



Without Troops, No Battle

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In recent years, the United States armed forces are facing an unprecedented recruitment crisis. The American military, primarily composed of volunteer soldiers, is struggling to fill its ranks. While international conflicts like the war in Ukraine and the crisis in Gaza dominate the news, the crucial issue that often goes unnoticed is the lack of troops ready to fight. **The U.S. armed forces are not ready for a new war, not so much due to a lack of advanced equipment or technology, but due to a shortage of soldiers.**

In 2023, three of the four main branches of the United States armed forces did not meet their recruitment goals. In particular, the Army missed its recruitment target by 10,000 soldiers, leading to a 20% deficit. The Navy and Air Force faced similar difficulties, while only the Marine Corps met its targets, albeit with a significant reduction in its structure. The difficulty in recruiting new troops is compromising the United States' ability to face potential future conflicts, threatening national security.

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The Causes of the Crisis and the Implications for National Security

One of the main causes of this crisis is that an increasing number of young Americans do not meet the physical, psychological, and moral requirements to enlist.

Before the pandemic, fewer than three out of ten Americans aged 17 to 24 were eligible for military service, and today this percentage has further decreased. Issues like youth obesity, poor physical fitness, and drug use are drastically reducing the pool of potential recruits. Added to this is the introduction of the military health system MHS Genesis, which has made it more difficult for recruiters to hide disqualifying factors such as past injuries or mental health issues.

The crisis is not only numerical but also concerns the interest of young people in pursuing a military career. A 2022 survey revealed that less than 10% of Americans aged 16 to 21 would seriously consider enlisting, with motivations mainly related to material benefits like salary, college assistance, and travel opportunities. Few, in fact, are driven by a sense of honor or patriotism. This phenomenon leads to a progressive detachment between civilian society and the military, with the risk that disconnection from the reality of war could compromise civilian oversight and accountability of military operations.

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Solutions and the Future of the Volunteer Armed Force

Addressing the recruitment crisis requires a deep reflection on how the armed forces present themselves to young Americans and how service requirements can be adapted. Some analysts suggest that recruitment in the armed forces should focus on specialized skills, such as those required in cyber operations, to attract highly qualified personnel. However, such an approach risks undermining the principles of equality and common culture that are the foundation of the U.S. military force.

Other proposals include the creation of preparatory programs, such as the "Future Soldier Preparatory Course," which aims to train recruits who do not meet initial standards but have the potential to become effective soldiers. However, long-term solutions may require greater "permeability" between civilian life, active service, and reserve, allowing citizens to move more

easily between these worlds.

Ultimately, **the only true solution might be a radical change in the recruitment system, if not even a reflection on the return of mandatory conscription.** Although it is unlikely that the United States will need an army of 12 million soldiers as in 1945, the possibility of reinstating the draft could be considered, especially if the recruitment crisis worsens further. If the United States fails to resolve this crisis, the risk of losing a great power war could become a concrete reality, with serious consequences for the country's security and stability.