Creating the Modern Army

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Published by University Press of Kansas

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Introduction

The Quest for a National Military Policy, 1878–1920

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a small number of officers became aware of two major developments that would be of concern to the U.S. Army. The first was the disappearance of the frontier and with it the disappearance of one of the military’s major missions, serving as the constabulary force controlling relations between white settlers in the West and Native American residents. The other was recent and dramatic changes in warfare that could affect American security. The officers were especially influenced by the wars fought between 1866 and 1871 that led to the unification of Germany. In these wars Prussia, although smaller and far less prosperous than its two major opponents, Austria-Hungary and France, quickly and decisively defeated each of them. For these officers, the Prussian successes stood in dramatic contrast to the prolonged and excessively bloody slugging match that was the American Civil War. Aware also that the new drives to imperialism also left areas outside of Europe vulnerable, including the United States, they sought to reform the U.S. Army by organizing it along European, and especially German, lines. This meant, in particular, creating a centralized control structure such as a general staff, developing an officer corps that would be professionally educated, and creating a trained reserve force that could be quickly called up in the event of a war.

Two major factors, however, made this seem an almost hopeless task. One was that American public opinion was traditionally antipathetic, if not openly hostile, to regular armies organized by central governments. This attitude was inherited from English experience with standing armies in the seventeenth century under both the Stuart kings and Oliver Cromwell, during which the army was seen as an instrument of despotism and threat to liberty. This attitude was then reinforced by Americans’ experience with the British Army immediately before and during the American Revolution. Hence, while those who framed the Constitution accepted the need for a regular army, they hedged it about with safeguards to prevent it from becoming a tool of despotism.
Moreover, well before the Revolution the American colonists had already developed two other forms of military organization based on the principle of citizen-soldiers as alternatives to a standing army. The first of these was the local militia, made up of citizens who maintained arms and underwent some degree of training. Headed by local officers who were often elected, these units were usually sufficient to maintain social order and to defend their communities from threats from Native Americans. The second came in the form of ad-hoc volunteer forces usually formed to meet specific military exigencies. These units were usually recruited in communities by prominent civilians who became their officers. A large number of such units fought in colonial wars and in the Revolution. They also played a major role in the Mexican War (1846–48) and, until conscription was introduced, made up almost entirely the Union and Confederate armies in the Civil War. Similar units, notably the Rough Riders, were still active in the Spanish-American War (1898). During the nineteenth century, civilian leaders of some of these units had received at least the rudiments of military education at a few private colleges, most notably Norwich Academy in Vermont. During and after the Civil War, many regular officers were suitably impressed with the fighting quality of volunteers so that they sought to regularize the volunteer tradition. The Morrill Act of 1862 that created the land-grant university system included a provision requiring these schools to provide some form of military training to students so they might later take on leadership roles in volunteer units if needed.\footnote{1}

One major problem for the reformers, then, was that any effort to reorganize the army along German lines would be highly unacceptable to an American public that was not only deeply suspicious of regular armies but also felt that the two homegrown civilian-based alternatives were more than adequate for meeting the nation’s needs, especially since an ocean separated the United States from any major European power.

The second major factor facing reformers was conservative resistance from within the army itself. There were two aspects of this. First, until well into the 1890s, much of the army’s senior leadership was comprised of officers who had served in the Union army during the Civil War. Many of these officers entered the war as part of volunteer units. As historian J. P. Clark points out, having been virtually self-taught, this generation of officers saw little value in reforms that stressed professional military education. The fact that the Union army had been victorious in the war seemed to vindicate their approach to military leadership to the point that they saw no need to change.\footnote{2} The second aspect was that the major political power in the nineteenth-century American army lay with the chiefs of the bureaus, such as the Quartermaster Corps, that supported the
army. These senior officers, having lifetime tenure in their posts in Washington, had built up close relations with Congress. As James M. Hewes has observed, “Bureau chiefs in office for life . . . had greater Congressional influence than passing secretaries or line officers.” As a result, during the 1860s, the bureaus had become virtually independent fiefdoms within the army, and unsurprisingly, the chiefs were hostile to any reform movement that challenged their position.

The reform movement was initiated by the efforts of one officer, Lieutenant Colonel Emory Upton. One of America’s most influential military reformers, Upton, born in 1839, had graduated from West Point in 1861 just in time to participate in the Civil War. In the eastern campaigns, he proved to be a brilliant and courageous officer, becoming a brigadier general of volunteers by the end of the war. Upton was greatly impressed by the fighting quality of the volunteer soldiers in the army but was disgusted by what he saw as the ignorance of many senior volunteer officers. He attributed the latter to both the almost dominating role played by political influence in the selection of senior officers, especially in the state militias, and to the lack of any systematic military education.

After 1865, Upton began to develop a program of reform to address the problems he had seen during the war. He started by developing a new and simplified system of infantry tactics more suitable for volunteer soldiers. This was adopted by the army in 1867. After that he turned his attention to the issue of officer education. In 1875 he convinced General William T. Sherman, then the commanding general of the army, to send him to Europe and Asia to study military systems there. In Europe Upton was particularly impressed by the German army and its rigorous system for the professional education of its officers. Returning to the United States, he wrote a report of his trip, later published as The Armies of Asia and Europe, in which, among other things, he lauded the Prussians’ progressive military-education system, their general-staff system, and their reserve system. In addition, he proposed his own idea for raising an army based on volunteers, which he called National Volunteers since they would be trained by the Regular Army rather than by what he saw as the heavily politicized state militias. Regular regiments would then contain one or two skeletonized battalions of National Volunteers that, given the popular excitement typical at the beginning of hostilities, would be filled with new volunteer recruits.

Upton had also come to see that America’s major military failing was a lack of a distinct military policy to guide the development of its assets. The objective of such a policy should be to have the nation prepared for war before hostilities started. Its major elements would be, first, that the Regular Army was to be free of political influences outside of those provided for in the constitution. Second,
the nation’s existing military force would be supplemented by volunteer soldiers trained by the Regular Army rather than the state militias. And third, the professional officers would receive a progressive military education to prepare them for each level of command.

Upton’s ideas initially attracted little attention even in the army. Few officers saw any purpose in a progressive education system aimed at higher command in what was essentially a frontier constabulary force and in which few could expect to be promoted beyond captain. Frustrated, Upton planned a second book in which he would make his appeal for a modern European-style military policy directly to Americans rather than as a gloss on an official report. The new work, to be called “The Military Policy of the United States from 1775,” was to excoriate the nation for never having developed such a policy while advocating his own ideas. Upton, however, died in 1881 before he could finish it himself.⁶

Yet, within a few years of his death, Upton’s vision of an American Army led by a new breed of officers who identified themselves primarily as educated military professionals began to attract a growing number of adherents. These men could be called the “new professionals.” A small trickle of such officers began to follow Upton in making trips to Germany to study its military system. Initially, the new professionals were just a tiny minority in the army, but their numbers grew, and their influence grew even faster. That influence depended on their organization and their control of powerful positions in the army. Their organization was founded in the new military schools and professional associations that they helped establish in this period. The most important of these organizations was the Military Service Institute, founded in 1879. Headed by General Sherman, the institute gave respectability to the idea of officership in the army as a learned profession, while its organ, the Journal of the Military Service Institute, became the major intellectual clearing house of ideas concerning reform. Other new professional associations, such as the Cavalry Association founded in 1885 and the Infantry Society founded in 1893, along with the journals sponsored by these groups, provided the new professionals with additional opportunities to form networks, read the ideas of others, widen their circle, and establish their reputations through publications.

The influence gained by the new professionals by means of their leadership in these associations was then reinforced by their slowly taking control of the Adjutant General’s Office. Located close to the office of the secretary of war, the Adjutant General’s Office was seen as the premier bureau in the post–Civil War army and the only one concerned with the overall direction of the military. As such it attracted reform-minded officers and, by the 1880s, became a center for institutional change.
By the 1890s, this movement had coalesced to the point that its adherents could begin to articulate a program of reform largely based on Upton’s ideas. The elements of this program clustered around the general idea that the Regular Army should be transformed from a western constabulary and garrison force into a small but compact European-style mobile striking force. This would call for a number of major changes, including the reorganization and concentration of the army, then organized around regiments, into tactical units such as divisions and corps; a shift of focus in its leadership structure from administration to strategic direction; the development of a professional, educated officer corps; and the creation of a means by which the limited strength of the peacetime army could be temporarily augmented in time of an emergency by militarily trained civilian reserves.

Progress toward achieving these goals was made in several directions during this decade. In particular, the army began to systematize its professional-education system. In 1890, officers below the rank of major were required to pass a written test before being considered eligible for promotion. To help prepare for this examination, authorities encouraged regiments to create “lyceums” as the basis for an informal junior-officer educational system. At the same time pressure grew for creating more branch schools, such as the older School of Artillery at Fort Monroe, Virginia, while the existing School of Application for Infantry and Cavalry at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, was gradually upgraded into a more academic staff college. Finally, some officers began to call for the establishment of an Army War College as a counterpart to the recently formed Naval War College.

Thus, in the later 1890s, the new professionals began to feel confident that they had the organization, power, and articulated program necessary to carry out a major reform of the army along Uptonian lines. They were still a distinct minority, but the disaggregated structure of the army and its tradition of quiet loyalty deprived any opposition of a focal point to oppose the reform movement now emanating from the Adjutant General’s Office. The reformers, therefore, were far more concerned with congressional and public apathy or even hostility to updating the military. While army leadership could carry out many reforms internally without the sanction of Congress, most major programs would require legislative action. Yet in the previous three decades, the army had enjoyed little success in getting reform measures through Congress. A major effort to make use of the rising war sentiment in 1897 to push through such legislation also foundered.

The cause of the failure was opposition from the increasingly energized National Guard, as the former state militias were now called, which underscored
the fact that it would now be necessary for army reformers to take this service into consideration in any plans for further development of a military reform program. As professionals, many officers in the Regular Army had little more than contempt for the Guard. Seen as both the institutional descendent of the American militia tradition and the product of state-centered political patronage, they considered the Guard to be the embodiment of military amateurism. Since such amateurism directly denied the value of the systematically acquired military education that the new professionals considered central, the Guard was anathema to most of the reformers. Finally, as Michael Neiberg points out, regular officers were suspicious of and prejudiced against the democratic character of guard units, with the election of officers and the familiarity inherent when officers and men came from the same community.  

This contemptuous view of the National Guard was, in many respects, neither fair nor accurate. While many guard officers did owe their position to patronage, many were also sincere military enthusiasts who sought to be as well trained and professional as time and resources would allow. And while it was still a state organization, the National Guard, as its new name implied, was also acquiring a sense of national identity, which was institutionalized by the creation of the National Guard Association in 1879. Finally, guardsmen saw themselves as the embodiment of the citizen-soldier, a military tradition they considered to be uniquely American, just as many felt that the European-inspired military vision of a professional soldier was distinctly un-American. Thus, in early 1898 the Guard was able to take advantage of its powerful state political backing and of its attractiveness to many in Congress as a truly American fighting force to defeat the army’s reform plan, instead winning for itself the reserve role in any significant war in the future. This victory was an educational experience for the new professionals, who now understood the need to work in cooperation with the Guard in developing further reforms.

America’s experience with the Spanish-American War precipitated a major surge of military reform. While American arms had been gloriously victorious, the chaos that surrounded the mobilization for the war made clear how unready the nation had been and still was for any significant military emergency. Together with the support of President Theodore Roosevelt and a strong Republican dominance in Congress, military reformers were able to secure a series of major changes in the period between 1901 and 1903 that gave them much of what they wanted. While Roosevelt’s secretary of war, Elihu Root, has been given the credit for these improvements, most of the legislation behind them was actually written by the reformers. The so-called Root Reforms included the
Army Reorganization Act of 1901, which allowed for the expansion of the army to 89,000 men and called for the creation of the Army War College, providing the capstone to efforts to create a system of professional education, starting with the regimental lyceum and ending at the War College. The key reform, however, was the General Staff Act of 1903. This measure encompassed a nearly revolutionary restructuring of the army. The existing army had long been largely an administrative organization, providing a variety of military activities associated with controlling the frontier and guarding major coastal harbors, all of which was controlled by the administrative bureaus in Washington. The General Staff Act transformed it into a tactically organized military organization controlled by the General Staff, to which the bureaus themselves would be subordinated. These reforms were made politically possible by the support of the National Guard, which, in turn, got the Efficiency in Militia Act of 1903, providing for the federalization of the Guard in a time of emergency and thereby officially making it the nation’s reserve force. Finally, in 1904, at the culmination of the reform process, Root published Upton’s *The Military Policy of the United States* as a tribute to the man credited with the vision upon which the entire reform movement was founded.8

The Root reforms were both an end of one phase of the army reform movement and the beginning of a new phase. They largely fulfilled the vision of the new professionals, but those aspirations were largely limited to the concerns of the late nineteenth century and the strategic situation created by the Spanish-American War. And now with their agenda largely fulfilled, most of these officers retired from promoting further reforms during their careers.

The new professionals were succeeded by a generation of military reformers who might be called the “young professionals.” These officers were largely the product of the new military schools, which gave them a core of similar ideas and created a sense of corporate identity, self-assurance, and superiority sometimes bordering on arrogance. Convinced that they had received the revealed word in modern military matters, they impatiently favored revolutionary over evolutionary change.9 Inspired also by the publication of Upton’s book, the young professionals made the establishment of a national military policy the focal point of their desired revolution. As their influence grew, this effort increasingly became the central long-term concern of reformers within the army’s leadership. As with Upton, the young professionals considered the purpose of a military policy was to prepare the nation for war by the systematic arrangement of all military organizations in the country around a single plan for mobilization. Despite the Root reforms, the country’s military matters were still handled on a piecemeal basis,
with the role of the National Guard as one of the most anomalous of the pieces. This concern for the systematic organization of the nation’s military resources became far more acute after the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5). In this conflict, as well as in the earlier Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), a small but well-prepared power quickly defeated a larger but unprepared power. Moreover, in fighting the Russians, the Japanese were able to transport an army over water and still defeat them, a fact that seemed to demonstrate the actual vulnerability of the United States to an invasion by an overseas power. This was followed in the United States by a brief war scare with Japan, provoked by the treatment of Japanese nationals in this country. These events created a concern that the mobile striking force provided for by the Root Reforms would be inadequate in the face of a maritime invasion. Many in the army began to visualize the United States as a wealthy but virtually unarmed plum ripe for the picking by any aggressive major power. For the young professionals, what was now needed was a way by which the country could quickly raise an army of 200,000–400,000 men. Thus, after 1907, the question of how to create a reliably trained reserve force became the central issue of any discussion of a national military policy. This again called into question the issue of the reliability of the National Guard while making the various reserve systems used in Europe, in which men were called to the colors for several years and then returned to civilian life to serve as a trained reserve, increasingly attractive.

This movement began to coalesce with the appointment of Major General Leonard Wood as chief of staff of the army in 1910. Wood was a dynamic, energetic, and highly charismatic figure who was ambitious to bring about dramatic change to the army. This would have made him a natural ally of the young professionals. This alignment, however, was slow in developing. While the major goal of the young professionals was the creation of a national military policy, Wood’s interest in that idea was tepid at best. He was, by temperament, far more an independent crusader for projects rather than the creator of systems and organizations that could, finally, restrict his own freedom of action. Hence, rather than establish a comprehensive national military policy, he preferred to create a Council of National Defense, made up of both civilian and military leaders, which would garner political support for his individual ideas for military change.

Wood’s initial efforts to go it alone, however, failed. A naïve plan to mobilize support for the creation of a Council of National Defense by releasing to Congress and the press a secret report demonstrating the nation’s vulnerability to invasion blew up in his face due to his failure to consult with President William Howard Taft ahead of time. This was followed by an effort to increase the
military reliability of the National Guard by further federalization backed by drill pay. This, too, failed when it was derailed by the powerful state adjutants general, who feared loss of control.

Wood’s dalliance with the National Guard also strained his relations with the young professionals. They fully shared the Regular Army’s lack of confidence in the military value of the Guard, and Wood’s failure contributed to a growing consensus among them to abandon the Guard as a reserve force and focus instead on creating a European-style reserve system. Left to themselves, the young professionals at the same time made further progress in defining the elements of their own reform agenda. In addition, the experience gained by working with various aspects of military policy in the General Staff during 1911 increased their sense of confidence that an actual national military policy could be formulated. Thus, by the end of that year, Wood was in danger of being left behind by the reform movement that he was supposed to be leading.

Wood and the young professionals in the General Staff were brought together in 1912 in the face of a sudden political threat to the entire reform program. The threat came primarily from growing hostility to their efforts within the army. One source of this opposition came from the administrative and logistical bureaus, whose accustomed dominance in the army was undercut by the General Staff Act of 1903. Despite the provisions of that law, these offices still retained significant power in Washington. Further resistance came from traditionalists who still made up the bulk of the officer corps. Their major concern was the growing interest in the European-style reserve program. For them, the central and most attractive feature of the old army was that it involved working with long-term and highly trained enlisted men who remained satisfactorily deferential to the officers. The idea of these career soldiers being largely replaced by men enlisted for only a short term for training purposes seemed to imply a new culture that was neither comfortable, rewarding, nor even martial. Active opposition from the traditionalists had largely been muted by the fact that they were disaggregated, voiceless, and traditionally at odds with the bureaus. But the growing evidence of Wood’s commitment to a program of far-reaching reform, as well as his own personal arrogance, began to draw these two sources of resistance together, making an effective resistance movement possible if a leader and an issue could be found.

Toward the end of 1911, that leader appeared in the person of the army’s adjutant general, Major General Frederick C. Ainsworth. Adjutant general since 1907, he had built a reputation as a reformer by making the administrative activities of the agencies he headed more efficient. In addition, Ainsworth was highly
skilled at cultivating good personal relations with congressmen, who thought highly of him. He also deeply resented the fact that the General Staff Act had ended the supremacy of his office in the army. By 1911, he had become aware of the growing anger among the traditionalist officers regarding the reserve issue and saw that he could restore the leadership of the Adjutant General’s Office by using this discontent and his own relationships in Congress to overthrow the supremacy of the General Staff.

In doing this, Ainsworth was also aware that the new Democratic majority that took over in the House of Representatives after the 1910 elections could easily be made sympathetic to his ideas. Taking advantage of the party’s interest in cost reduction, Ainsworth helped the Democratic chair of the House Military Affairs Committee, James Hay of Virginia, develop a package of proposals that would constitute a specific Democratic military-reform program. While the proposals were suggested to Hay principally as a means of reducing costs, their real purpose was to reduce the power of the General Staff. The heart of the program was a consolidation of the bureaus and the General Staff into a single office dominated by the adjutant general. In addition, to gain the support of the traditionalists in the army the reforms also proposed increasing the initial enlistment contract from three to five years, which would not only reduce recruiting costs but also derail the development of any European-style reserve system. For his part, Hay used committee hearings and questionnaires sent directly to field officers to give them a chance to voice their opinions on the enlistment issue and to demonstrate that Wood did not speak for the army.

Both Wood and the young professionals saw the dangers posed by the Hay proposals to be introduced in Congress in December 1911, but they differed as to how to respond. Wood planned a multiple counteroffensive to undercut Ainsworth’s influence among the traditionalist officers while presenting Congress with his own cost-cutting program based on closing obsolete bases and creating a Council of National Defense. The response of the young professionals, who had little enthusiasm for either closing posts or creating the council, was to develop and publish a statement of a comprehensive military policy that would demonstrate the ability of the General Staff to take the lead in meeting the nation’s military needs. Sensing possible public-relations value in such a document, Wood accepted their idea and appointed a committee of four General Staff officers—Colonel R. P. Davis from the coast artillery, Captain William Lassiter from the field artillery, Captain George Van Horn Moseley from the cavalry, and Captain John McAuley Palmer from the infantry—to undertake the project.
The three captains selected were among the most brilliant of the young professionals then making their way through the General Staff. Both Lassiter and Moseley eventually became major generals and played critical roles in the development in the army in the interwar period. And although he only reached the rank of brigadier general during his military career, Palmer, the archetypical military intellectual, was by far the most influential officer in shaping the army’s ideas about military policy going into the 1920s and was responsible for the most important and innovative elements of the committee’s eventual statement.\textsuperscript{21}

As a first effort to design a national military policy, the document prepared by the four officers, later published with the title \textit{Report on the Organization of the Land Forces of the United States} (hereafter referred to as the \textit{Report}), was surprisingly successful. It provoked controversy but finally received a reluctant and highly ambiguous acceptance by the General Staff. Over the next eight years, it remained a major influence in further efforts by both the General Staff and Congress to formulate a military policy. Finally, its basic conceptual elements became part of the National Defense Act of 1920 and have served as the nation’s fundamental military policy ever since.

The \textit{Report} stated that the basis of any national military policy should be to provide a military force sufficient to defend the nation from a threat from any major European power or Japan without placing a major strain on the economy. The proposed solution was to provide for an economically minimal Regular Army to meet limited needs, such as an expeditionary force, but that could be readily expanded to up to 300,000 or more men in the event of a national emergency. This would be achieved by the creation of a three-tiered force structure would be made up of the following:

1. A Regular Army organized in divisions and cavalry brigades and ready for immediate use as an expeditionary force or for other purposes for which the citizen soldiery is not available, or for employment in the first stages of war while the citizen soldiery is mobilizing and concentrating.
2. An army of national citizen soldiers organized in peace in complete divisions and prepared to reenforce \textit{sic} the Regular Army in time of war.
3. An army of volunteers to be organized under prearranged plans when greater forces are required than can be furnished by the Regular Army and the organized citizen soldiery.\textsuperscript{22}

The bulk of the \textit{Report} was devoted to how the “mobile army,” to be made up of Regular Army troops stationed in the country, would be tactically organized.
It was this part of the *Report* that attracted the most attention of other senior officers and was the source of the most controversy.

The second and third tiers of the proposed force structure would be made up of two different types of reserve forces. The second tier was to be an organized manpower pool available as a means of expanding the Regular Army from a somewhat reduced and skeletonized peacetime force to full wartime size at first and then providing replacements for losses incurred in the initial phases of a conflict. In this regard, the *Report* followed the line favored in published discussions that this reserve force be raised in roughly the same way that the major European powers did. It proposed that the existing three-year enlistment be increased to six years, half spent with the colors and the balance as a ready reserve. Since enlistments in the U.S. Army were voluntary rather than compulsory as in Europe, the authors did not think American public opinion would oppose this plan.

The other reserve force, the third tier, would be a large citizen army raised in response to a major war. The idea of a citizen army was Palmer’s distinctive contribution to the report and the heart of what he considered to be a proper military policy for a democracy. In the reforms at the turn of the century, the National Guard had been given the role as the primary reserve force. For the *Report*, however, Palmer analyzed exhaustively the constitutional limitations that restricted the usefulness of the Guard, especially in conflicts outside the borders of the United States and concluded that these limitations were not only problematic but also not easily overcome by further legislation. At the same time, he realized that any effort to create a large reserve force by means of rotating enlisted men through the Regular Army for their training would be toxic with the American public, smacking of European militarism. To be accepted by the public, he argued, any citizen reserve force would have to be seen as part of a distinctly American military tradition. As stated early in the *Report*, “The practical military statesman . . . does not propose impracticable or foreign institutions, but seeks to develop the necessary vigor and energy within the familiar institutions that have grown with the national life.”23 The *Report* then went on to point out that volunteers had been the traditional American means of augmenting the country’s small Regular Army in all the wars of the nineteenth century. Therefore, the major reserve force should be a citizen army made up of volunteers, the insinuation being that this part of the proposal was nothing more than a codification and institutionalization of traditional American practice.

But the authors then pointed out that current threats to the United States meant that this tradition had to be modified in two ways. First, the volunteers would have to be more than a mere manpower pool upon which a reserve force
could be built when needed. Given the complexity and size of modern military units, effectively mobilizing such a force would take far too long. Instead, the volunteer citizen force would have to be already organized on paper into its own tactically structured army, a virtual citizen army. Upon mobilization, each volunteer would report to his specifically designated unit headquarters for further training. This post would already contain prepositioned supplies and munitions and a core of trained reserve officers. To augment the latter, the Report suggested that the training ongoing in land-grant universities be organized and put under some degree of federal control to produce the desired military results, a foreshadowing of the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program established later. With all this set up ahead of time, the Report confidently predicted, a well-trained volunteer citizen army could be ready to take the field in just six months.

The second modification to the American volunteer tradition was trickier. For the citizen army to be ready to take the field in just six months, volunteers would need to have already had six months prior military training during peacetime. So, creating this quick-mobilizing reserve army would involve the Regular Army providing military training for a large number of civilians in peacetime. Yet instituting any such training would again raise the specter of the army militarizing society, so the question of how the volunteers would receive prior training remained unanswered.

Finally, it should also be noted that while the Report itself was largely the result of the efforts by the rising military professionals to reform the army along the lines proposed by Upton, there were other national forces working along the same line as well. As J. P. Clark has noted, the efforts to rationalize the army’s structure was also influenced by the rising culture of progressivism in the United States. On a parallel track, James Hewes argues that the reforms were also the product of the efforts of political and industrial leaders to reorganize the army along efficient business lines.24

Meanwhile, the legislative battle over Ainsworth and Hay’s reform bill began in the House of Representatives in December 1911. The fight was tumultuous and bitter. At one point, Wood was able to push Ainsworth into a position that forced him to resign as adjutant general. This served not only to increase the bitterness of the struggle in Congress but also to focus it on Wood himself; it became so personal that a move was made to include a description of the requirements for chief of staff that would have made Wood ineligible. But with the patient intervention of both Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson and President Taft, the situation was ameliorated, and a much modified Hay bill finally passed with little damage done
to the General Staff. Yet it did include provisions that the enlistment contract be extended to four years so as to preclude the creation of a European-style reserve. The work of Palmer’s committee played little role in all this, but its recommendations remained to serve as the basis for future reform efforts.

With the end of the struggle over the Hay bill, the effort to create a national military policy entered a new phase that culminated in the summer of 1916 with the actual passage of a legislation creating such a policy. As before, Wood and the young professionals in the General Staff tended to go their separate ways. But they remained committed to the overall project of basing America’s defense needs on some kind of citizen army and remained focused on the principal issue of creating a large pool of trained manpower available as a reserve. Yet their approaches were different. While the General Staff continued to seek a legislatively approved policy based on the concept of a citizen army, Wood sought to create the foundations of support for such a policy by popularizing both the army and military service.

The general did this, in part, through a major public-relations campaign largely carried out by himself and aimed at convincing American elites of the value to society of the army itself and of providing military training for the country’s young males. He pursued a vigorous schedule of speaking at chambers of commerce, boards of trade, and university graduations. Yet his most significant effort at popularizing military training was the idea of offering male college students voluntary military training at their own expense at summer camps at Plattsburgh, New York. While the original idea behind the camps was to develop a group of men with sufficient training to make them officers in volunteer units in the case of war, for Wood, the main goal was “planting in every university and college a true knowledge of what our military policy has been and what it should be.”

Wood also worked to popularize the idea of universal military training. He had been interested in this idea from the beginning of his tenure as chief of staff. The concept was, indeed, beginning to gain acceptance among American elites who were concerned about the social ramifications of the rapid urbanization and industrialization of U.S. society. There was particular concern that malnutrition and poor living conditions in cities was leading to a growing physical degeneration, a concern that fueled the movement to place physical-education programs into the public schools. They worried, too, about growing urban unrest and the need to “Americanize” the massive influx of immigrants. Wood spoke to all of this in his effort to promote universal military training.

The general’s major concern in all of this, and one he shared with the General Staff, was how to provide for a federally trained and controlled manpower reserve in the event of a major war. Although he did not share the highly negative
feelings prevalent in the staff regarding the unreliability of the National Guard, he shared the fear that the organization could provide neither the troop numbers nor the assurance of quality performance that would be needed. Wood’s initial approach had been to create a trained reserve by using the European military method of short-term enlistments followed by long-term reserve obligations. But, as noted, the legislation supporting this idea became a casualty in the struggle over the Hay bill in 1912.

Therefore, Wood, like Palmer, turned to the more traditional idea of volunteers. In the spring of 1914, he was successful in getting Congress to approve the Volunteer Act. The chief purpose of this measure was to secure a recognized place for volunteers in U.S. defense efforts in the event of a major war. While the act reaffirmed the position of the National Guard as the second line of defense in the event of such a conflict, it provided a distinct provision for federal volunteers as a third line. While the law did not provide for any peacetime training of potential volunteers, it did legitimize for the first time the basic three-tiered structure upon which ensuing military-policy efforts would be based.²⁸

While Wood had spent 1913 and 1914 popularizing both the army and universal military training, the General Staff sought to pursue the development of a national military policy. This task was given specifically to the War College Division of the staff. This unit was the chief planning body in the General Staff and, as such, had a magnetic attraction to younger and more intellectual staff officers convinced that the army needed radical change. So for the next four years, the War College Division became the center for the pursuit of a national military policy.

Officers in the division initially intended to use the Report as its guide. But as they sought to translate its generalities into specific provisions, they began to lose confidence in some of its basic premises. Overall, they increasingly felt that the main problem with the military policy outlined in the Report was that it sought to create a single mobile striking force out of two quite different bodies, the professional Regular Army and a citizen army or the National Guard, raised and trained on the basis of voluntarism. As military professionals grew more scientific in outlook, they became increasingly suspicious of the contingent and more assertive in the demand that military policy be based solely on assured forces. By the fall of 1914, this concern, the outbreak of war in Europe, and collapsing army confidence in the reliability of the National Guard or any other kind of volunteer force led the General Staff to turn to the development of a new military policy. The staff developed a proposal that now suggested the reserve force, to be called the Continental Army, be recruited by conscription rather than by voluntary enlistment.²⁹
Yet both President Woodrow Wilson and his secretary of war, Lindley M. Garrison, were opposed to any policy based on raising armies by means other than voluntarism. So, from 1914 through the first half of 1916, the focal point of the effort to develop a national military policy was a struggle between the War College Division and Garrison over the issue of whether the major reserve force would rely on conscription or voluntarism.\textsuperscript{30} Things initially went well for the division in this struggle. It was able to make use of Senator George Chamberlain, a Democrat from Oregon, who was chairman of the Senate Committee on Military Affairs and an ambitious maverick with considerable interest in military matters, as a means to get independent access to Congress.\textsuperscript{31}

The confrontation between Secretary Garrison and the General Staff came to a head in late 1914. The staff, now fully committed to abandoning the Report, called publicly for a new comprehensive military policy based on doubling the Regular Army to 205,000 men supplemented by a force of 300,000 reserves, trained through two to three years of service in the army, to serve as a manpower pool, with the National Guard relegated to an undefined secondary status.\textsuperscript{32} When Garrison failed to support this proposal and, instead, proposed to Congress a minimum reform bill, the staff turned to Senator Chamberlain, who successfully pushed for the defeat of Garrison’s proposal.\textsuperscript{33}

This was a bitter experience for Garrison and a warning that he was losing control of the army. As a result, the secretary suddenly reversed himself and sought to regain authority by taking over the leadership of the movement for comprehensive reform, with hopes of limiting its scope by defining the project himself.\textsuperscript{34} But the War College Division was no longer willing to be limited in any way in carrying out a project that represented an ideal long sought by army professionals. Moreover, by early 1915, the mood in the country was changing dramatically. The unexpectedly titanic nature of the war in Europe and the size of the forces involved, as well as the sinking of the \textit{Lusitania} by a German U-boat, created a sudden panic in the United States about its vulnerability. This precipitated what was called the “preparedness movement” as well as a dramatic upsurge of public interest in universal military training, creating a political force that seemed to verge on becoming irresistible. Taking advantage of this, Brigadier General Montgomery M. Macomb, the head of the War College Division, had a committee prepare a draft army-reorganization bill to be ready for the next session of Congress, with Chamberlain agreeing to sponsor it.\textsuperscript{35}

But the critical question for both Secretary Garrison and the War College Division remained how the reserve pool of trained manpower would be created. While Garrison remained committed to the voluntarist approach also held by
President Wilson, the division had already given up on any idea of raising such a trained reserve force by any means other than conscription. In discussion with Garrison, Macomb pointed out that an earlier study had shown that the existing voluntary recruitment system could sustain an army of no more than 140,000 men, thus additional men would have to be found outside any reserve system based on voluntary enlistment in the Regular Army. Garrison responded to this unwelcome news by reviving and remodeling an idea once entertained in the War College Division. The secretary proposed that the remaining manpower requirements would come from a new voluntary citizen-soldier force, which he also came to call the Continental Army, to be independently recruited and trained by the Regular Army. He pressed Macomb and the division to accept it. But while the division had once favored a variation of this idea, there was now little enthusiasm for it, given its voluntarist basis. Instead, division members remained convinced about the need for conscription to raise a federal reserve force. But they were also aware that the political climate in the country was still dominated by a traditional distrust and hostility to anything that could be seen as militarism. So, they hedged by tacitly agreeing to remain quiet on the issue while reserving the right to testify against a voluntary program if a change in public opinion allowed it.

Then, in July 1915, aware of the growing pressure of the preparedness movement, President Wilson called on both the secretary of war and the secretary of the navy to submit proposals to him to form the basis of any future preparedness legislation. Garrison submitted a proposal prepared by the War College Division, but Wilson rejected it. In September Garrison instead recommended a policy statement he had drafted himself along far-more modest lines and based on his Continental Army idea.

General Staff members were so outraged by Garrison’s action that any possibilities for further cooperation were all but ruined. The secretary’s unilateral action was not only an insult to their professional pride but had also torn their own plan to shreds. Their anger only deepened as it became clear that the president would actually adopt Garrison’s program. As a result, Macomb and his division began to resort to a campaign of orchestrated leaks to the pro-preparedness press designed to discredit Garrison’s program, allowing the division to put forward its own military-reform legislation to bring the nation as close to conscription as the public would allow. This campaign soon began to focus on the Continental Army, which everyone acknowledged was the most vulnerable element of Garrison’s proposal and encapsulated his hopes that a modern military policy could be framed on the basis of voluntarism. The division then looked to Senator
Chamberlain as the means of getting a General Staff program before Congress. Chamberlain was willing to assist, but he and the division understood no program tied to conscription could yet get a hearing. So, the War College proposal was divided into two bills, an army-reorganization bill that included no provisions regarding citizen-soldiers, and a second bill, to be held back initially, that would commit the nation to some form of universal military training and the selective conscription of reserves.41

By early 1916, the situation for the division and its program looked decidedly favorable as the military-affairs committees of both chambers of Congress began hearings on Garrison’s bill. Public opinion had turned against the Continental Army idea, leaving the secretary’s program in deep trouble. At the same time, the Chamberlain reorganization bill seemed to benefit from its clear identification with the General Staff. The testimony of the division members in both houses was so impressive that there was considerable hope that the program they advocated could be passed.42

The momentum that seemed to be gathering behind the division’s program was suddenly checked, however, by developments in the House. Congressman Hay, who was handling the Garrison bill, told President Wilson that he could not get it through unless he dropped the controversial Continental Army provisions and provided the necessary citizen-soldiers by further federalizing the National Guard. This outraged Garrison, and, when he failed to get from Wilson a virtual pledge of unconditional support for his bill as written, he resigned.43

Then, at the moment of its triumph, the War College Division lost control of the issue in Congress. The failure of Garrison’s Continental Army plan led not to acceptance of the division’s plan for a reserve based on universal military training as hoped, but to the use of the National Guard as the nation’s reserve force. With this, things moved quickly, and on June 2 Congress passed a bill that became known as the National Defense Act of 1916. The measure provided for the gradual expansion of the Regular Army to 175,000 men over a five-year period and gave the role of the citizen-soldier reserve to the National Guard. No other citizen-soldier force was created, although there was a general statement noting the universal obligation of all men to serve that was said to be implied in the Constitution. But the act also created the ROTC, which would provide at least a pool of reserve officers who could serve as the nucleus for a major buildup of forces during an emergency.

Overall, the National Defense Act fell far short of what the officers in the General Staff sought, especially with the National Guard being given the role of the citizen-soldier reserve and the continued reliance on voluntarism as the
basis for military service. Nevertheless, the army finally had what it had sought for nearly forty years, a nationally accepted military policy. But it was not a policy that the military professionals were ready to accept as written, and they remained committed to substantially remodeling it should the opportunity arise.

Two major opportunities to carry out such a remodeling seemed to appear almost immediately. The first was the mobilization of the National Guard to deal with the Mexican border emergency during the summer of 1916. Pancho Villa’s raid on Columbus, New Mexico, created considerable excitement in the United States and led President Wilson to call up the entire National Guard to form a force capable of guaranteeing the security of the border while a Regular Army force pursued Villa into Mexico. This mobilization initially seemed to be a success. But as the period became more prolonged, guardsmen began to complain. The proponents of universal military training sensed this as an opportunity to demonstrate the Guard’s unreliability as a reserve. By December, the chief of staff, Major General Hugh L. Scott, charged in hearings before the Senate that the mobilization had proven not only the deficiency of the National Guard but also the bankruptcy of the entire volunteer approach and called for replacing the Guard with a citizen force based on universal military training. By then, Congress seemed ready to revise the National Defense Act by replacing the Guard sections with provisions likely to produce a more dependable and less politically vocal alternative.

The second and more significant opportunity came with perceived changes in the public mood. While the national press was coming to favor universal military training, there were indications that public opinion was changing, too. By late 1916, Scott sensed that it had shifted to such a degree that it made legislative consideration of universal military training a real possibility and decided to have ready a more compelling case for it if an opportunity arose. He called on the War College Division to prepare a new study of their previous policy recommendations. By early December, as it became clear that Chamberlain and others in Congress were planning to submit actual universal military training legislation, Scott gave the project the highest priority.

One of the officers assigned to the project was Palmer, now a colonel, who had returned to the War College Division in 1916. As principal author of the Report, he was unhappy that the General Staff, in developing its program, had abandoned what he considered to be that work’s central feature—the citizen army. Being unable to do anything about it now, he, instead, turned his attention to the issue of universal military training. While his proposal for a citizen army in the Report had been based on voluntarism, by 1916, Palmer had become one of the most vocal
military advocates of compulsory training. In doing so, he largely worked outside
the army with civilian groups in the preparedness movement and, in particular,
with the Military Training Camps Association (MTCA), which had taken the
lead nationally in calling for a policy of universal military training.49

In the War College Division, Palmer was assigned to the committee designated
to draw up the new report demanded by Scott. He soon found that his fellow
members were favorable to the idea of a citizen army, which would now receive
its preliminary instruction through universal military training. The division was
able to present the chief of staff with a preliminary report in December, proposing
a new military policy based on a worst-case scenario of an attack by two major
powers and aimed at mobilizing an army of four million men. This force would be
structured as a Regular Army and a National Army. The Regular Army would be
given responsibility for garrisoning outlying forts, mounting minor expeditions,
and training. The National Army would have its own internal structure to allow
for a rapid mobilization, as Palmer had advocated in his 1912 work.50

General Scott approved the program, demonstrating considerable interest in
Palmer’s National Army concept, and called on the War College Division to
produce a more detailed plan within little more than a month.51 The commit-
tee, however, found it difficult to meet this timetable. Since both the idea of a
citizen army and a universal military training program were new concepts, the
committee felt compelled to work each out in detail. As a result, even though the
members worked on weekends and through the Christmas holidays, the detailed
plan was still incomplete.

The committee finally finished its plan on January 27, 1917 and circulated it
for comment. It was based on three principles: “universal liability for training
in peace and service in war, decentralization of administration in peace and war,
and localization of organization.” Under the plan, all able-bodied males would
be called up in their nineteenth year for eleven months’ training, to be followed
by two weeks of training in their twentieth and twenty-first years. They would
serve in a “First Reserve” for four years and one month, then in a “Second Re-
serve” for another seven years. After that, they would be part of an “Unorganized
Reserve” until reaching the age of forty-five. Both the First and Second Reserves
were to be fully organized in local units. Officers were expected to be graduates
of the newly created ROTC program. The National Guard would, in the mean-
time, revert to its older status as a state constabulary.52

But by the time the proposal reached the new secretary of war, Newton D.
Baker, in mid-February, the international situation had changed dramatically.
Germany’s announcement that it would resume unrestricted submarine warfare
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led to a crisis in its relations with the United States, making war imminent. The emergency and subsequent hostilities became a fatal interruption in the growing momentum enjoyed by the universal military training movement just when it seemed to be on the verge of success. The cause of this lay in three factors: the attitudes of Wilson and Baker toward the issue of universal military training, the particular framework of events leading to the decision to base wartime military policy on selective service, and the absorbing character of the war itself.

Neither Wilson nor Baker were philosophically opposed to the idea of wartime conscription, but they were not at all enthusiastic about universal military training as a permanent program. As progressives, they were both attracted to ideas of rationalizing social-structural activities and saw the government as capable of doing good. Baker appreciated the military ethos of self-subordinating service and, even before the war, saw in army life a chance to provide youth with appropriate vocational, civic, and moral education. But both held major political and policy objections to universal military training as a permanent program. Despite the almost unanimous support given by the press for the policy in 1916 and earlier, Wilson and Baker could sense that garnering actual political support for such a proposal was impossible. Moreover, both were convinced that the nation would balk at universal military training once the fiscal cost was revealed. Nor were either of them convinced that the nation needed such massive protection. Finally, and most importantly, by 1916, Wilson had already developed the hope that the peace that would follow the war would be favorable to the creation of a new world order based on international cooperation. Therefore, he and Baker were opposed to the creation in wartime of any permanent postwar military policy predicated on any sort of contrary global vision.

By the time Baker forwarded the General Staff bill to Congress, the issue was becoming moot. The nation’s interest was rapidly shifting from preparedness in general to preparation for fighting a specific war. Shortly after the February 1 rupture with Germany, Baker ordered the General Staff to prepare a plan for raising an army of 1,000,000 men by means of expanding the Regular Army and National Guard to 500,000 combined and supplementing that with a second batch of 500,000 men—all to be raised on the principle of voluntarism. The General Staff, however, was still determined to use the global situation to establish a military policy based on compulsory training. It developed the plan it forwarded to Baker on its own recently submitted universal military training proposal while arguing strongly for the use of conscription rather than a voluntary system. This did not satisfy Baker, who sent the staff back to develop a plan based on voluntarism.
With the president’s call on March 21 for a special session of Congress to meet on April 2, it became clear that war was inevitable. On March 23 Baker gathered a group of senior General Staff officers into a special committee to create an army of 1,500,000 men, though still on the principle of voluntarism with a recourse to a draft only if that failed. For a short while thereafter, the secretary continued to press for a mobilization plan based on voluntarism. But those hopes ended later that year with the passage of the Selective Service Act on May 18.

The Selective Service Act and the rush to get ready for war effectively ended the hopes of the universal military training movement. Backers tried to remain hopeful and attempted to seize any opportunity to get the idea back on the national agenda but failed. Chamberlain and others in Congress again attempted to get universal military training bills onto the congressional agenda but also failed. By June 1917, it was clear to the War College Division that the issue was dead. The service journals continued to hold out for a short while longer, seizing on any piece of evidence that suggested there was still public support for compulsory training. Yet the situation was clearly hopeless, as Baker made it clear that the War Department would make no recommendation regarding a permanent military policy until after arrangements for peace were concluded, hinting strongly that such a policy would in no case include universal military training. This remained the policy throughout the war so that the task of finally creating the long-sought national military policy based on a federally trained citizen army was postponed until afterward.

The sudden end of the war in November 1918 took the army and the General Staff very much by surprise. Despite the great Allied battlefield successes in the late summer and fall, as late as October the General Staff was still expecting fighting to last well into 1919. But by the middle of October, both Baker and the members of the General Staff began to see the need to initiate planning for a postwar reorganization of the army. He and President Wilson were concerned about the likelihood of social unrest in central Europe after the war and sought to ensure that the United States had military forces necessary to secure the peace there until the desired League of Nations was established.

Leadership in the General Staff was now in the hands of General Peyton C. March. He had come to the staff in March 1918 to tighten the organization of its efforts to support the American Expeditionary Force in France. Prior to this, March had had little experience with the staff and was not part of the prewar efforts of the War College Division to create a new military policy based on a federally trained citizen-army reserve. Instead, he favored the idea of a large and partially skeletonized Regular Army that could be expanded in wartime by
means of a draft. Thus, he and Baker easily agreed on an army-reorganization program that would lead to a military of 500,000 men. But while Baker and Wilson saw this army as only a transitional force, March saw it as part of a permanent military policy for the United States.

March worked out his basic concept for the postwar army quickly in concert with his assistant chief of staff for operations and training, Major General Henry Jervey, Jr., in October 1918. Jervey then transmitted it in a terse and informal memorandum to Brigadier General Lytle Brown, who was then the director of the postwar successor to the War College Division, the War Plans Division, as “further reference to the study of plans for demobilization.” The March plan based future U.S. military policy on the cadre principle, calling for the permanent establishment in this country of a single Army complete in the framework of all divisional, corps, and army units, but at a reduced strength so that the total of the one Army would be 400,000 to 500,000 men.” “The idea,” Jervey went on to explain, “is to have a framework all ready for an immediate expansion in case of need but not to have too many individuals permanently in military forces.

The terseness of Jervey’s directive, together with a lack of further guidance from March, soon led to a significant strain in the relations between the chief of staff and the War Plans Division. For March and Baker, time was of the essence. For different reasons, both wanted to get a reorganization bill to Congress as soon as possible. March wanted rather brief and general organic legislation that would leave the details to be worked out at the discretion of the president. The officers in the War Plans Division, on the other hand, believing that the terseness of the directive gave them leeway to plan the long-desired military revolution that would cap with complete triumph the long search for a national military policy, chose to be thorough and meticulous in drafting legislation. Moreover, the experience of the war and of the new weapons introduced in combat, together with the intention of actually carrying out a revolutionary break with the past, meant that the division saw itself plunging into the unknown. As a result, the project quickly blossomed into a massive undertaking, spinning off an ever-increasing array of subordinate studies while the division officers stumbled through nearly metaphysical discussions as to the nature of the knowledge upon which policy could be developed.

Meanwhile, March, who justifiably feared that the mood in Congress would soon turn against the army, had directed that the division have a draft of a bill presented to him by the beginning of January 1919. Given the complexity of the
project it had created for itself, the division was unable to give him much more than a hastily drawn up draft of legislation based upon disconnected fragments of an incomplete study. Frustrated that he could not get anything like the legislation he wanted when he needed it, March ignored the division’s proposal and, in early January, gathered a few top General Staff officers and proceeded to write a reorganization bill himself. After he gained Secretary Baker’s approval, he submitted to Congress the draft of what became known as the March-Baker bill.

Members of the War Plans Division were deeply angered with the summary treatment accorded to their own proposals by General March. They were embarrassed by the fact that, at the end of December 1918, they still had only a highly fragmented and not altogether comprehensible study to show him and expected the very rough draft to be returned with demands for revision, perhaps even disapproved altogether. They did not expect that both the division and its study would be ignored. The division made further efforts to gain March’s attention for a number of months until they finally gave up in May 1919 and unenthusiastically worked in support of the March-Baker bill.

March’s draft bill met with almost immediate hostility in Congress so that after only a few days of hearings, Congressman Stanley H. Dent, Democrat from Alabama and chairman of the House Military Affairs Committee, told Baker that he doubted that the measure could be passed before the end of the term. Meanwhile, by May, the army no longer had the field of reorganization entirely to itself. Other groups in society with an interest in the issue had now had time to begin mobilizing political strength to make their voices heard.

The most important of these was the National Guard. Most guardsmen who had fought in the war came out with a deep distrust and hostility toward the Regular Army. But they initially had little means of exerting political pressure on the formation of national military policy. The mobilization for the war had all but destroyed the state organizations, and the army did little to help them recover. Congress’s summer recess, however, provided the Guard time to recover at both the state and national level and to begin to mobilize its own political forces. It soon began to turn its attention to the efforts of the War Department to craft a new national military policy, becoming deeply suspicious that the emerging legislation would include no provisions for a National Guard. Such suspicions were entirely justified. Many of the Young Turks in the General Staff saw the “state troops” as an anachronism that should be swept away in the hoped-for postwar revolution within the army. And despite their many differences, the War Plans Division and General March were in at least tacit agreement in that the National Guard did not factor in their respective army-reorganization plans. As a result,
the Guard began to develop its own ideas about postwar army reorganization and to mobilize political support against plans developed by the War Department.67

The congressional summer recess brought all legislative efforts to a close. By the time Congress reconvened in August, control of the formulation of military policy appeared to have passed out of the hands of the General Staff. The draft March-Baker bill was introduced into both the Senate and the House on August 4. For the next four months, it underwent extensive hearings in both chambers that were marked by considerable hostility to both the bill and the General Staff and by confusion and hesitancy on the part of many of the officers called upon to testify.68 While General Staff members did not attack the bill, their obvious hesitancy and the tepidness of their support led to charges that they were being gagged by General March. By early October, the House and Senate Military Affairs Committees were sufficiently impressed by the opposition to the bill that both decided to abandon it and write their own legislation. But each decided on a different approach to the task. By November, the House Military Affairs Committee began writing what would be essentially a series of amendments to the National Defense Act of 1916.69 The General Staff readily provided professional assistance to this effort, lending to the committee the services of Colonel Thomas M. Spaulding and Colonel Thomas Hammond.

The Senate effort, headed by the chairman of its military-affairs committee, Senator James W. Wadsworth, Jr, Republican from New York, had given up on the March-Baker bill in early October and decided to draft legislation strikingly different from that bill. Earlier, several General Staff officers quietly suggested to Wadsworth that he call on Palmer to testify regarding the March-Baker bill. The colonel appeared before the committee and electrified it by announcing his near total opposition to the proposal and outlining the ideas he had been advocating within the General Staff for over a year, and had originally outlined nine years earlier in the Report. In this case, however, Palmer put heavy emphasis on two essential points. His first was that any national military policy had to be based on universal military training. His second was that U.S. military policy should be based on a truly citizen army. He then spelled out the essential characteristics of his vision of a citizen army as one in which citizen-soldiers and officers who would largely be self-trained would occupy all the positions in the army from bottom to top.70

In all this Palmer was immensely successful. Committee members were charmed by his manner, delighted by his opposition to the General Staff line, and impressed by his broad vision of military policy that seemed so congruent with their own outlooks. Over March’s angry objections, Palmer was detailed to
the Senate committee, finding considerable freedom to write his own ideas into prospective legislation without General Staff opposition.

Once the hearings were over, both military committees decided to write their own bills, leaving that task to subcommittees. This meant, in fact, that the actual drafting of legislation was left largely in the hands of the military advisors to the committees, Spaulding and Hammond in the House and Palmer in the Senate. In this arrangement the three military advisors were able to work cooperatively. The result of all this was two bills that, as they were emerging, were becoming increasingly similar in detail while still divergent in principle and structure.

Of the three officers, Palmer on the Senate subcommittee enjoyed far more freedom in drafting its bill than did Hammond and Spaulding on the House subcommittee. The colonel had won the confidence of Senator Wadsworth and the subcommittee members, who saw his ideas as reflections of their own and left him largely free to write the bill he wanted, forwarding it section by section to Wadsworth for approval. In the House, the drafting subcommittee was chaired by a Republican, Daniel R. Anthony of Kansas. While Anthony’s district included Fort Leavenworth, he was not friendly to the army and was far more concerned with creating an atmosphere that would favor the revival of the National Guard. Hence, he was hostile to both universal military training and to any army reserve organization that would rival the Guard. Therefore, as both draft bills were reaching conclusion, the officers in the General Staff began to unite in support of the Senate version.

While army leadership slowly united behind the provisions in Palmer’s draft, the legislation itself began to face increasing opposition from outside the army. The result is that the legislative history of the bill from early February of 1920 until it’s final consideration in conference committee was dominated by outside forces. The opposition was primarily focused on two interconnected issues—universal military training and the National Guard—and military supporters of the draft bill, especially Palmer, found most of their time consumed in a largely losing struggle over these.

The most controversial of the two was universal military training. Overall, the end of the war and of the preparedness movement meant that public support for the idea was rapidly fading. Hostility to the proposal was already so strong that House Democrats in caucus voted overwhelmingly to make opposition to universal military training a party issue. With that, support for it collapsed.

In the Senate, debate on its version of the bill was delayed by consideration of the Paris peace treaties and did not begin until April 1920. By then, the political current against universal military training was so strong Colonel Palmer feared
that a move to delete those provisions from the bill would also root out the provision for the Organized Reserve, which was the heart of his citizen-army plan. As a result, he countered an anticipated motion to delete universal military training by drawing up a set of amendments making such training voluntary rather than compulsory. His plan worked. Some senators grumbled that voluntary military training made as much sense as voluntary taxation, but it was difficult to vote against voluntarism. Palmer’s amendments passed, saving the Organized Reserve.75

The second issue was the National Guard. The Guard was continuing to mobilize its adherents and political support to ensure that it would not be ignored in any future military legislation. This actually took Palmer by surprise. As was the case with the March-Baker bill, the colonel’s proposed military policy had no provision for the Guard. While having come out of the war sharing the respect held by many other senior regular officers for guardsmen as soldiers, he still saw the state organizations and their hierarchies as political and patronage organizations rather than genuine military units. He naïvely assumed that what he called “the best element of the old National Guard” shared his views and would prefer to serve in his planned Organized Reserve. Thus, by the time Palmer realized the extent of the Guard’s growing influence, its political position had become almost unassailable. It threatened to bring this political power into opposition to universal military training unless the Guard itself was made part of the national defense policy and given the role of second line of defense. With this, Palmer and his Senate allies capitulated and wrote the Guard into their policy proposal.

The final legislative problem was that army reorganization legislation had been treated in the House as an update of the National Defense Act of 1916, so the House bill was written as a series of amendments to that law. The Senate bill, on the other hand, treated army reorganization as an entirely new piece of legislation. For Palmer and the rest of the enthusiasts in the General Staff, the “revolutionary” character given to the legislation, making 1920 year one of an entirely new military policy, was vastly superior to the “evolutionary” character given to the House legislation. But that cause was lost as well in conference committee, and the final legislation was written as a series of amendments. It was then passed by both chambers on June 4, 1920.

The final form of what became known as the National Defense Act of 1920 was, obviously, a major disappointment to Palmer and many other upper-level army officers. Without a provision for universal military training, the citizen army—the heart of the colonel’s proposal—survived only as a hollow shell made up solely of reserve officers. Moreover, this force had to face the National Guard
as a politically powerful rival citizen component in the army. Yet while Palmer and his colleagues failed to get the national military policy they wanted, they did succeed in getting the rest of the army, as well the U.S. government and the nation, to accept the idea of a citizen army rather than a Regular Army as the basis of U.S. military policy.

What was important about the National Defense Act of 1920 was not so much its separate parts as how it was perceived. While the fact that it was written as a series of amendments to the 1916 act made it difficult to see the conceptual basis, its central features were clearly visible. The revised act provided for a national army to be made up of three components: the U.S. (Regular) Army of 280,000 men and officers; the National Guard, which was expected to eventually reach 435,000 men; and a reserve force made up of the Officer Reserve Corps to serve as a skeletal organization that could be rapidly expanded in the event of war. Finally, the details for the actual reorganization of the army were left to the president, giving the General Staff the virtual freedom to reorganize the army within the guidelines set by Congress.

The perception of the 1920 act is more difficult to discern but a far more important matter. If the envisioned citizen army were to succeed, the revolutionary character of this measure had to be understood and accepted by the army, the government, and the nation. But the disaggregated form of the act as a series of disparate amendments made it extremely difficult to perceive. During the rest of the 1920s, Colonel Palmer worked tirelessly to help both the army and the American public understand this. He was aided by the fact that General John J. Pershing, who succeeded General March as chief of staff, understood and warmly supported the concept. In addition, the officers in the General Staff who had worked for years to establish this new military policy understood it as well. Finally, with all its drawbacks, many in the army saw sufficient positive features in the 1920 legislation, leading them to embrace it. For all army officers, the nineteen months between the end of the Great War (or World War I) and the advent of the National Defense Act of 1920 had been a difficult period marked by confusion over demobilization, the end of wartime promotions, and what seemed to be a growing lack of public interest in the army. In this regard, they were eager to see the act as the beginning of a new period of stability and development.