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The most perilous position on the world stage is at the very top, and that is where America finds itself today. Where it finds itself tomorrow depends on how well it can counter new threats. Perhaps the most conventional response to a challenge is to increase the size of the military through compulsory service. But this conventional solution fails to adequately respond to the unconventional nature of modern threats. Implementing compulsory service would be unwise because it is unnecessary in modern warfare, and would cause America to accept significant economic and human costs.

The future of warfare simply does not depend on man power to the same degree it has in the past. Weapons of mass destruction and drones have eliminated the need for a large number of troops with boots on the ground. Battlefield deaths have decreased radically since the Vietnam War, because the majority of wars are no longer fought on a physical battle field.¹ It is true that even with these developments, the need for troops will not entirely disappear. But like the evolving nature of warfare, the role of the soldier has also been transformed. Arguments to grow our armed forces emphasize the stress we place on our current troops. It is true that the rotating nature of deployment is demanding on members of the armed forces, but adding more members will not solve this issue. To alleviate this burden and use forces efficiently, the U.S. has to consider organizational strategies beyond the status quo. If the U.S. stays entrenched in their current system, adding more manpower will not solve the root issue, instead it will eventually perpetuate it on a larger scale. The U.S. is a global superpower, and the country's tactics have served it well in the past, but how the U.S. moves forward will determine if it can remain on top. It is clear that compulsory service for the purpose of adding manpower is not only unnecessary,

¹ Aaron O'Neill, "United States: War Fatalities 1775-2021," Statista, March 5, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1009819/total-us-military-fatalities-in-american-wars-1775-present/>.

but also the kind of regressive thinking that leaves America's position on the world stage vulnerable.

It is incomplete to examine whether or not the U.S. should implement compulsory service without examining the economic impacts of such a drastic move. Proponents of compulsory service make the argument that it serves as an equalizing factor across the economic disparity the U.S. faces. Perhaps compulsory service could provide opportunities for citizens of low income areas by putting them on equal footing with elites. While it is an interesting premise, it has to be weighed against the economic sacrifices compulsory service poses. Compulsory military service interferes with citizens plans to pursue higher education or enter the workforce². Additionally, an economist that prescribes to Adam Smith's views on specialization would recognize that not everyone is equally good at being a soldier.³ In other words: it is costly to force a square peg into a round hole. Compulsory service for every United States youth means millions of square pegs that are not the right fit for military service. This cost is not just dollars and cents, its human lives. Soldiers who are ill suited for the military risk not only their own life but the lives of those around them. While interesting, the proposed benefits of compulsory military service simply cannot outweigh the economic or human cost.

It seems inevitable that there will be some human cost to maintaining the U.S. position on the world stage. However there is a distinction between voluntarily risking one's life for their country, and being forced to take this risk. Since America's inception there has been a struggle to strike a balance between security and liberty. At the time of America's founding several states proposed amending the constitution to limit the power of the draft because of how costly

² Panu Poutvaara and Andreas Wagener, "Conscription: Economic Costs and Political Allure," *The Economics of Peace and Security Journal* 2, no. 1 (2007).

³ Panu Poutvaara and Andreas Wagener, "Conscription: Economic Costs and Political Allure," *The Economics of Peace and Security Journal* 2, no. 1 (2007).

exercising this power could be.⁴ Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness were asserted as natural rights when America declared its independence, and they remain cherished principles today. Many brave service members are voluntarily willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for others to maintain these rights, and at times in America's history it has been necessary to implement the draft for national security. But, if the country is requiring young people to lay down their lives in pursuit of a greater good, their sacrifice must not be in vain. Today, the need for mandatory military service does not outweigh the lives it would cost to implement.

Implementing a policy of compulsory service means accepting significant human and economic costs. As it stands today, there is no compelling justification to accept the sacrifices that accompany that choice. In fact, such a move would actually prove regressive as success in modern warfare no longer hinges on manpower. The U.S. rests at the top of the hegemonic order, and it is natural to look for means to defend its position against challengers like China. The best defense is to learn from the past, but not to tether oneself to it.

⁴ “ARVER v. UNITED STATES. GRAHL v. SAME. WANGERIN v. SAME (Two Cases). KRAMER v. SAME. GRAUBARD v. SAME.,” Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute (Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute), accessed March 3, 2021, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/245/366>.

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