

Americans have traditionally eschewed large standing militaries, and the concept of the citizen-soldier under civilian authority is thoroughly grounded in our Constitution. The earliest American military forces were militias that could be called upon as needed—a role today's Reserve Component continues to fulfill, but in an expanded sense. In World War II's aftermath, the need for larger, better-equipped and better-trained forces capable of rapid mobilization and deployment became apparent, and the "call to arms" became the "draft."

The Selective Service Act of 1948 served the United States into the Vietnam era. However, by the end of that war, the draft was in disfavor, and the country and Army were reassessing the Army's basic role in society. An All-Volunteer Force (AVF) was established with the draft's end in 1973 but not without further controversy that extended into the next decade. The draft, in theory, had fulfilled a perceived need for the Army to reflect society at large. But would an AVF fight if called upon? Would it become elitist and lose touch with the US public it served? Or would it become a haven for the illiterate and poor? As our Army's professionalism and success have shown, these issues were not a cause for concern.

The US Army has been and is America's Army. Despite changes in how a young man or woman entered the Army, today's soldier is just as much an American as he or she is a soldier. A common theme that runs throughout the articles in this section is that a set of common values—patriotism by another name—still cements the bond between America's Army and the public it serves.

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