NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Professional army must change to maintain a democratic society

Mary Ann McGivern | Apr. 7, 2014 NCR Today

According to Andrew Bacevich in *Breach of Trust [1]*, after Vietnam, when President Richard Nixon gave us a volunteer army, we the people relinquished responsibility for war, making it the province of government.

He opens his book describing a "support the troops" rally at a Red Sox game, where the Navy brings a sailor home to her family for a surprise week's leave. Red Sox Nation whoops and hollers, but Bacevich recognizes it as faux support. He says we, the people, support the troops as long as we don't have to change our own behavior, pay for war or bleed.

The troops, in return, have taken on the responsibility for framing the role of a volunteer army. At the end of the Cold War, Gen. Carl Vuono coined the phrase "global strategic mandate" to describe the Army's task, and his successor as Army chief of staff, Gen. Gerald Sullivan, put flesh and bones on the vision, disseminating an analysis brimming with confidence in the newly high-tech, lean professional army. Bacevich doesn't see that the blame for recent military failures belongs on the shoulders of then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld or contractors in the field.

The book's subtitle, "How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country," makes it clear that in Bacevich's opinion, we "jettisoned the tradition of citizen-soldier," leaving the professionals to fill in the gap without guidance from the people.

In her book *Drift*, Rachel Maddow reviews how we have strayed from the efforts of our Founding Fathers in the Constitution to make it difficult for us to go to war. In *Breach of Trust*, Bacevich analyzes the results of that drift. Bacevich says the volunteer army won't hold. He recommends reinstating the draft or inaugurating a program of required national service. He notes critics will complain that maintaining long campaigns in places like Afghanistan will be much more difficult, and he says, "Just so."

Breach of Trust is a more difficult read than *Drift*, which I reviewed here on May 11, 2012 [2]. Bacevich looks closely at the steps our professional army took to get us where we are today, and he doesn't have much optimism about whether we can change our direction. But change we must if we want to maintain a democratic society.

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Links:
[1] http://www.amazon.com/Breach-Trust-Americans-Soldiers-American/dp/0805082964
[2] http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/drift-rachel-maddow