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Why Join the Military to Defend Everyone Except Americans?

Doug Bandow

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The American empire lives. Leading Republicans and Democrats alike support a proxy war in Europe, back murderous conflict in the Middle East, and threaten catastrophic war in Asia. Fervent critics of “isolationism,” like Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, seem determined to defend everyone except Americans. The bulk of military outlays go either to protect prosperous and populous allies that can’t be bothered to defend themselves or to punish states not inclined to follow Washington’s dictates.

There’s always more money for arms, even though the United States is racing toward insolvency. Federal debt owed to the public is roughly 100 percent of GDP, near the record set at the close of World War II. Without dramatic change, the debt ratio will be twice as high by mid-century. Yet the bloated military budget continues to jump skyward.

The bipartisan congressional War Party risks running out of an even more important resource, manpower. Wrote Newsweek’s Alex Phillips: “A majority of American adults would not be willing to serve in the military were the U.S. to enter into a major war, recent polling has found, while public confidence in the armed forces appears to be waning.”

Phillips responded to a Daily Mail poll on whether Americans would volunteer to fight and die if America was invaded. Only 51 percent of 18-to-29-year-olds said they would do so, triggering complaints about America's feckless youth.

The Pentagon's real problem is that Americans increasingly don't want to serve even without a major war. The armed services are having trouble filling their ranks. Explained Phillips, "In 2023, the Army and Air Force fell short of their respective goals by around 10,000 recruits, while the Navy was under by 6,000." At least 2023 wasn't quite as bad as the year before, which the military called "arguably the most challenging recruiting year" since creation of the All-Volunteer Force 50 years ago.

The armed services can cope with modest personnel shortfalls for a time, but soon will be unable to perform as expected. Last year, then-Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville said he would have preferred to add 70,000 to the previous year's force, rather than cut it by 12,000, as he was forced to do. Indeed, active-duty levels have fallen 39 percent since 1987. In a desperate attempt to increase the human pool, the Army decided to suspend the requirement for a high school diploma, before retreating under fire.

Recruiting difficulties are many. For instance, the labor market has become more competitive. Moreover, only a quarter of young people meet academic and fitness standards. Public confidence in the military is down. Why has become a matter of partisan controversy. The politicization of the military may play a role. Conservatives also cite the leftist zeitgeist, claiming that "pop culture, social media, and college professors have brainwashed our youngest minds into thinking America was built on racism, colonialism, and sexism."

Naturally, Republicans also blame President Joe Biden. The Patriot Post's Brian Mark Weber cited "persecution of warriors who refused to get the Covid vaccine" and "the shameful retreat in Afghanistan." Yet the administration has effectively reversed its Covid policy, and if the young

were already bewitched by woke thoughts, they probably wouldn't have been dissuaded from taking up arms because of vaccine requirements.

Afghanistan offers a better explanation, but not because the U.S. left. Americans recognize that the withdrawal was incompetent. Nevertheless, they still wanted out, having been consistently lied to by political officials and military officers alike about the prospects of success. Even worse was the dishonesty of the George W. Bush administration in Iraq, and the needless sacrifice of so many good lives for bad lies. Both conflicts have greatly diminished the military's reputation over the last decade.

The foreign policy elite has sacrificed so many lives for so little justification. More than 7,000 service members and nearly 8,000 contractors died in combat after 9/11. An incredible 30,000 have committed suicide over the same period. Officially, some 52,000 were wounded in combat, many grievously. However, Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs reports that the real number "is exponentially larger," given other injuries in theater and conditions diagnosed after returning home. Finally, hundreds of thousands of foreign civilians died in the misguided conflicts, innocent casualties of U.S. hubris and folly.

It is one thing to risk your life and health for America. But to instead die in such foolish wars? And to have your sacrifice so shamefully wasted? Patriots should preserve their lives for something better.

So far, the military has no answer to the dearth in recruits. The services are simply muddling along, considering small fixes to significant shortfalls. Adding recruiters and hiking pay are obvious steps. Reaching younger Americans and adjusting military routine to modern youth culture are others. Decreasing disqualifications and increasing physical fitness would increase the recruit pool. Retaining more existing personnel would reduce the need for new recruits. So

would hiring laterally for specialty roles and introducing robots. Such efforts should help at the margin. Even so, however, they are unlikely to fill personnel gaps in the thousands.

The most important problem is that nothing has changed with U.S. foreign policy. Indeed, today's potential wars are becoming more deadly. "We have strike groups, aircraft carriers with a Marine Expeditionary Unit outside Israel now," observed Justin Henderson, a Marine Corps recruiter. He added, "We're funding two wars, but we're actually boots on the ground, drones above Gaza. So we're already involved in there—and we're not sure what's happening in Taiwan. So this is a very tumultuous time for us, because we don't know what's going to happen."

No, we don't. Yet nothing good is likely to come from being involved in so many of the world's incendiary confrontations and conflicts. Washington continues to ask young Americans to risk their lives here, there, and everywhere for no good reason.

In Europe, the U.S. provides defense welfare for comfortable, self-satisfied Europeans almost eight decades after World War II ended. They prefer to focus on funding generous social programs than seeing to their security, since they can leave the latter to Americans. Now the U.S. is promoting an expansive proxy war via Ukraine against a major conventional power with nuclear weapons, indirectly killing thousands of Russians. The main reason escalation remains unlikely is that Moscow appears to retain the upper hand, so it prefers to avoid confronting America and Europe. Why would any recruit want to risk being thrust into a catastrophic European war?

Then there's the Middle East. The administration's recent military escalation and threats of war are beyond reckless. Washington's policy is deformed by partisans of both Israel and Saudi Arabia, neither of which constitutes a vital American interest justifying war. The former is a nuclear-armed regional superpower and can manage its own affairs. It should bear responsibility

for its mistreatment of millions of Palestinians. Going to war with Iran over Israel would be supremely stupid.

The Kingdom is a grotesque dictatorship whose Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, infamous for murdering and dismembering his critics, has increased political repression even as he has relaxed social controls. His regime has ravaged its neighbor Yemen, killing tens of thousands of civilians with American aircraft, munitions, and intelligence. Yet the Biden administration continues to press an agreement with Riyadh which would turn US soldiers into bodyguards for the Saudi royals. Why would any American patriot join to become a modern Janissary?

American soldiers should not die for either country. Nor should they be in Iraq and Syria, where they are under frequent attack. Saddam Hussein has been gone from Iraq for 20 years; today, Americans are doing little other than acting as targets for hostile Iran-related militias. Worse, the U.S. is illegally occupying Syrian territory and stealing Syrian oil. Along the way, Washington is confronting military forces from Syria, Iran, and Russia. These postings have nothing to do with defending America.

Finally, there's Asia, where the US has long treated wealthy allies like Japan and South Korea as helpless defense dependents. Even more dangerous may be Washington's informal promise to defend Taiwan, a democratic state stuck in a very bad neighborhood, as close to China as Cuba is to America. Taipei deserves the world's moral support, but is not worth a war with Beijing, which considers the island state's return to be essential. The odds are against the U.S. Even if Washington prevailed in a shoot-out, that would be only the first round, as World War I was for Germany. China is determined not to allow Washington to control affairs 90 miles off its coast, just as the U.S. refused to accept a Soviet military presence in Cuba. And once combat started, America's allies would be more likely to opt out than in, leaving the fight to the U.S.

Uncle Sam's determination to be forever entangled in foreign wars is a very good reason not to join the armed services. The best way to solve the recruitment problem is to end frivolous interventions on behalf of peripheral interests. The armed services' essential task is defending Americans—not sanctimonious Euroweenies, kleptocratic Saudi royals, well-heeled South Koreans, indifferent Taiwanese, and endless others.

If the infamous Blob, as the foreign policy establishment has been called, refuses to abandon its determination to dominate the globe, it almost certainly will have to impose conscription. However, a return to the hated practice would foster resistance, intensify partisan polarization, and spur social conflict. Moreover, coercing service would reduce the quality of the U.S. military, hiking indiscipline, reducing retention, and draining morale. Doing so might put more people in uniform, but far fewer would want to be there and prepared to give their all in combat, especially in the frivolous interventions of late.

The Washington War Party continues to spend wildly to dominate the globe, threat of national insolvency be damned. However, the challenge of finding young men and women willing to act as sentinels for a conflict-filled global empire is proving more daunting. If Americans increasingly refuse to serve, the Pentagon will have to do more than the policy equivalent of adjusting the deck chairs of the Titanic. Republicans and Democrats alike might have to again put America's defense first.

Doug Bandow is a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute. A former Special Assistant to President Ronald Reagan, he is author of Foreign Follies: America's New Global Empire.