HAIL TO THE CHIEF: A GUITY DECISION

The mini-furor, which came in the wake of the presidential decision to continue Selective Service registration, serves to point up a number of things that merit consideration.

First and perhaps foremost is the fragile nature of our supposed national recovery from "the Vietnam syndrome." Scarcely had the sounds of the White House announcement to the press been made, when "anti-war" protest leaders had their old placards and clippings at the ready, and the closet doors, where they have been gathering cobwebs and waiting for a propitious moment to come to light again. The protest crowd is still there - as ardent, as unhappy and as obnoxious as ever.

Equally important, it must be noted that the president's decision took a certain amount of personal courage since he was on the record, going back to the 1968 presidential campaign, as opposed to a pacifist draft or registration. Many of his domestic advisors were known to be aligned against the continuation of the registration program. Others in the administration had ridiculed his decision because it was viewed as a ploy of former President Carter's intellectual response to the invasion of Afghanistan. Those who know Ronald Reagan were not surprised that he had the personal courage needed to put his foot in sand and to reverse himself in what he viewed as the best interests of the nation.

Lastly, we would note that a number of critics, both inside and outside of government, immediately seized upon this decision as an example of the lack of leadership in the Pentagon on the issue of the All Volunteer Force. This is a spurious issue, and we mean to get back to it later on in this commentary.

It is worth noting Mr. Reagon's own words be repeated to explain his guilty decision:

We live in a dangerous world. In the event of a future threat to national security, registration could save the United States as much as six weeks in mobilizing emergency manpower. We subscribe to this sentiment, and we believe that the president's assessment of the situation is correct. Nevertheless, it seemed something less than forthright when we pretended, in our approval of this presidential decision, to continue the impression in itself as anything but one of the major steps toward the solution of the nation's - to use the president's own words - "emergency manpower."

The requirement for emergency manpower is a fundamental element in the nation's ability to mobilize, deploy and sustain the military forces which might be needed to defend our national interests in time of crisis. Our Association believes this emergency manpower must be pre-planned manpower. This will insure that we can fill out understrength or even non-existent units on the first day of war. Pre-trained manpower will assure that we have a certain number of trained individuals who can be used as casualty replacements in 60 days after a war is underway.

To be perfectly candid we do not think it is a good idea for the National Guard for those individuals to come from trained Guard units, either, which is needed to carry out some wartime mission. Therefore, this Association continues to believe that a process to examine and classify registrants. Selective Service officials must know early on which men are fit to serve, and how they might best serve in the event of a national emergency. We also believe it would be fulf - as proposed by Montomery - to draft and train 200,000 young men annually - pickled on a randon, lottery basis with no loopholes for conscientious objectors - to build-up the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) and to keep it at a level such that when the need arises we have a reservoir of trained emergency manpower. Right now this is clearly not the case.

The president has declared that "the continuance of peacetime recruitment..." does not foresee a return to the draft. He has stated that in the event of national emergency, "No such emergency now exists, and registration is in no way a proxy for conscription."

We are hopeful that sooner or later and the sooner the better - the president will see that a more intensively Selective Service registration program is not a repudiation of the All Volunteer Force (AIF).

The AIF idea works within certain parameters. It works as a peacetime force. With the mobilization of all of its National Guard and Reserve augmentation, it can handle the needs of the early stages of major combat. By no stretch of the imagination can the army of forces trained in the active segment of the AIF be portrayed as a wartime force.

No nation in the entire history of man has ever been able to maintain a professional army and send it off to fight the war with no further involvement on the part of the citizenry. Our basic problem, and a very human problem in it, stems from the fact that we would like to avoid the issue of emergency manpower... until we really need the manpower for the emergency.

We do not believe the times, the technology, the threat of our active forces to us to wait until it is convenient to address the problem. It is essential that we take the steps today to ensure that the trained augmentation we may need tomorrow.

Several crises of recent years have taken the vital essence of military force... in the form of several million reservists in the trained augmentation. We need to start now, as soon as possible, to train the emergency manpower, sure to be needed if we are to be strong enough to do the job.

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