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## **The Generation of Trust: How the U.S. Military Has Regained the Public's Confidence Since Vietnam**

*In The Generation of Trust: How the U.S. Military Has Regained the Public's Confidence Since Vietnam*, (AEI Press, March 2003), David King and Zachary Karabell show that the newest generations of Americans, Generation X (born 1961 through 1975) and especially Millennials (born after 1975), trust the government—and the U.S. military in particular—more deeply than their baby boomer parents ever have. Relying on extensive polling data, the authors note that the increased confidence in the leaders of the military since the end of the Vietnam War is an anomaly as trust in most other institutions has declined. Baby boomers remain highly suspicious of the military because of what they saw in Vietnam when they were coming of age. Yet children born since the mid-1970s grew up with a very different picture: a more professional all-volunteer force and markedly better battlefield performance.

“Racial divisions and drug abuse have virtually disappeared from today’s military,” writes David King. “And while a male-oriented warrior culture remains, women have been almost completely integrated into the services.” The professional military has had a string of successes, from Grenada through Afghanistan, and a good deal of the credit for these successes should go to reforms passed by the U.S. Congress in the late 1970s.

While today’s young people look up to the military more than their baby boomer parents did, this newfound support may not be very deep. Trust among young people has been profoundly influenced by advertising (such as the current “Army of One” campaign) and by sympathetic movies (from *Officer and a Gentleman* and *Top Gun* through *Black Hawk Down*). Indeed, the Pentagon has invested millions to subsidize Hollywood productions. However, because young Americans have their impressions of the military rooted in advertising phrases and movie images, that support may be shallow. “The new generation’s support for armed conflict,” warns David King, “may wane as the realities of a messy war are confronted for the first time.”

In *The Generation of Trust*, King and Karabell blend military history with a sophisticated analysis of public opinion polls. The result is an engaging review of public support for the military especially timely in view of the war in Iraq.

David King is associate professor of public policy at Harvard University. Zachary Karabell holds a Ph.D. in history from Harvard University and is a senior economic analyst with Fred Alger and Company in New York City.

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