

Draft in Your Future? Better Believe It!

--By Laurie Rivlin Heller

Rumors abound these days about a proposed military draft. Almost daily the news media are covering the subject. I'm glad to see it—but don't be too quick to believe what you read or hear. A cover UP is in progress.

While the spokesman for the Selective Service System, Dan Amon, insists that “the people who really matter have been quite clear that the all-volunteer system is here to stay,” their actions say more than their words. The Bush administration has been thinking ahead.

- § Last year Bush told the Selective Service System to get everything in place for a draft, and report to Congress by next March that the system --which has lain dormant for decades—is ready for activation by June 15, 2005.
- § The Selective Service is also planning for a targeted draft of individuals with computer skills and foreign languages, similar to the expedited registration and draft plan for health care personnel (including doctors, nurses and medical technicians) currently in place.
- § The NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT of 2002 requires high schools to report the names and addresses of every 18 year old male to the Selective Service. No young man will be able to “dodge the draft” these days.
- § Nor should they think of moving to Canada. Thanks to the “Smart Border Declaration” signed in 2001 by Secretary of Homeland Defense Tom Ridge, everyone crossing the U.S./Canada border is subject to a “pre-clearance agreement.”
- § And note: Should a draft take effect, education deferments don't exist anymore. College students can only postpone induction until the end of their current semester.

So why all this planning ahead? The President clearly intends to expand his campaigns abroad, as he has repeatedly told us. “America is pursuing a forward strategy of freedom in the greater Middle East,” Bush announced in January's State of the Union address. In his news conference last month, President Bush said, “Freedom is the Almighty's gift to every man and woman in this world. And as the greatest power on the face of the Earth, we have an obligation to help the spread of freedom.”

More ominously, the administration is “pressing ahead to advance their regional strategy, one that calls for regime change in Iran, then Syria and Saudi Arabia,” Robert Dreyfuss and Laura Rozen reported in *The Nation*. In their article “Still Dreaming of Tehran” (April 12, 2004) Bush advisors Richard Perle, architect of the Iraqi war, and David Frum, the speechwriter who coined the phrase “axis of evil,” call for a covert operation to “overthrow the terrorist mullahs of Iran.” Their goal: jumpstart a revolution, and ultimately a U.S. confrontation with Iran. It looks like the sons and daughters of America will be fighting Bush's wars far into the future. For this, a military draft will be essential, and inevitable.

At his April press conference the President reinforced the need. “Troop strength now and in the future is determined by the situation on the ground,” the President said. “If additional forces are needed, I will send them. If additional resources are needed, we will provide them.”

Well before the Iraqi war began, Retired General Eric Shinseki, former Army Chief of Staff, warned Congress that “several hundred thousand” troops would be needed for years, to occupy and stabilize Iraq alone. “There is no question that the Army is stressed,” U.S. Army Chief of Staff General Schoomaker informed the House Armed Services Committee in January. More recently, Retired Generals Barry McCaffrey and William Odom told Bob Edwards on National Public Radio that our Iraqi forces are “grossly anemic.”

Another Retired General Mike Davidson cautioned Neal Conan on PBS’s Talk of the Nation, “Forty percent of the U.S. Army soldiers in Iraq today are from the Guard or Reserves. Forty percent!” he repeated incredulously. “The Commanders I’ve talked to say we don’t have enough forces there now,” Senator Joseph Biden, senior Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, declared last month on Face the Nation. “We need at least 150,000 highly specialized troops,” confirmed Republican Senator Pat Roberts, Chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

“I don’t know anyone in the executive branch of the government who believes it would be appropriate or necessary to re-institute the draft,” Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld asserted at the Newspaper Association of America’s recent convention. But at the same time he was telling the Senate Armed Services Committee, “If the war on terror demands it, we will not hesitate to increase force levels even more.” In fact, Rumsfeld admitted to the Senate that the military is so overstressed he is using emergency powers to expand it by 33,000 troops. The Pentagon also has plans to expand the number of combat brigades from 33 to 48 in the coming years. And they are rushing to “re-balance” the service branches, taking troops out of jobs that can be done by civilians to free more soldiers for combat duty.

The Pentagon has had stop-gap measures in place for months. “Outsourcing” logistics and supply functions to private firms gave more than 90 companies the chance to compete for contracts in Iraq. But mercenaries may not be so quick to sign up as the situation deteriorates. Bechtel and others were already pulling back from projects after the murder, mutilation and burning of four Halliburton workers in Fallujah. The recent war crimes, allegedly committed by contract personnel, are likely to escalate the pull back. Excessive deployments, rotation delays, “stop-loss” and “stop-move” orders (which prevent soldiers from leaving the service, or hold them overseas beyond their original tour of duty) have devastated troop moral. But nothing has affected them as much as the recent Shiite uprising.

Captain Brayden Yoder, a Supply and Service Officer with the 123rd Main Support Battalion Support Operations, 1st Armored Division in Baghdad recently wrote home that “our quasi-Gestapo techniques have enraged the populace” and troop moral has plummeted this April. “The longer we stay, and the more the locals turn against us, the less we will be able to feel good about our actions here in Iraq and the more we will be asking U.S. soldiers to die for nothing,” Brayden wrote. “And the more divisions we send south to take down holy Shiite cities, the more this occupation will look like the Viet Nam war: “We had to burn the city in order to save it.”

With soldiers like Yoder thinking twice about what they are doing there, you won’t hear anyone admit that the administration is gearing up a draft -- not until after the election. But by then it won’t matter that military leaders prefer well-trained volunteers, and career soldiers, to inexperienced

draftees. As Bush expands the U.S. empire around the globe, there simply won't be enough volunteers to fill the ranks of the military.

So expect a draft in the spring of 2005 -- if YOU re-elect George W. Bush! It's only realistic.

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