

BOOK REVIEWS

Cohen, Eliot A. *Citizens and Soldiers: The Dilemmas of Military Service*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.

The broad purpose of this book is “to provide a context for America’s current military manpower debate, to analyze the nature of our difficulties and the extent to which we can master them.” Author and assistant professor of government at Harvard University, Eliot Cohen seeks the answer to the following question: Why has the United States, unlike every other twentieth-century Great Power and World Power, failed to settle on a durable system of peacetime military service?

Cohen argues that in devising systems of military service all countries must resolve two clusters of claims — on the one hand, those of foreign/military policy and on the other, those of justice/ideology. An examination of the history of American military manpower policy, according to the author, reveals the truth of the contention that the United States cannot avoid certain irresolvable manpower difficulties. He writes that the elements of the dilemma are two-fold. First, the United States must maintain a large standing force for all-out conventional war on the European continent and must also be prepared to fight small wars. Second, the American regime is at once liberal and egalitarian. Thus, a substantial and vocal portion of the public will be unhappy no matter what policy is adopted. In short, this two-cornered dilemma, Cohen argues, has obstructed any comprehensive approach to the U.S. military manpower problem.

The uniqueness of *Citizens and Soldiers*, as opposed to other general studies of military manpower, is primarily one of perspective. The author views military organizations as, first, fundamentally political, and second, fundamentally institutional. Taking Clausewitz’s dictum that war is a continuation of politics by other means to mean much more than that war is a tool of statecraft, Cohen suggests “that politics pervades war and preparation for it; that . . . military institutions are political institutions.” Although the book incorporates historical and theoretical material, it is neither a history nor a disquisition on political philosophy. In the words of its author, it is, rather, “a work in the field of military politics, which is a branch of political science.”

Organizationally, the first chapter of the book discusses the broad classes of factors that influence the development of military service systems. Next, the origins of modern systems of military service are examined. In Chapters 3 and 4, Cohen deals with “total” and “small” wars. In response to the question — What system of conscription is best suited to the demands of all-out war? — he writes: “The answer depends largely on the amount of time available for modernization The expansible/selective service system was suited in theory (if not completely in practice) to the United States when she could rely on months or even years during which to assemble and train her forces.” During “short, sharp

conflicts,” the author maintains that “a completely professional force will likely be the most effective and politically usable tool of a World Power.”

Subsequent chapters discuss the uniqueness of military service as a political obligation, the tensions between liberal and democratic attitudes toward compulsory military service, the military manpower dilemmas that have beset America since World War II, and the decision to establish an all-volunteer force in 1970. In the final chapter, in presenting a possible solution to America’s manpower dilemmas, Cohen makes two substantial points regarding the U.S. military manpower system. One, there is no one form of military service that will satisfy both military needs and the more political claims of justice. Two, “the worst system of military service is that which changes constantly, which invites paralyzing debates and accusations of inadequacy or injustice, which tacitly encourages manipulators of rules to evade service and thereby to undermine the moral basis of military obligations.” In sum, according to the author, the difficult task confronting the United States is to devise a system that is not merely fair and effective, but durable as well.

This is a timely, relevant and scholarly study that addresses an issue that is certain to affect significantly American security and well-being in the future. Chapter endnotes and a four-page selected bibliography provide valuable reference data for those seeking additional insights into the subject of military service. *Citizens and Soldiers* is highly recommended for policymakers, both civilian and military, and for the serious student of national security affairs.

James B. Motley, Ph.D.
Director, National Security Studies
Defense Systems, Incorporated