

Excerpted from “The Argument: Should the United State Reinstate the Draft?” 2013

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1 We need trained soldiers, not a horde of draftees.

2 Thanks to Rep. Charles B. Rangel, the recurring question of whether to reinstate the draft
3 has been thrust to the front of the public-policy debate. Those calling for a renewed draft
4 have a variety of arguments at their disposal. These range from the high cost of payrolls and
5 recruiting to building a common experience in our youth that will bind us together as a
6 nation. Under close examination, none of them holds a lot of water.

7 The best reason for not calling for a draft is that no member of the combined Joint Chiefs of
8 Staff is asking for one. These are the men responsible for protecting our country and
9 ensuring that our armed forces are fully prepared to meet any potential enemy. It is a trust
10 that these men take very seriously. After 10 years of war they are intimately acquainted with
11 the kind of army the nation needs to meet the uncertainties of the future. All of these senior
12 officers came of age in the wreckage of the post-Vietnam military. They saw first-hand the
13 ruinous effects a large draft force can have when there is no national emergency to justify
14 the call to arms. These men built from the bottom up the professional military that has not
15 lost a single engagement in a generation. If they prefer a highly trained professional force
16 over a large influx of half-trained, short-serving draftees the nation would do well to heed
17 their advice.

18 If the Joint Chiefs do not want a draft, there had better be a good reason to force one on
19 them. The congressman claims that we need a draft to ensure that the burden of any future
20 conflict is shared by all and does not fall primarily on the poor and on minorities. This is an
21 old canard that he trots out from time to time to make his fellow legislators feel guilty about
22 voting to commit military force. Disproportionate military losses among minorities is a
23 myth that began in the Vietnam era and is a total fabrication. Minorities did not die in
24 Vietnam or in any conflict thereafter in any greater numbers than they are represented in the
25 population. And, with the exception of 1966, the exact opposite has been the case. Blacks
26 made up 12 percent of the deaths in Vietnam, 13.1 percent of the U.S. population, and

27 almost 11 percent of our troops in Vietnam. Whites (including Hispanics) made up 86.4
28 percent of those who served in Vietnam and 88 percent of those who died there. The highest
29 rate of black deaths in Vietnam was 16.3 percent (in 1966)—and almost all of those killed
30 that year were volunteers for elite units, not reluctant draftees.

31 That still leaves open the question of whether our military is composed mostly of economic
32 refugees. The evidence says no. Virtually every member of the armed forces has a high-
33 school diploma, in contrast to 79 percent of the comparable youth population. Practically all
34 new recruits place in the top three intellect categories (as measured by the Armed Forces
35 Qualification Test), versus 69 percent of their civilian counterparts. New soldiers also read
36 at a higher level than their civilian counterparts. Overall, the U.S. military closely reflects
37 the makeup of our large middle class. . . .

38 Furthermore, those who are calling for a draft fail to recognize that war has changed
39 dramatically in the past three decades. A high-technology force conducting incredibly rapid
40 operations requires well-trained professionals, not short-term draftees. An army of draftees
41 would be little more than cannon fodder for any advanced force to chew up. Moreover, in
42 the complex counterinsurgency environments of Afghanistan and Iraq, success depends on
43 sending long-serving professionals repeatedly back into situations in which they are
44 intimately familiar. Sending a new crop of annual draftees into these countries would have
45 translated into skyrocketing casualty lists and failure on the battlefield. The thoroughly
46 trained and professional U.S. military is the most dominant battlefield force in the world,
47 capable of winning a stand-up fight against any opponent. Our national policy makers may
48 misuse this force from time to time, but why would we ever put our military preeminence at
49 risk in favor of a mass of half-trained grumbling draftees?

50 Then there is the cost. If we require every able-bodied male to serve 18 months to two years
51 after he turns 18, then we are talking about inducting more than 1.5 million draftees a year.
52 Equipping and training that force to even a reasonable standard would cost in the area of \$3
53 trillion—and another \$1 trillion a year to maintain it. Of course, no one is going to bankrupt
54 the nation to build a military 10 times larger than what we currently need. This means that
55 less than one in five of the eligible draftees would be needed or called.

56 Given that only a proportion of the eligible males would be called, anyone who thinks that

57 the draft will remain a fair cross section of our society is living in a dream world. More
58 likely the military would become even less representative of society as the rich and middle
59 class would do whatever they had to in order to avoid contact with the “undesirable
60 elements” who would be caught up in a draft. At present, recruiters seeking the highest-
61 quality volunteers turn these undesirables away. As a former recruiting commander, I often
62 lamented how many people we had to interview, physically examine, and test just to get one
63 qualified applicant. Throughout my tenure, the ratio never fell below 14-to-1, though some
64 other districts did a bit better. If the services lowered their standards even minimally, they
65 could enlist their yearly goals by March and close their recruiting offices.

66 Some, including Rangel, make the argument that if the military cannot use all of the
67 draftees, then they should be enlisted into some other form of national service. Has anyone
68 thought about the size of the bureaucracy that would have to be created to mobilize, train,
69 deploy, feed, house, and monitor several million 18 year olds every year? You would need a
70 second army dedicated to doing nothing but keeping track of teenagers. Besides, what
71 rational being believes that the federal government is the best organization for putting our
72 youth to useful work? In no time at all our children will become pawns for whatever is the
73 political flavor of the day.

74 As Doug Bandow states in his Cato Institute study of the draft, “A return to conscription
75 would yield a less experienced, less stable, and less efficient military. Inducement, not
76 coercion, is the answer to sagging retention. Studies have consistently indicated that the
77 most effective remedy is improved compensation.” By taking care of our soldiers, using
78 them only for critical missions, and ensuring that they have the best equipment and training
79 available, we maintain a quality force, capable of defeating any enemies we may face in
80 coming decades.

Horde: group, crowd, or gang

Recurring: happening frequently or repeating

Disposal: in the power to make use of as you choose

Ensuring: to make sure or certain of

Potential: capable of being or becoming something

Acquainted: being known or familiar with each other

Influx: something arriving or coming in

Heed: to pay attention or caution to

Minorities: a smaller part of the whole; ethnicities that are not as populated as others within the whole population of a region

Canard: a false or fabricated report

Disproportionate: being out of proportion of uneven

Fabrication: the act or process of lying or being untruthful

Exception: set apart from or not being included in a rule or law

Reluctant: showing or feeling unwillingness or hesitation

Lamented: to mourn or grieve

Bureaucracy: an administration or organization

Remedy: a medicine or application to treat or cure