



## STRAINED MILITARY RESOURCES IN IRAQ LEAD TO FEARS OF A NATIONAL DRAFT

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*Growing concern over troop levels in Iraq and around the world has led some parents and teens to worry that a draft may not be too far off.*

Military service in the United States is strictly voluntary-- men and women serving in the armed forces do so by choice. But, during times of war, that can change. Mandatory service, called conscription but known popularly as the "draft," allows governments to require men, and sometimes women, of a certain age to serve in a military crisis.

In the United States, the draft has been used as a tool since the Civil War. In 1940 President Franklin D. Roosevelt instituted the first peacetime draft, which allowed the government to draft citizens at any time.

"We must and will marshal our great potential strength to fend off war from our shores," Roosevelt said as he enacted the Selective Training and Service Act.

Though controversial, the peacetime draft remained in place until America pulled out of Vietnam in 1973. Today, Congress can give the military the right to draft troops during wartime.

### **Current draft concerns**

Recently, many Americans have begun to worry that the shortage of troops caused by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan may lead President Bush or his successor to reinstate the draft.

The fears have been compounded by the numbers. Of the country's 1.4 million active duty troops, according to a New York Times report, 655,000 are Army and Marine personnel, the pool from which troops in Iraq are drawn. Because the 191,000 troops currently stationed in Iraq and elsewhere in the world must be rotated often, military resources could deteriorate fast.

In addition, both President Bush and his opponent Senator John Kerry have called for more troops to help secure peace leading up to Iraq's first Democratic election in January. The problem is no one seems to know where those troops would come from.

The president has proposed pulling troops out of places like Europe and South Korea. However the current nuclear crisis with North Korea could require troops to remain in the region. Sen.

Kerry has said if he's elected he would expand the Army by 40,000 members but, according to Army National Guard reports, recruiting levels are already low.

"We have put ourselves in a position where we don't have the capability to handle another major contingency," Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island told the New York Times.

Both President Bush and Senator Kerry have denied any plans to reinstate a draft, though many Americans still worry that it could happen. A recent survey, conducted by the National Annenberg Election Survey, found that out of 1,500 adults between the age of 18 and 29 surveyed, 51 percent believe that President Bush would bring back the draft.

### **A draft scenario**

So what would happen if the government decided to draft its citizens? Who would be affected?

First, the military would have to determine that the war in Iraq or another such conflict needed more troops. The president and Congress would then pass legislation reinstating the draft. Earlier in October, the House of Representatives struck down a bill asking for reinstatement of the draft. The president issued a statement backing the House for its action and promised to veto the bill if it were sent to him.

Once it gets the green light from Congress, the Selective Service would begin a lottery system, choosing young men whose 20th birthday falls in the year of the draft. The military would then draft men starting with 21-year-olds and ending with 25-year olds. So far, women are exempt from being drafted.

The process would take 193 days from the time your name comes up to when you are required to report for duty. Incarcerated men, hospitalized men and men who claim "conscientious objection," an objection to military duty based on religious or moral beliefs, could claim exemption. Dual citizens and non-U.S. citizens are not exempt from the draft.

### **Peace or patriotism?**

While some young people think it's the duty of a country's citizens to defend it, others say military service should be a choice.

Seventeen-year-old Jason Tseng considers himself a patriot and said though he would go to war if drafted, he disagrees with the idea of a draft for the war in Iraq.

"Philosophically I don't think the government should ever institute a draft unless there are dire situations. The situation in Iraq is bad, but this is nowhere near World War II. World War II warranted a draft."

Tseng, whose mother is a civil engineer for the military, said many teens do not agree with this war.

"More and more the American people are beginning to see the fallacies of this war. If the president were to force a large number of America's youngest and finest to go overseas and risk their lives for a war that is completely unnecessary, there would be public outcry."

"If there was a very real threat - if another country decided to invade-- a draft would be more widely accepted and the public would be more receptive to the idea," he added.

Cathy, the parent of a 17-year-old son in McLean, VA, who did not want to give her last name, worries that because the military has had to keep so many troops in Iraq longer than anticipated, a draft may not be too far off.

"I just don't see how they're going to continue to support the effort with a voluntary Army," she said.

Cathy, whose brother was a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War, said if a draft were to take place now, she would consider sending her son to school abroad.

"How about college in Canada?" she said.

*--By Kristina Nwazota, Online NewsHour*

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