

From the border to the barracks; Let immigrants serve, experts say

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Body

Washington --- In the Revolutionary War, thousands of **immigrants** fought for America's independence.

Two centuries later, two prominent national security **experts** contend that foreign citizens can once again help the United States maintain combat readiness.

Michael O'Hanlon, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, and Max Boot, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, have proposed allowing thousands of **immigrants** into the United States to **serve** for four years in the military in exchange for citizenship. Many legal residents already participate in the armed forces, but this program would bring in citizens of other countries with the express purpose of becoming soldiers.

For some, this brings to mind the practice of hiring foreign mercenaries. For others, it cheapens the ideal of being an American and takes advantage of desperate people.

But O'Hanlon **says** the military is in dire need of new personnel and that **immigrants** could be an ideal solution.

"The Army and Marine Corps are too small and too stressed, even though they've gone to great lengths to work hard to recruit," he **said**. "I want to give them some more options to find people."

O'Hanlon and Boot **say** that importing **immigrants** to be soldiers would solve the military's recruitment problems and provide the armed forces with more translators and **experts** in other cultures.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have stretched thin U.S. military resources, forcing the Pentagon to rely more heavily on reservists, National Guard troops and multiple deployments. In an effort to meet recruitment goals, the military has boosted cash bonuses and other incentives.

O'Hanlon acknowledges that hiring noncitizens is risky and that extensive background checks would have to be done to protect national security. But he **says** that "we're not living in a perfect world" and that **immigrants** traditionally perform well in the military.

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The United States currently has more than 40,000 noncitizens serving in the armed forces on active and reserve duty. About 8,000 permanent residents enlist for active duty every year.

The rate of naturalization for the immigrant soldiers has increased in recent years because the United States expedited the process and allows citizenship ceremonies to be held overseas for service members.

Margaret Stock, a lieutenant colonel in the Army Reserve and professor at West Point, said the Pentagon has the authority to bring immigrants to the United States to serve in the military, as long as it determines that it is vital to the national interest, but that the Pentagon has not chosen such an option.

A few countries have a tradition of foreign citizens serving in military branches, including France, where the Foreign Legion comprises about 8,000 noncitizens.

IMMIGRANT SOLDIERS

The number of immigrants in the military who have become American citizens has increased in recent years.

2001.....749

2002....1,055

2003....3,870

2004....4,668

2005....4,614

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