

THE BIOCENTRIC INSTITUTE

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MEMORANDUM

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America's military draft ended in the wreckage of the Vietnam War, replaced by an All-Volunteer Force. The draft is viewed as ill-equipped to fight the kind of asymmetrical conflicts now waged by armed drones and small teams of highly trained Special Forces. In the run-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Defense Secretary Donald dismissed draftees as of "no value" to the modern military.

But in this communication, William B. Dickinson recalls being drafted just before the 1953 Korean War cease-fire and spending two years in the U.S. Army Counter-Intelligence Corps. "Although spared combat," says Dickinson, a former Washington editor and journalism professor, "I never doubted that my summoned body and its disposition belonged to Uncle Sam." He believes that his service, and that of other conscripted soldiers in other wars, strengthened our sense of what it means to be a citizen.

"The volunteer force that has replaced the short-term citizen-soldier may make sense in today's technology-driven armed services," he writes. "But without a sharing of sacrifice and risk with the broader population of young people, unintended consequences have weakened the democratic experience. We need to ask: In an era when war is not only undeclared but unacknowledged, how much does the individual owe to the state as opposed to himself?"

In a largely ignored 2010 lecture at Duke University, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates voiced some of those consequences, including the growing costs associated with an all-volunteer force. But his greatest concern was the fact that "whatever their fond sentiments for men and women in uniform, for most Americans the wars remain an abstraction." He also warned of the risk over time of developing a cadre of military leaders that "politically, culturally and geographically have less and less in common with the people they have sworn to defend."

Dickinson says that for all its failings, conscription was a litmus test of our nation's willingness to go to war -- with conviction. Today, he concludes, "all the problems of equity and shared sacrifice remain unaddressed." He wrote his essay for the nonprofit Biocentric Institute, which conducts programs and studies directed toward the enhancement of quality of life for all peoples. **This report and earlier ones are available on the Web site of The Clifton Institute (www.cliftoninstitute.org) and may be reprinted in whole or in part, or quoted, without charge or restriction.** Opinions expressed are those of the contributing author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Clifton Institute, sponsor of the Biocentric Institute.