivers in areas and positions where it makes sense to accept such risks. The U.S. military could also consider using this service program to support homeland operations or humanitarian assistance which may attract youth more reluctant to serve in combat. Another advantage of this approach is that at a minimum a relationship develops between the AVF and the society it supports.

A final recommendation is to commission a study to define critical military occupational skill and how to expedite recruitment in those specific areas prior to a crisis. This study could identify the critical military occupational skills sets that either require a high degree of skill, long periods of training, or both. The study should map these specific military specialties to their closest civilian equivalency to determine the
availability of personnel with related and potentially transferable skills. This process must include analysis of the military training requirements to convert their civilian skills to military application. This examination would provide a starting point for how the U.S. military should approach recruitment during urgent force expansion. This process could identify areas where there is little or no overlap between civilian and military skills that will support focused military recruitment. Recruiters could then focus and prioritize those specialties over areas where the skills overlap is greater. Examples would include an attack aircraft pilot and doctor respectively. The commercial airline industry would be a likely recruitment source for an attack aircraft pilot but preparing this pilot for military operations would require significant military training, where as a doctor could transfer with minimal training. This process would not only allow the U.S. military to take more informed and targeted recruitment actions, but it could lead to the identification of key areas of industry where the U.S. military should cultivate relationships.

This data could also support a broader direct commissioning program. Direct commissioning is a tool that is familiar to the military in very specific specialties and during a demand to expand the force this could provide additional relief to AVF expansion. In fact, the U.S. Army is launching a pilot five-year program that will recruit cyber officers in this manner. The driving force behind the decision is the fact that the evolutions in cyber technology and techniques moves so quickly and requires so much experience that the timeline to create a cyber professional from a recruit with no experience is too long.\textsuperscript{47} This is a remarkable pilot program since it represents a willingness of the U.S. Army to experiment. This experiment can then provide data for considerations in other aspects of growing the force with quality service members.
To expand on this specific concept, the U.S. military could also offer financial incentives to private industry that employ specific skill sets. Private employers could pass on incentives to their employees that receive periodic military familiarization training to facilitate potential transfer in the event of total mobilization and force expansion. This concept relieves some of the costly financial burden from the military to develop specialty skills while also developing closer civil-military relationships. Renowned political scientist, Dr. Eliot Cohen, suggests this same concept in his recent book *The Big Stick* where he refers to World War 2 practices where, “Business people became colonels in the Army’s quartermaster corps, and small-town mayors became civil affairs officers.” The idea is that the U.S. military needs to be more intelligent in its ability not just to recruit but to then place them in positions where their skill set fits. This is just one of several concepts the U.S. military could consider in attempts to develop an augmentation force to bridge the gap between the AVF and conscription.

Conclusion

The totality of the vulnerabilities in capacity, cost, and societal factors combine to create conditions that during conflict will challenge U.S. Government leadership’s ability to determine the precise timing of the AVF breaking point. The reluctance of political and military leadership to embrace the return of the draft as an option can only contribute to the “fog of war” and risk the time and space to appropriately expand the force in the event of major regional conflict. Retired Lieutenant General Eikenberry provides insight on the AVF reality stating, “We have collectively ignored the severe political and strategic consequences of its implementation [AVF]… the advantage of the volunteer over the conscript military is less certain today.” The draft should remain a viable option in the U.S. Military
strategic planning for near-peer conflict in a major regional conflict. It would be more beneficial for senior leaders to define circumstances that would constitute its implementation and prepare the public for this possibility. The recommendation of this analysis is not to abolish the AVF model but to acknowledge it faults, prepare for higher levels of mobilization, and develop a mitigation plan to extend the AVF’s ability to support manpower requirements in a major regional conflict against a near-peer adversary. The political and military leadership must admit that there is a breaking point to the AVF and currently the military is ill-prepared to execute a decision to convert from a volunteer force to a draft in response to a major conflict. These discussions should occur with transparency as well as to inform the public. At the least, the very discussion of when to implement a draft may serve to reinvigorate the military-civilian relationship and force the American populace to think more about when our leaders elect to use force.

Endnotes


7 Ibid., 7-13.

8 Ibid., 17-21.


10 Ibid., I-6.


20 Ibid., 3.


22 Evans, Getting it right, 22.


27 Ibid., 6.


30 Nataraj et al., Assessing the Army’s Ability to Regenerate, 2-3.


34 Ibid., 7-8.


39 Ibid., 71 and 79.


49 Gates, *Department of Defense Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2009*.