



# ***THE DECLINE OF THE MASS ARMY***

**Morris Janowitz**

**T**HE mass army based on conscription with extensive reserves is being phased out of existence in Western industrialized countries. During the 1970's, the force structure of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization will be altered with profound implications for international relations and domestic civil-military relations. The decline of the mass armed force takes place under conditions of advanced industrialism, but reflects both technological and socio-political factors. In NATO countries, the movement is toward shorter length of conscript service and toward a militia with six months' active duty service and greater reliance on an all-volunteer system. In the United States, the termination of conscription was one issue on which antiwar Congressmen and pressure groups could unite with the Nixon administration. The result was the political decision not to extend Selective Service legislation beyond 1 July 1973, and the initiation of planning by military officials to reach a "zero draft" call by 1 January 1973 so that there would be a six-month period for trial and transition.

The ending of the draft in the United States will have a deep impact on military manpower systems in Western Europe. It will not work to maintain existing conscript systems. The impact will be the reverse in that it will push NATO nations toward an all-volunteer system or toward new forms of militia systems.

Great Britain introduced an all volunteer system in 1960, over a decade ago, and the 1970's will see further over-all reductions in its man power because of economic pressure and the sheer difficulties of recruitment. Since 1968, NATO countries have reduced, or are debating the reduction of, the length of conscript service. More radical measures are certain to be examined after the end of the draft in the United States.

The Netherlands, with its powerful commitment to NATO principles and



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strategy, is openly debating and planning for the conditions under which it will institute an all-volunteer system. In the Federal Republic of Germany, Helmut Schmidt, Socialist Minister of Defense, has advocated an all-volunteer 'cadre augmented by a short-term, six-month conscript militia.

In Italy, and to a lesser extent France, similar debate is in course. In these two countries, the size and type of manpower systems are not only related to international relations, but to internal security so that the consequences of the debate on the shift toward a more volunteer force has been retarded.

### Historical Transformation

In any historical period, the military establishment is both a reflection of the larger society and an institution with a distinctive environment and ethos. Thus, the end of the US draft represents a dramatic historical transformation in contemporary American society. It is truly the end of a historical epoch in the rise and decline of the mass armed force.

The mass armed force has its origins in both technological and socio-political factors. The technology of the mass army was rooted in an organizational system created by increased firepower of the infantry and artillery, plus improved means of transportation of military personnel and supplies. Historical epochs do not start or conclude on a specific text book date. The technological basis of the mass army was in operation during the Civil War and in the Franco Prussian conflict, but essential prototype elements, especially organizational elements, could already be found in the Napoleonic Wars.

However, there are strong reasons to ground the origin of the mass armed force in the socio-political struggle of the American

## THE MASS ARMY

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and French Revolutions and the emergent forms of modern nationalism which they produced. These armed rebellions marked the end of the post-feudal armies as the revolutionary leaders armed the rank and file.

### Citizenship Factor

The idea that citizenship involved the right and the duty to bear arms—truly a revolutionary notion—came into being. In fact, military service was an essential element in establishing and expanding the scope of modern citizenship. To be a citizen of the nation-state was to have the right to bear arms in defense of the state. (It is striking to recall that, during World Wars I and II, elements in the black community in the United States demanded the right to serve in combat units as an expression of their aspirations for full citizenship.)

In Europe, after the French Revolution, the mass armed force developed professional cadres which were augmented by a conscript and mobilization system. The professional officers were highly distinct from the rest of society although the institution rested on an ethos of citizenship participation. But this was not the first time in the history of political and institutional change that the outcome of political protest movements produced unanticipated consequences. In the United States, the professional cadres were smaller, and the development of the mass armed force was not institutionalized until the turn of the century.

However, professional cadres did serve the political and ideological cause of nationalism since the officer corps of Western Europe had no difficulty in transferring its feudal-based allegiance to the modern bureaucratic nation-state. A corresponding process took place in the United States, in that the small cadres of military officers accepted civilian supremacy as a desirable format. In both Western Eu-

rope and the United States, mass armies supplied the opportunity for lower classes to participate directly in the development of national polity in a manner they could readily manage and appreciate.

### Political Affirmation

Service in the conscript forces in the 19th and 20th centuries for a significant segment of the population—even after the slaughters of World War I and up through World War II—was an act of political affirmation. In Europe, it undercut internationalism and Socialist political tendencies, and, in the United States, it was an equally strong expression of popular nationalism. The right to participate in the conscript armed force, as much as the extension of the franchise, was at the core of the political emergence of modern nationalism.

The emergence of a distinctive and professional officer corps, with its strong sense of separation from civilian society, brought with it its own elements of transformation. Its sheer increase required changes in organization. In Europe since the close of the Franco-Prussian War, and in the United States since the Root reforms and the mobilization of World War I, a dominant trend in the mass armed force and in civil-military relations until 1945 has been the “civilianization” of the armed forces.

Preparation for war and war-making gives the military its particular institutional climate. However, the boundary between military forces and civilian society weakens as total mobilization requires that a larger and larger segment of the population become part of the war apparatus. Air warfare has meant that entire populations are targets for military action. Military leaders must share authority with civilian scientists as technology becomes more and more complex and the influx of civilians into the

officer corps during periods of mobilization undermined traditional forms of authority and command.

Within the professional military, the source of social recruitment into the officer corps broadens, the concentration of personnel with civilian-type skills increases, and the patterns of military authority shift from authoritarian command to organizational decision making.

## Equalitarian Ideology

The process of civilianization of the mass military is not only an outgrowth of technology and organizational control, but the vast resources required for military operations and the need for justification of prolonged hostilities and massive destruction require an equalitarian ideology, both in democratic and totalitarian societies. Progressively, men are no longer prepared to fight for nationalist sentiments alone, but the cause must be seen as morally justified. For their legitimacy, military institutions require direct civilian control. Although the expanded resources of the military permit it to operate as a very powerful pressure group, the threat of old fashioned military dictatorship seems remote.

Again, both technological and socio political factors associated with World War II started the decline of mass armies in the affluent nation-states of the West although it has taken 25 years for the process to become fully self-evident. The deployment of nuclear weapons marked the technological transformation of the armed forces of NATO nations as the sheer destructive power of these instruments altered the scope of war-making. But the introduction of nuclear weapons per se did not dictate the gradual erosion of mass armies; it was only a precondition.

In advanced industrialized societies, both the purpose of military institutions



*Mitteilungen fuer den Soldaten*

**Helmut Schmidt, West German Defense Minister, has advocated an all-volunteer cadre augmented by a short-term, six-month conscript militia.**

has been subjected to massive criticism, and the moral worth of conscript service has been shaken. Hedonism, personal expression, opposition to the style of life of the military establishment, resistance to military authority, plus a new, diffuse, moral criticism have become paramount among young people.

The destructive potential of nuclear weapons serves not only to produce new forms of pacifism and moral opposition to violence, but to heighten the realistic understanding of the effective interdependence of national societies. The use of force has traditionally operated within circumscribed limits; the new moral and political definitions serve to generate a powerful sense of neutralism. Literacy, patterns of mass consumption, and political rhetoric have emerged as more important than military service as hallmarks of citizenship.

The performance of US forces in Southeast Asia, of course, has supplied an emotional basis to emerging popular pacifism. These

## THE MASS ARMY

trends are concentrated among an important minority of young people, but can be found in varying degrees in all parts of the social structure. Nationalism itself is muted and mixed with diffused but powerful feelings of trans nationalism. Thus, in West Germany, reluctance to serve in the armed force under a broad definition of conscientious objection has meant, in recent years, that up to 10 percent of each age cohort are exempted from service. The notion of a pluralistic society weakens the very foundation of popular military service.

Comparable trends are at work in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, but in vastly different cultural and political settings. Totalitarian control eliminates political and moral debate about conscription. Thus, published opinion polls from Poland indicate that young people, while they profess “appropriate” answers to general questions about military service, on specific details reveal strongly negative attitudes toward the

realities of conscript service. Only a small minority were positively attracted. Youth discontent is widely acknowledged in the Soviet Union, and it has its implications on conscript service.

In the Soviet military, authorities have to deal with their forms of social turbulence. They have reduced the term of Soviet conscripts, emphasized volunteer recruitment wherever possible, and closed important branches of the armed forces to all but volunteer personnel. The military has been downgraded as a locus of citizenship training; this function has been transferred to premilitary training in high school and involves military personnel assigned to this task. The military forces of the Soviet Union serve as an integral element of the internal security forces, both at home and in the Warsaw Pact nations.

### Political Decisions

These political realities, plus the validity given to the Chinese threat, mean that



*Library of Congress*

**The technological basis of the mass army was in operation during the Civil War.**

personal, moral, and even political opposition to military service has no, or little, direct immediate impact on manpower policy. But one should not underestimate the extent to which Soviet authorities are concerned and must take into consideration the attitudes of indifferent youth. In the United States and in NATO, the equivalent problems exercise strong weight in influencing the balance of political decisions.

The introduction of the all-volunteer armed force in the United States means that available manpower—as much or even more than technology—will influence military strategy in the decade of the 1970's. The President's Commission projected an all-volunteer force of approximately 2.6 million or slightly less than that of the pre-Vietnam buildup. At the time, that projection already appeared to be a major miscalculation or self-deception.

In the spring of 1971, civilian officials in the Department of Defense were indicating publicly that the post Selective Service force would be approximately 2.26 million, while privately they indicated a more realistic level of two million. However, the prospect of a force of 1.6 to 1.76 million cannot be ruled out if not by 1976, in the late 1970's. The major reduction will, of course, be concentrated in the ground forces.

### **Economic Pressure**

The rundown in over-all manpower in part reflects deliberate national policy. US policy requires a smaller force. But sheer economic pressure will be equally decisive. Political necessities will press for a reduction of military expenditures below the 1971-72 figures of acknowledged nine percent of the gross national product although any such reduction will be slow and most difficult to achieve. In particular, at any given level of expenditure under an

all-volunteer force, personnel costs will rise as a percent age of the military budget.

Drawing on the British experience, US personnel costs can be expected to rise from above 40 percent to close to 60 percent during this decade. Like wise, unless there is a drastic alteration in weapons procurement policy, the cost of the armaments to be procured will rise.

Thus, there are two essential questions: How can US forces be redeployed and professionally reorganized so as to articulate with a meaningful and politically responsible foreign policy? How can the military as it moves to an all-volunteer force be recruited, educated, compensated, and organized so as to prevent it from becoming isolated from the main current of civilian society?

While there is an element of risk, a military force of 1.75 million men with eight percent of the gross national product, and with this percentage declining gradually, could 'Support a meaningful military policy of effective and minimum deterrence rather than a strategy of a delicate balance of terror. An effective all-volunteer armed force will require basic professional and organizational changes.\* Such a military force would undertake a variety of national emergency tasks which cannot be performed by civilian organizations, and the pursuit of which tasks would enhance its military effectiveness.

The all-volunteer armed force represents the end of the historical phase of the mass armed force. The rise of the mass armed force was not purely a military development, but reflected the socio-political trends of nationalism. The internal tensions and crisis in legitimacy within the Armed Forces has

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\* For an analysis of the elements of required change, see Morris Janowitz "Adapting the Armed Forces to an All-Volunteer System," in *The Public Interest*, March 1972, forthcoming.



## THE MASS ARMY

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meant that the decline of mass conscription, although delayed by the war in Vietnam, will take place rapidly and without significant resistance in American society.

The form and character of the all volunteer force will not be a purely military phenomenon, but will reflect the character of the larger society. The all-volunteer armed force will be associated especially in those elements of American society which continue to be the carriers of traditional nationalism. But the military can both reflect and

incorporate new forms of transnationalism which are already in being, both in its own ranks and in civilian society.

Under these circumstances, it will be the duty of civilian society to assume an active role in directing the military to redefine its professional perspective and to help it to understand that peacekeeping through a military presence, deterrence, and participation in the control of national emergencies is the modern definition of the heroic role.

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**In looking to the future, the Army must preserve the values and traditions which have made our Army great, while accepting the challenge to build an even better Army. The truth of the matter is that the Army is more skilled and capable of dealing with social change ... while still preserving worthwhile traditional values ... than most institutions.**

*General William C. Westmoreland*