

Changing the perspective on military service

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Abstract

Recently, there has been a significant development in the realm of regional security involving both NATO and the EU, signifying a deliberate push to enhance their capabilities in terms of military strength. This collaboration marks a pivotal juncture where the policies of the EU and NATO are converging, leading to a departure from the EU's erstwhile characterization as a soft power and its evolution into what can be aptly described as a smart power - a strategic amalgamation of both robust and diplomatic influence. This transformation is likely to set a precedent, influencing even aspirant nations to adopt a similar trajectory.

A notable manifestation of this joint effort is the bolstering of military and technical capacities, particularly evident in the augmentation of military capabilities. Within this context, an area of focus is compulsory military service, a subject that has triggered substantial deliberation in light of the ascendancy of professional armed forces.

This shift has catalyzed a vibrant discourse among advocates and detractors of this transition. The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the myriad benefits that military service can offer to individuals, communities, societies, states, and nations. The ongoing discourse regarding this issue is not confined to a specific

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region, but rather extends across the Western world. In this context, the present paper endeavors to explore and analyze these dynamics within the context of Albania, thereby adding to the broader conversation.

Key words: *mandatory military service, state structure, national power, national security, internal/external threats, social cohesion*

Introduction

Compulsory service – often used as military service - is the responsibility of citizens to their nation i.e., to the most important matters of national interest. The service, often referred to as recruitment, dates to antiquity and continues today, under different names. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “conscription has existed at least since ancient Egypt’s Old Kingdom (27th century B.C.), though universal conscription has been rare throughout history. Forms of conscription were used by Prussia, Switzerland, Russia, and other European powers in the 17th and 18th centuries. In the U.S., conscription was first applied during the Civil War, by both the North and the South. The modern, almost universal, system of national conscription dates back to the French Revolution in the 1790s, where it became the basis of Napoleon’s largest and most powerful army. Most European nations later copied this system even in peacetime, to serve on active duty and then ready in the reserve force.”

Since the beginning of the 21st century, many states have avoided conscription by relying on professional armies on a voluntary basis. The ability to rely on such a model, however, presupposes a degree of predictability regarding the demands of war and conflict, particularly in the operational field. Many states, which have still abolished conscription, reserve the power to resume conscription during wartime or times of crisis. States involved in interstate wars or rivalries are more likely to implement conscription. In a number of countries, the tradition of compulsory service is reflected, while others, either due to economic difficulties or flawed foreign models, have avoided compulsory service.

Evolution of the concept is closely related to moral and political motivation. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1772) in “The Social Contract”, strongly argued for compulsory service, as he believed it was the right and privilege of every citizen to participate in the service and defense of the whole society. And according to him, leaving the service to the homeland only to the professional structures (army) was a sign of moral decline. He referred to the chronology of the Roman Empire, which according to him came to an end while the Roman Army was transformed from conscription to a professional force. Similarly, Aristotle in his famous work



'Politics' closely linked armed service from the ranks of the population to the political order of the state. Niccolò Machiavelli, author of "The Prince", was also an ardent supporter of compulsory service and saw professional armies as the cause of the failure of social unity in Italy.

At the beginning of the 20th century, William James (1906), in its classic essay "The Moral Equivalent of War", considered compulsory military or national service to strengthen the unity of a nation, starting with the youth. Some later proponents of this concept, such as Jonathan Alter and Mickey Kaus, support conscription as a way to strengthen social equality, create national consciousness, 'bridge' class divisions, and allow citizens (adults and young ones) to engage in public responsibility (Kapur, 2020). Charles Rangel (2003) called for the restoration of conscription during the Iraq War, not because he seriously expected it to be passed, but to sound the alarm that the current socio-economic situation clearly presented the picture that very few children of the upper class served in the US volunteer armed forces.

Samuel Huntington (1957), in his work "Soldier and State", makes an analysis of the evolution of the military service and the entire armed forces. Although he does not doubt for any reason that the position of the military is considered a 'pure profession', he establishes a relationship between the models of national service. Looking for a harmony between the citizen, the state and the soldier, he also recommends the way to solve the dilemmas that arise in the soldier-state-citizen triangle. It is no coincidence that Huntington's book is used today as a reference material even in the position taken regarding the types and place of compulsory service.

A return to tradition

Currently, conscription has, to a significant extent, been challenged by the professional army, there is a debate between supporters and critics of this process. Supporters argue that conscription promotes macro-level unity in several ways. First, it enables individuals to live, engage and experience important challenges together, creating the common experience of service and responsibility at the level of society or nation. This creates the context to be aware of a general understanding about what civic responsibility is, what should be done and what is required of everyone to serve the country and society. Citizens can understand and even develop an appreciation for the form and action that each should feel for their nation. Above all, researchers argue that such things can bring people together, especially when dealing with the emergence of "environments" characterized with social, cultural, religious, regional, internal or even external threats.

In addition, life in the military can teach individuals more than just saluting each other or learning how and when to use weapons. The training provided goes beyond learning technical skills. This may include individual responsibility, teamwork, initiative, diversity, stress management and collective awareness. But here many people will be able to learn life habits and self-discipline traits, but also self-defense skills. Compulsory conscription means that “no one” will be spared from facing hardship in the most extreme cases.

On the other hand, opponents of compulsory service believe that such commitment violates the free will of citizens, the rights of people to exercise this will. No individual has the final say on whether they should engage in military training and join the military if a nationwide mandatory mandate is executed. Unlike volunteer soldiers who are willing to undergo rigorous training and serve the nation, others often lack essential experience and mobility, ensuring low quality skills. Opponents believe that this could lead to a high degree of hardship for people forced under compulsory military service.

Some time ago, Sweden established the compulsory military system (Sweden brings back . . . 2017, BBC). And Norway extended the mandatory military system to women as well. Denmark has never put it into question, nor Switzerland, Austria, Greece and Turkey. The US commits selective enforcement. Kosovo strongly committed to the creation of the Armed Forces. Several other countries, which have temporarily suspended it, are considering the mandatory system as an issue for resolution. Some time ago, this topic was also considered in Albania.

Compulsory service, which is more directly related to power (military) capacities, as a component of national power and which determine national security issues, forgotten over time in Albania. The times of politicians proclaiming themselves as regional champions of pacifism are gone. Furthermore, an issue as compulsory service is related to the national strategy.

Time for debate

The debate is necessary and important, although Albania is behind schedule. This is about a sensitive issue and the lack of reflection can have painful consequences. The issue is related not only to security dimensions, but also to social and national culture ones. No one denies that security in our region, at least for the near future, will continue to remain quite influential, but also fluid. In recent months, neighboring countries have demonstrated that they feel more “secure and calmer” when they increase and display their power capacities, specifically military ones. Despite the economic difficulties, in the north and south of the peninsula they do not hide their commitment to increasing the capacities of conventional power; in purchasing modern weaponry and increasing military budgets.



As they are member or partner countries in NATO, they have returned to their national capacities. None of them, in calm or tense situations, show “euphoria” in the idea that they are NATO member countries. They know about NATO Article 5 and collective defense. However, they understand better than others that NATO is an alliance that requires its own decision-making time with consensus, which is especially complicated when the issue is discussed within its members.

It should be emphasized that compulsory service is not just a military issue. It is like an axiom: in a country where there is no formal or informal institution of national unity, compulsory service is the only institution that can equally place its citizens in front of the same responsibility.

Young people from rich to extremely poor backgrounds can be in one place and one time and feel equal in front of a sublime responsibility that is the nation. Feeling equal as experienced when watching a football match of the national team. They could be challenged and sensitized with the same responsibility, which is greater than parties, beliefs, or localisms. Under this optics, compulsory service cannot be replaced by anything else in social feeling and behavior in the society. Undoubtedly, it affects more than anything the capacities of national power. It is human power and, as Kaplan (1994) says in *The Coming Anarchy*, it is more important than any kind of technology.

According to Pew Research Center, “the U.S. is one of 23 countries where the military draft is authorized but not currently implemented. An additional 60 countries – fewer than a third of the 191 for which Pew Research Center found reliable information – have some form of an active conscription program. The other 108 countries we examined have no legal provision for compulsory military service; 23 of these don’t even have conventional armed forces” (Desilver, 2019). There are two types of debates: in countries that have it and in countries where it has been temporarily avoided. The debate was accompanied by referendums in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Austria, Israel, countries that apply compulsory service. Referenda severely crushed the idea of abolishing military service. In these referenda, almost 70% of those who wanted to maintain military service were young.

Critics, most of whom are oriented by pacifist but also religious inspirations, consider compulsory service as a deviation from individual freedoms and from the principles of faith or an opportunity to promote issues of militarism. Supporters argue that conscription is more than a component of national strength and consciousness. The argument goes beyond the context of the armed forces. It is deeply related to the values, interests and individual and national character, the collective consciousness of the population, but also the responsibility of the elites. In almost all the Nordic countries it has been accepted at the level of national pride. The referendum that took place in Finland in 2013 to abolish compulsory service

failed overwhelmingly. In Sweden, over 70% of young people spoke against ending compulsory service. Such referenda also failed in Switzerland and Austria. Even in Germany there is a very sensitizing debate about imposing the obligation.

NATO or EU member countries apply models that are entirely defined in national references. There is no standard NATO or EU requirement that defines the service model. Denmark, Norway, Greece, Turkey and other NATO members implement the compulsory service model. Other European countries (non-NATO members) such as Austria, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, etc., implement compulsory service. However, mandatory service is not related only to the concept of combat forces, but also to types of community service.

Does conscription foster nationalism? No. It promotes the highest national values. - Although it is the only environment where the activity starts with the solemn oath and the national anthem, it does not promote nationalism, but vital values. Compulsory military service educates and promotes national values in many ways. First, it is one of the few, if not the only, institution that brings national unity closer to the nation's vital bases and interests. Young people are enabled to understand and develop concepts about the nation, culture and national interests. Nowadays, no other institution develops this process better. Compulsory military service enables people to feel together, especially when faced with identity challenges or threats, with cultural or religious, political or ideological divisions, from any direction that can act. It enables young people to learn and train together, enabling them to share common experiences. Further, it helps the general understanding of life, difficulty and responsibility, which is almost necessary for any kind of subsequent engagement. Compulsory military service does not promote nationalism, but it makes citizens aware of the real concept of the nation and the responsibility of each citizen one for his/her country.

Compulsory service helps bring people together in one country. The reality of citizenship is that it is not an individual endeavor. It is a team sport. The definition of patriotism is the unity of private individuals to create a better public life for the country. When you are a citizen, you feel specific demands to ensure the rights that everyone enjoys, creating the feeling that this is only achieved in social relationships. As emphasized by Huntington in 'Soldier and State', the Founding Fathers of the United States defined virtue through the symbol of the individual who was willing to put aside individual interests in pursuit of a common good.

Most countries already require people to perform acts in the public interest. Although the idea of recruitment is one that for some may be 'scary' or create dilemmas of personal ethics and morality, this can be resolved by confronting the many actions that are clearly in the public interest. Perhaps many of those actions require a 'sacrifice' on the part of the individual involved to ensure the common good for all. If it is placed in relation to such examples of 'sacrifice' as



the payment of taxes or even the activity of public schools in the community, even less compulsory military (national) service is just another of those 'sacrifices'. By setting aside personal commitment for a specific period, usually up to a year, it is possible to gain various other life experiences and professional knowledge that can help you overcome many challenges and be successful throughout your life.

It creates a sense of public identity. When everyone falls into the category of service, then there is a sense of common identity that the state is able and able to create across the country. Citizens have a sense of national purpose that helps identify them all. One of the advantages of conscription in a democracy is that it has more variety, but also more options, than any other state structure. Conscription creates common ground for everyone, so even in the fiercest debate, there is always a common ground that can eventually lead to a moment of compromise.

Does military service work in this model of society? - Military service provides invaluable experiences for each individual. It is a significant change from previous experiences for young people; a change in perspective that can help them see the future on a different level than the spontaneous one, inspire them to work harder in the future, and foster a greater sense of not only national interest, but also responsibility citizen. For young people (but not only) compulsory service turns into a benefit that produces important and equally valuable traits of the individual's character. And indeed, during compulsory service, young people are taught not only respect for authority, self-discipline, behaving and working in a group, but also other skills, dealing with problems and difficulties, management or leadership skills, these qualities for which compulsory service is unique.

On the contrary, their absence, even as it is proven day by day, is turning into a viral phenomenon. Armstrong (2016) writes for News Max that mandatory military service cures many of the ills of today's society - "You want to see your son, your daughter, your nephew and niece, the neighbor's kids, teenagers to be serious, persistent, respectful, disciplined, honorable and prepared for life? It's not an ad for a magic pill - it's just an argument for conscription. Instead, you find the sight you don't want to see, the young people without objectives, without initiative, without self-confidence, up to young people involved in crime, abuse, prostitution since adolescence..." (Ibid). Let's choose.

Conscription adds another layer of responsibility to the state. When conscription exists, then more members of society are involved and directly interested in the day-to-day affairs of their state, who stay alert to current events so they know how safe their loved ones will be. theirs in any given situation. Of course, there will also be a significant desire to understand more about the threats their country is trying to challenge, providing a factor that provides more support. At the same time, this level of interaction makes elected statesmen accountable for their decisions.

Military service can provide people with useful professional skills. Serving in the armed forces means more than knowing how to pick up a gun and how to use it. Military life can teach people specific technical skills that they can use throughout their lives. Many will start a career after their time in the service because of what they learned during their time in training. Responsibility, leadership and teamwork are just a few of the traits that are instilled in each person as they learn how to discipline, display or defend themselves and their country.

There are opportunities to gain leadership skills at your disposal. Even if you don't think military service is the best path to take in your life, the time you spend in the service can help enrich your resume with skills to pursue a career you love. You will have proven and acquired skills and experiences that will allow you to get much needed solution or management experience. Some human individuals may even have completed their degree after being recruited because of the talents they show their superiors. If given a choice between hiring someone straight out of college or an individual with 2-3 years of practical experience, most hiring managers choose the latter option.

Editorialist Kenneth Andreson, when Sweden stopped the compulsory service in 2010, wrote in National Dilemma that "(...) there is a strong basis to fear that with the termination of the military service, another level of disappearance of the public consciousness will be added to the existing one (...) the connection between obligations and rights is always becoming less and less clear." Military service fosters a sense of civic conscience, a phenomenon so severely crushed by political, cultural, religious, origin or homeland divisions.

Our society is more and more frighteningly demonstrating social divisions and differences. No institutional structure faces the phenomenon. Compulsory service is an environment where differences are allowed to melt and unify. Ari Bussel says in New Blaze, that "The Armed Forces are a domain of all, of those who come from rich and poor homes, from different religious groups and practice in religious beliefs, but also secular, with colors of different skin, smart, or even slow, with disabilities, but also healthy, brave and hesitant. The service encourages everyone within a process of the same standard, treating them equally, placed under the same requirements and entrusted with the same great responsibilities, regardless of faith, affiliation, social status or labels of other affiliations".

In lieu of conclusion

There is an ongoing debate about conscription as a responsibility that citizens should feel for their country. In this era, it is very important for the young generation to be involved in such services as it develops a sense of identity and patriotism within



them and makes them understand that every citizen also has obligations towards the country. At the same time, military service prepares and helps young people to develop necessary qualities within themselves, which they cannot get anywhere else. This makes young men and women more serious about living with a sense of responsibility that is born and develops together with them. In a world where crime and violence are common, doing military service will enable them to be responsible and mentally protected against any perceived threat. This would not only create security for them, but also make the whole society safer.

Furthermore, military service can promote national unity in many ways: enabling young people to learn and train together, creating the shared experience of serving in the military. Military service and community service instill feelings of patriotism and love of country in the minds of young people and contribute to their education; therefore, all young people should feel the responsibility of undergoing a period of military or community service.

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