US imperialism wargames the military draft

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3 August 2026

On July 22, the U.S. Selective Service System issued a request for quotations seeking a contractor to develop a computer simulation of a military draft. The project is another indication that the American ruling class is making concrete preparations to mobilize hundreds of thousands or potentially millions of young people for future wars.

The proposed “Readiness Simulation” would model the Selective Service System’s entire mobilization pipeline, from registration and selection to notification, classification and delivery of conscripts to the military.

According to the solicitation, the agency wants to test different mobilization and policy scenarios, determine staffing and resource requirements, assess the impact of sudden surges and identify delays and bottlenecks that could obstruct the rapid induction of conscripts.

The contractor will be required to develop a government-owned system that operates in a Selective Service-designated cloud environment and uses anonymized aggregate data. The simulation must allow officials to alter variables and examine how the conscription apparatus would operate under different conditions.

More detailed requirements make clear that the project goes far beyond maintaining a list of draft-age men. The system will model processing through Military Entrance Processing Stations, including no-shows, medical disqualifications, claims for deferment and the diversion of conscientious objectors into the Alternative Service Program.

The project represents a significant modernization of American draft planning. Active military inductions ended in 1973 amid mass opposition to the Vietnam War, widespread disillusionment and growing resistance among conscripted soldiers.

Subsequent Selective Service exercises largely concentrated on local boards and the processing of paper records. The new project would create a digital environment in which officials can pressure-test the entire conscription system and identify obstacles to rapidly supplying the military with draft-age men.

The solicitation does not identify a particular war or estimate the number of conscripts the system would be expected to process. Its publication, however, takes place amid the expanding US war against Iran and advanced preparations for military conflicts involving China, Russia and North Korea.

Any one of these conflicts, particularly a direct war between nuclear-armed powers, could produce demands for military personnel far beyond what can be supplied by the present all-volunteer force.

The US military and both capitalist parties have maintained a studied silence on how many American youth and workers could be killed or wounded in a major ground war against Iran. Despite classified Pentagon briefings provided to leading Democrats and Republicans, neither party has demanded the release of casualty projections or an explanation of the war’s likely duration and cost.

The Pentagon undoubtedly prepares such estimates behind closed doors. Military planners must calculate expected casualties to determine requirements for replacement troops, medical support, equipment and unit rotations. The population is denied this information because an honest account of the potential consequences would provoke enormous opposition.

A ground campaign against Iran would confront immense military and logistical difficulties. Iran is a country of more than 90 million people with extensive coastlines, mountain ranges and large armed forces.

Even publications and military analysts that support the basic framework of US foreign policy have warned that a ground or amphibious campaign against Iran could become a modern-day Gallipoli. The *Times*, the *Free Press*, the US Naval Institute and the Australian

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Strategic Policy Institute have all invoked the disastrous 1915 campaign when assessing the consequences of attempting to force open the Strait of Hormuz or seize Iranian territory.

At Gallipoli, British and French imperialism initially attempted to force a naval passage through the heavily defended Dardanelles. After mines and Ottoman shore batteries sank three battleships and damaged several others, the Allies escalated to a ground invasion of the peninsula. The campaign ended in humiliating defeat after months of fighting and hundreds of thousands of casualties.

Iran's mines, missiles, drones and fortified coastline could turn an operation initially presented as limited into a protracted ground war requiring an enormous influx of troops and replacements.

Vendor proposals for the Selective Service simulation are due August 14. The accelerated procurement coincides with the introduction of automatic draft registration by December 18.

Automatic registration was mandated under the bipartisan National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2026. It transfers responsibility for registration from individuals to the Selective Service System, which will assemble its database using information collected by other federal agencies.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* warned in "Trump's selective service filing prepares for activation of US military draft," automatic registration does not itself activate conscription. It does, however, expand and modernize the administrative machinery that would be required to carry one out.

The new simulation project goes another step. It is designed to test whether that machinery could withstand the strains of an actual mobilization and rapidly deliver conscripts to the military.

These preparations are unfolding as the Trump administration escalates the war against Iran. The bombing campaign has failed to achieve Washington's objectives, including the subordination of Iran and unrestricted American domination of the Middle East.

Trump has refused to rule out the deployment of ground forces. In a July 14 interview with Fox News, he declared, "Sometimes you need a ground campaign, but we have other people that will do the ground campaign for us."

The Democrats' position was summed up by Michigan Senator Gary Peters during a July 21 hearing with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. Peters did not oppose the illegal war. Instead, he berated Hegseth for supposedly failing to prosecute it effectively: "You don't have a strategy. You don't have a long-term plan to actually win this war. Win the war!"

The war against Iran is itself one theater of an expanding world war. Ukraine's recent attack on an Iranian commercial vessel in the Caspian Sea, which killed one sailor, and joint US-Saudi strikes against Iranian-aligned militias in Iraq demonstrate how rapidly supposedly separate regional wars are merging.

A military draft is not inevitable. But the ruling class is preparing for one, and workers and young people must prepare their own response.

As the Socialist Equality Party explained in its April statement, "Oppose the draft! Build a working class movement against imperialist war!" the struggle against conscription cannot be entrusted to the Democratic Party or any faction of the political establishment.

Workers and young people must organize independently of both capitalist parties and build a mass socialist movement against war. This movement must demand an end to the war against Iran, the abolition of the draft and the standing army, and the dismantling of the vast military-intelligence apparatus used to wage war abroad and repression at home.

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