Should the U.S. Bring Back the Draft?

The U.S. has relied on a volunteer army since 1973. With Americans fighting, and dying, in Afghanistan and Iraq, is it time to bring back the draft?

**YES**

On Sept. 11, 2001, I was working in the World Trade Center, and by sheer luck I was not one of the 2,823 people who died there. As I ran down 61 flights of stairs, it was clear to me that we had suddenly become a nation at war, and I expected the government to reinstate the draft immediately.

But that didn’t happen, and the failure to reinstate the draft in the aftermath of 9/11 was a huge mistake.

That became clear to me when I joined the Marines in 2003. I served for six months in Iraq, and my experience made me realize we have a serious talent deficiency in the military.

A draft would remedy that immediately. America’s bravest are currently fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, but our brightest are not. If I could have built a squad with five M.I.T. or Caltech students, I bet within months they’d have found a way to make the roadside bombs that killed so many U.S. troops ineffective.

Furthermore, if the most well-connected people in government and business had to worry about their own children’s safety, battle plans would be made more prudently, and the best gear would be available to the military in a more timely manner.

I favor a World War II-style draft, with the brothers and sons of future and former Presidents serving (and, unfortunately, dying, as a Roosevelt and a Kennedy once did). That is when a war effort is maximized. The military cannot be a faceless horde to those in charge of our most important institutions.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan need to be more discomfiting to the average American than just bad news on TV. In the long term, democracies cannot successfully wage protracted wars when the only people who are sacrificing are those who choose to go. —Mark Finelli

Corporal, U.S. Marine Corps

**NO**

On the wall of my congressional office hangs a quote from Senator Robert A. Taft: “A compulsory draft is far more typical of totalitarian nations than of democratic nations. The theory behind it leads directly to totalitarianism. It is absolutely opposed to the principles of individual liberty which have always been considered a part of American democracy.”

Taft said this in 1940, but it’s just as true today, and I’m very concerned that the Obama administration may be considering bringing back the draft.

For years, I have introduced legislation to get rid of the Selective Service, which requires all 18-year-old men to register with the government, because why should you have a Selective Service if you’re not planning to have a draft?

To me, a military draft would be the most serious attack on personal liberty. I consider it involuntary servitude. If we can draft young men and women and send them overseas to fight wars and think this is part of a method to preserve liberty, then we are sadly mistaken. And the truth is, if there is to be a draft, it will be for men and women.

I joined the Air Force in 1962 and proudly served as a flight surgeon for five years. My experience taught me that military service must be voluntary. Most military experts believe a draft would actually impair military readiness, despite the increase in troop levels, because of training and morale problems. Furthermore, most members of the military oppose a draft because they know there’s a vast difference between serving alongside another volunteer and serving alongside a reluctant conscript.

A military draft would allow the government to demand your very life without your consent. This should be unthinkable in a free society. —Congressman Ron Paul

Republican of Texas
Should Women Serve on the Front Lines?

The ban on women serving on the front lines has just been lifted. Do you think this will positively or negatively impact the strength of the American military.

YES

American women are engaging in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, and as a result, some are returning home with wounds both obvious and hidden. The issue is not whether women should be allowed in combat; it’s that our attitudes and laws need to catch up to the reality on the battlefield.

In the U.S. Army (as in the other military services), women are barred from holding a combat-arms position, including the infantry. In addition, female soldiers are prohibited from serving in ground-combat units.

Despite that prohibition, I was attached to an infantry battalion for my 12-month tour in Iraq. There were not enough male soldiers in my Civil Affairs detachment for all the infantry battalions we had to support. Out of sheer necessity, the official policy was ignored. I went everywhere the infantry soldiers did, lived as they did, and faced the same dangers they did.

Many female soldiers have been in, or still are in, the same situation: They go out on missions and face the possibility of roadside bombs, small-arms fire, and more. In today’s military conflicts, there are no front lines, and the dangers are everywhere.

Should women be allowed to hold a combat-arms role, and not just provide support? Yes, absolutely. Some argue that women are not physically or emotionally capable of being infantry or field artillery soldiers, but women in a dozen countries, including Israel and Canada, are already proving themselves in such roles.

The bottom line is that in the U.S., women are still perceived as less capable than men, and the law of our land enforces that outdated attitude.

Catherine Ross

NO

The nation’s pride in our military women does not justify assignments in direct ground combat, which involves more than the experience of being in danger, or even the risk of ambush.

Forget about video-game action heroes like Lara Croft, and think about real-life infantry, Marines, and Special Operations Forces that engage the enemy in the most remote and dangerous parts of Afghanistan. These men carry electronic equipment, weapons, ammunition, heavy body armor, and water weighing 50 to 100 pounds. Such burdens would weigh more heavily on smaller female soldiers who have, on average, 45 to 50 percent less upper-body strength and 25 to 30 percent less aerobic capacity, which is essential for endurance.

In the Army’s own surveys, 90 percent of enlisted women have said they oppose involuntary combat assignments on the same basis as men. They know that training for female soldiers is modified to compensate for physical differences between men and women, but there can be no modifications on the battlefield. In direct combat, women would not have an equal opportunity to survive, or to help fellow soldiers survive.

Even if physical capabilities were objectively measured and equal, co-ed combat assignments would affect discipline and unit cohesion. Women lose more duty time due to medical issues, including pregnancy, and their absence would be particularly disruptive in combat units, where concentration and mutual trust are essential for survival.

At times, we have no choice about sending young men to war, but we do have a choice when it comes to sending young women. Changing that would be a mistake.

Elaine Donnelly
President, Center for Military Readiness

(The New York Times Upfront, Vol. 143,
Go Back to Draft?
% saying the U.S. should ...

Return to draft       Keep as is

All        20        74

Notes: "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown. Based on general public, N=2,003.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER GP/35

Drafting women
A Quinnipiac poll finds wider support among men than women for conscripting both sexes if the U.S. implemented a draft.

Q: If the military draft were reinstated, would you favor or oppose drafting women as well as men?

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<th>Favor</th>
<th>Oppose</th>
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<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women</td>
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<td>48</td>
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SOURCE: Quinnipiac Univ., AP

MILITARY PARTICIPATION
% of total U.S. population in the armed forces, 1940-2010


Women’s Growing Share, 1973-2010
% of enlisted, commissioned officers who are women


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THREE LITTLE WORDS THAT WOULD END THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

I'VE BEEN DRAFTED!

WHAT IF WE HAD A DRAFT WHERE THE CHILDREN OF THE POLICY-MAKERS WERE THE FIRST TO BE CALLED UP FOR COMBAT?

THAT'S NO GOOD! WE'D NEVER GET TO HAVE ANY WARS!