

On Conscription

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19/11/2001

The former German President Herzog mentioned in 1995: 'Conscription impacts in such a severe way the personal freedom of young citizens, that a democratic state is only allowed to raise that claim, if required by exterior security demands'¹. To speak more generally, which are the driving forces to insist on, or even to introduce, conscription in a democratic state? The paper will discuss the issue of **Conscription and Democracy** and the related problem of civilian control of the armed forces (section 1). Furthermore it will raise the question of **Conscription and Proficiency** and the related problem of capabilities and war- and action deployment (section 2). Finally it will discuss the problem of **Conscription and Cost** and the related problem of economic impact of switching from conscript to volunteer forces (section 3).

1 Conscription and Democracy

Certain German conservatives² raise the claim that conscription were one major building block of the armed forces of a democratic state, even that democracy and conscription were interrelated³. Often conscription is valued as a safeguard of democracy⁴. I would like to widen the view and discuss the problem of compulsory service in the framework of military-civil relationship in modern society. There is a broad consensus in democratic scholarship that military needs to be controlled: Military must obey and shall never raise against its civil, democratically elected masters⁵. Speaking in a much more general way one may say that control measures have to apply to all armed forces of a state, i.e. including police organizations⁶.

My thesis is, that effective control should be based on three fundamental pillars:

1. **Integration.** The members of the military apparatus must be integrated socially and culturally into the democratic society. 'Military forces may be formed of persons who share the civilian and democratic orientation of the general population'⁷. This is a measure *from within* the forces to prevent a 'state in a state'.
2. **Civil Primacy.** There must be an independent, civil rule over the military apparatus on all political and economic issues. 'But civilian control, while necessary, is not sufficient. Therefore the civilians who control the military (...) must themselves be subject to the democratic process'⁸. This is a measure *from without* the forces to prevent a 'state in a state'.

¹In: Meyer 2000, p. 35.

²Both German conservative parties, SPD and CDU insist on conscription for these reasons. The liberal parties Bündnis 90/Die Grünen and FDP as well as the young members of the SPD (JuSos) object compulsory service. Discussion of programs in Trähner 2000 and Kamp 2000.

³See Bald 1997, p. 731.

⁴Official version in: German White Paper on Defense, p. 85.

⁵For a discussion see e.g. Dahl 1989, pp. 244 and Kuhlmann 2000, pp 2.

⁶Dahl 1989, p. 245.

⁷Dahl 1989, p. 249.

⁸Dahl 1989, p. 244.

3. **Transnationality.** The military should be integrated into a transnational relationship with other democratic societies. This measure addresses the problem of a potential, non-democratic solo run ('Sonderweg').

As detailed in the sections below, different societies chose these measures as a roadmap: Since 'the failure of civilian control is sufficient to account for the existence of nondemocratic regimes in many countries'⁹. Conscription is often regarded as one important brick of the first pillar. But other means than conscription are far more important and efficient to properly control the military. And say to it the other way round, conscription can *not* do the job and it is far too dangerous to rely on it. There are plenty of examples of involvement of conscripted forces into crimes of war and antidemocratic actions; and there is hardly any evidence for the alleged, socio-romantic theory of 'conscription as a safeguard of democracy'. Not conscription, but democracy itself and civil control is the key.

1.1 The Bundeswehr

The advocates of German draft tell us, that conscripts would ensure that 'society concerns itself with the military'¹⁰, thus preventing a 'state within the state'. Conscripts would 'introduce elements of ordinary life into the forces'¹¹.

In order for that to hold we have to check upfront conditions: Firstly, are conscripts equally drawn from the democratic society (in order to make the barracks a 'reflection of society')? And secondly, do they take the appropriate positions inside the military itself (in order to keep the forces under control)? Especially for the German Bundeswehr of the 21st century we find hardly any evidence to support that.

The draft in Germany, especially after 1984, never was an equal draft. Young men could, not de jure, but de facto, decide whether or not to join the ranks, or, after conscientious objection serve in 'Zivildienst'¹². The number of conscientious objectors breaches figure of about 45%¹³. Furthermore there is evidence that this decision follows a certain rupture in society: Conscientious objectors are found to be more left wing liberal and higher educated than their colleges joining the army¹⁴. 'The typical conscientious objector as one with some alienation, who rejects military principles of order (...) and who has a more than average consumption of alcohol and drugs'¹⁵. Bottom line, given these facts and, indeed, that no compulsory service for woman exists¹⁶ the thesis of proper reflection of society can be rejected.

Strange enough, the shift away from conscription towards an all-volunteer force is even about to address one significant 'reflection' gap between the forces and civilian society: The primacy of male. Empirical studies show that the female part in volunteer forces significantly grew. In these days, European Forces show a female percentage between 5% and 10%, the US forces up to 15%¹⁷.

An interesting side note: Conscription is to a certain degree as well a *right* to bear arms. Military education is highly attractive for the dedicated right wing. There is no way to exclude these, admittedly undemocratic persons, from conscripted armed forces¹⁸. On the volunteer and professional side, luckily, the cards are different: People with extremist right wing or undemocratic views are not accepted¹⁹. The high standards even account for a personal shortage in the special forces, notably the commando unit

⁹Dahl 1989, p. 250.

¹⁰BMV, *Weißbuch 1994*. In: Kuhlmann 2000, p. 23.

¹¹Zentrum Innere Führung, *Wehrpflichtarmee - Freiwilligenstreitkräfte*, Koblenz 1994. In: Kuhlmann 2000.

¹²In 1984 the formal oral examination procedure was abandoned. The applications *had* to be accepted as long as they were complete and conclusive. Finally 95% of the applications are run without oral examination. See: Kuhlmann 1995b, p. 1.

¹³Finally only 50% of one male age cohort are drafted. The other 50% are made up of conscientious objectors, people unfit for service or serving in police, disaster control or development aid organization. *Bundeswehr Aktuell*, 09/1990. In Kuhlmann 1995a, p.4.

¹⁴Meyer 2000, p. 36. For in-depth documentation, see as well Kuhlmann 2000, p. 21.

¹⁵Puzicha and Meissner, ... *unter die Soldaten?*, 1981. In: Kuhlmann 1995b, p. 5..

¹⁶Nevertheless, based on the EuGH C 285/98 (27) decision as of 11/01/2000, there is voluntary service for woman in the Bundeswehr.

¹⁷Fleckenstein 2000, p. 17, 22.

¹⁸Only committed offenders on right wing charges may be expelled from conscription.

¹⁹Meyer 2000, p. 36.

KSK. A similar problem is known in special police forces or task units of the Bund (e.g. GSG 9). In the latter case, obviously, conscription is not an issue.

Another point, not yet considered here relates to the highly acclaimed, democratic 'Wehrgerechtigkeit' (justice of draft). It is already badly flawed: Only about 100'000 conscripts are required from 2002 onwards. How to justify that you are drafted, torn from your civil live for 10 month, but three others are not ²⁰?

To address the second point we have to check, which role conscripts play in the modern German army. First of all we find that there are hardly many: 57%, with a planned increase towards 72% by 2002, of the armed forces are non-conscripts²¹! The 1994 plan of restructuring the Bundeswehr cuts the forces into two pieces: The Hauptverteidigungskräfte (HVK) and the Krisenreaktionskräfte (KRK). Conscripts are only found in the HVK ²², which leaves the far more important KRK, since the actively deployed part of the forces, out of the alleged 'control by conscripts'.

Conscripts take rank and file roles. Evidence shows²³ that the 'frequency and intensity of contacts between upper and lower levels is generally overestimated', and, 'social distance between officers, especially unit commanders and conscripts, is remarkably high, and the influence exerted by conscripts over military unit commanders correspondingly low'²⁴.

Playing devils (conservative democrats'?) advocate: Given the findings above, conscription could only, if at all, play its envisioned role, if rigid measures took place: Introduction of general, equal draft with lesser exceptions. Since the KRK training is more lengthy, the extend of compulsory service would have to be enhanced. These requirements are too bizarre to be a political option.

So what? Speaking from a system theory point of view, Armed Forces are nothing more than the result of division of labor. They form (an armed) subsystem of society with a well defined task, as do the police forces of the Länder and the 'Grenzschutz' units of the Bund²⁵. The control of these subsystems is the task of the democratic political system.

Social and Cultural Integration of the Bundeswehr When justifying conscription, the Prussian general Scharnhorst is often quoted: 'The born defender of his country is the citizen itself' ²⁶. But, and that is the key point, *all* members of the forces, conscripts (if at all) as well as volunteers as well as professionals must be citizens. Much emphasis was put on this requirement in the Bundeswehr.

One of the 'main instruments to lawfully integrate the forces into the order of a democratically controlled state' ²⁷ was concept 'Innere Führung'. General Baudouin philosophy of the 'citizen in uniform' assured that a member of the Bundeswehr was primarily a citizen, retaining and respecting the civil rights. 'The concept of Innere Führung has made the Bundeswehr an integral and natural component of (...) state and society. It is a successful concept for the comprehensive integration of armed forces into a democratic state' ²⁸.

Dahl mentioned that 'indoctrination of professional soldiers, particularly officers may help to ensure civilian control by elected democratic leaders'²⁹. Bundeswehr personnel undergoes a regular education ('Politische Bildung') with the result, that 'one may claim that the core military personnel in general are better informed politically and more sensitive to political processes and peculiarities than the average

²⁰Figures in: **Fleckenstein 2000**, p. 20.

²¹**Kuhlmann 2000**, p. 22.

²²There is the rather bizarre construct of drafts enhancing their conscript service time from 10 to 23 month voluntarily in order to serve in the KRK. But then we can not talk about 'compulsory services' anymore.

²³Klausenitzer, *Die Diskussion um die innere Führung*. Berlin, 1966. In **Kuhlmann 1995a**.

²⁴**Kuhlmann 2000**, p. 23

²⁵Dahl explicitly speaks of 'military and police organizations' which must be controlled. **Dahl 1989**, p. 244.

²⁶30th anniversary of the Bundeswehr. In: **Schmäling 1990**, p. 172.

²⁷**Kuhlmann 2000**, p. 10

²⁸MoD, *Innere Führung*. 1994. In: **Kuhlmann 2000**, p.10

²⁹**Dahl 1989**, p. 249.

civilian citizen'³⁰. Officers receive a universal education from civilians at the 'Bundeswehruniversität'. Nevertheless it can be criticized, that over time the weight which is laid on sociological issues has been reduced³¹.

'Only about 20% of the soldiers serve their entire life in the Bundeswehr'³² and that is not expected to change under the Bundeswehr restructuring. All the others, are serving only between 4 and 15 years. This limitation raises the problem of demobilization and re-integration into a purely civilian life. It was found, that most of temporary-career volunteers 'are orientated first and foremost towards the world outside'³³. They receive within the forces an education or training 'leading to this future civilian occupation'³⁴.

Other than in the Wehrmacht or NVA the German forces run their job not segregated from civilian society. In Germany as well as in most western European Forces soldiers return to their families off-base after 'Dienstschluß' and enjoy, compared to decades ago, an 'unprecedented degree of social and cultural integration'³⁵. Leave, working hour regulations, the right to complain ('Beschwerderecht'), etc apply to them as to other (civilian) employees of the German state. As scholars put it, 'it is unlikely that military families will renounce the comforts of social integration and return to the isolation that prevailed before World War II'³⁶.

Research found a certain adapting of the reasonable, notably civil social behaviour patterns, by the Armed Forces. Professional, at least western European Armies are not run (anymore) 'with harsh social manners and a load parade tone. Superiors who can prevail only by the volume of their voices are a minority'³⁷. Systems can only be efficient, when the members 'buy in', and even the military got that. Given the existing integration patterns of the Bundeswehr described above, soldiers wont 'change their behaviour gained in civil socialization once they have entered the armed forces'³⁸. Such patterns, obviously, count much more in volunteer that in conscripted armies: The latter are serving under *compulsion* and therefore can not decide by feet (i.e. simply leave) whether or not the command style matches their expectations. To this degree, one might note, does conscription even hinder socialization.

Civil Control over the Bundeswehr The Bundeswehr is under political, civilian control: 'The Minister of Defense has command over the armed forces'³⁹. As well in wartime civilian control is guaranteed, by shifting the command to the Federal Chancellor⁴⁰.

When Bundeswehr was constructed a general staff, similar to the antidemocratic prewar 'Generalstab der Deutschen Wehrmacht', was deliberately omitted⁴¹: The chief of staff (army, air force, navy) separately reported directly to the MoD. The 'General Inspector of the Armed Forces' only was designed to be the supreme military representative of the Bundeswehr, never its general commander. Nevertheless, as critics point out, following the restructuring of the Bundeswehr by 2001, the General Inspector is 'back in line of command'. This, potentially dangerous step, is judged as a 'milestone in German civil-military relations' and should not be 'underestimated by the public'⁴².

The responsibility of all administrative and financial tasks was designated to the separate, independent, civilian Defense Administration ('Bundeswehrverwaltung')⁴³. This was a 'conscious attempt' to take 'personnel, material and money out of the hands of men in uniform'⁴⁴. This apparatus caused some

³⁰Kuhlmann 2000, p. 22

³¹Meyer 2000, p. 36.

³²Kuhlmann 2000, p.26.

³³ibid.

³⁴ibid. And Meyer, p. 36.

³⁵Callaghan 2000, p. 13.

³⁶Boehne and Dandeker, *Armed Forces, State and Society in Sweden*. In Kuhlmann 2000, p. 28.

³⁷Kuhlmann 2000, p. 23.

³⁸ibid.

³⁹GG 1995, 65a.

⁴⁰GG 1995, 115b.

⁴¹Kelleher, *Fundamentals of German Security*. In: Kuhlmann 2000, p. 9

⁴²Kuhlmann 2000, p. 9

⁴³GG 1995, 87b.

⁴⁴Abenheim, *The Citizen in Uniform: Reform and its Critics in the Bundeswehr*. In: Kuhlmann 2000.

friction between the forces and the bureaucratic administration, but was judged as 'necessary assurance for a balanced civil-military relationship'⁴⁵.

The 'Wehrbeauftragter des Deutschen Bundestages' (Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces) was created, following the example of the 'militieombudsman' of the Swedish forces. She is appointed by the parliament and herself part of the legislature and exercises control over the Ministry of Defense (which is part of the executive). Her task is 'to safeguard the basic rights and to assist the Bundestag (parliament) in exercising parliamentary control'⁴⁶. The commissioner is judged to be 'highly instrumental in establishing a balanced relationship between the armed forces and society'⁴⁷.

Integration of Bundeswehr The Bundeswehr was always completely integrated with other western European forces, starting from the 1955 Treaty of Paris, Adenauer's 'Westbindung', the 'Two plus Four' Treaty up to the Bundeswehr restructuring of today. From the 9 NATO corps, 3 are planned as rapid reaction forces, some including German forces. It is important to point out that *not a single* Bundeswehr unit is under the command of the Germany Executive alone⁴⁸. The divisions are assigned into transnational NATO corps, like the German-American corps in southern Germany, the German-Dutch corps and the German-Danish-Polish corps. Given these facts, a German solo run, is deliberately impossible.

Final Note As already indicated in the findings above, conscription does not play much a 'safeguard' role in contemporary Germany⁴⁹. The full blown three pillar control of the Bundeswehr is *the* reliable shield.

⁴⁵ibid.

⁴⁶GG 1995, 45b.

⁴⁷Kuhlmann 1995a, p. 8.

⁴⁸Rühl 2000, p. 4.

⁴⁹It does, of course play other roles, which will be discussed in sections 2 and 3.

1.2 Control of the Military and Conscription: Other Examples

In this subsection the issue of conscription is discussed in a comparative framework. Historical examples are given.

Modern Democracies Most modern, western democratic societies have abandoned conscription. Only to name a few⁵⁰: USA (1973), United Kingdom, Australia (introduced 1966, abandoned 1972)⁵¹, Canada, Belgium (1994), Netherlands (1994), France (decided 1997, implemented 2002), Italy (implemented 2005).

Outside Germany, this move hardly ever was considered as a step away from democracy, since 'there is no military service system that is exclusively tailored to democracy'⁵². 'The case against conscription (...) became possible because the political left had abandoned its fear of a professional military'⁵³.

The Wehrmacht An interesting example to look at is the Wehrmacht. The Weimar Wehrmacht was both: completely antidemocratic and non-conscript. Noske's attempts to tame the military and subordinate it to the Weimar Republic failed: Due to severe resistance by the military establishment, notably Seeckt, and, admittedly, due to the fact that this 'state within a state was fully backed by nearly all political parties' except some democrats⁵⁴. Conscription was explicitly prohibited in the Versailles Treaty by the Allied Forces; and these democratic states never considered that some (democratic, anti-democratic?) conscripts in the German Wehrmacht could do some good.

Soon, in 1935, the Wehrmacht became a conscript force but stayed antidemocratic as before. It is crucial to point out, that only the general draft allowed Hitler to raise the most powerful army of the late 1930s and to start the extermination war in the East. Conscripts did not stop him from within⁵⁵. Wehrmacht is the striking hint, that the equation 'conscription equals democracy' is badly flawed. There was no democratic culture, neither in Germany nor, obviously, in the Wehrmacht. Wehrmacht was deliberately constructed to be outside civil society and control.

A similar pattern is found in other totalitarian armies: Stalin's and Mussolini's armies were conscript forces with 'no considerable resistance from within'⁵⁶.

The 1991 Putsch in Russia Another instance to look at is the failed putsch in Russia which started 19/08 and ended 16 days later⁵⁷. Which role did conscripts play in the actions? The regular armed forces, which took Jelzin's side were elitist divisions (Tank Divisions Kantemirskja and Tamanskja). Most important, fully professional special forces, like the Tula Airborne Division or the Task Force 'Ozmonzy' of Ministry of Interior took the decision to protect the 'White House'. The crucial KGB 'Alpha Force' on the other side was fully professional as well. But KGB general Karpuchin refused to attack the 'White House'⁵⁸. Both, putsch and army resistance was driven by officers, notably commanders high in charge. There is no evidence that conscripts played any role in the events. The civil resistance with general strike and protest marches gave a clear signal. The failure of the putsch is seen in the fact, that both, civil society as well as armed forces already were caught by the spirit of democracy and freedom: 'The resistance by the people and parts of the army is greater, the determination to fight for the little freedom they achieved is higher, than the conservatives ever had dreamed of'⁵⁹.

⁵⁰Full list in: UN 1997, pp. 8.

⁵¹This Australian case is notable since conscription was a repetitive question. Usually the Australian democracy was non-conscript. In WW I polls turned down the draft 1916 and 1917. It was introduced in the Vietnam war, where Australia joined the US. Especially the 1972 removal of conscription was *hailed* as victory of democracy over the military establishment. See: Dale 1998, p.3.

⁵²Kister and Klein. In: Kuhlmann 1995a.

⁵³Manigart and Meulen, *Zero-Draft in the Low Countries*. 1997. In: Kuhlmann 2000, p. 21.

⁵⁴Bald 1997, pp. 736.

⁵⁵But from without, since the allies' forces were conscript forces as well. Although this is not of concern here.

⁵⁶Kuhlmann 1995a, p. 11

⁵⁷Ruge 1991

⁵⁸Ruge 1991, p. 200

⁵⁹Ruge 1991, p. 79

Latin America Latin American countries turned from a long enduring military rule to somehow democratic societies: Ecuador (1979), Peru (1980), Bolivia (1982), Argentina (1983), Brazil (1985), Uruguay (1985), Paraguay (1993) and Chile (1990)⁶⁰. All forces have been conscript forces, at least up to into the 1990s⁶¹. When analyzing the pattern how the armed forces are made compliant with democratic rule, most emphasis was laid on the civil control pillar of this section's outline.

As an example may serve Argentina: The military elite had completely lost its credibility in the Falkland debacle 1982 and failed on significant economic and social issues. One of the Alfonsín's first decisions was move the control to the (civilian) ministry of defense. Secondly the economic basis of the military 'junta' was destroyed: The ownership of the share of the country's biggest industry complex was withdrawn⁶². Finally the military establishment was brought to court. First attempts to overthrow the democratic government of Alfonsín (1987, 1988 twice) failed as well as the last and final in 1990, which was targeted at Menem. The reason for the failure was that the revolting 'carapintadas' had lost any backing in society. There is no evidence that the conscript structure of the forces played any role⁶³. Argentina, finally abandoned compulsory service in 1994⁶⁴.

'In Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s the military became a distinctly separate social order, a military caste out of civilian society'⁶⁵. The military establishment attacked and overthrow the democratic government. Conscription exists in Brazil⁶⁶. In neither closed the gulf between the forces and society, nor did it stop the military professionals.

USA Currently US intellectual elites are discussing the problem of a potentially flawed military-civilian relationship in the USA⁶⁷. This is especially interesting since the USA abandoned conscription in 1973. (...)

⁶⁰Wagner 2000, pp. 19.

⁶¹UN 1997, pp. 8.

⁶²Carreras, *Die Rolle der Opposition im Demokratisierungsprozeß Argentiniens*. Mainz 1997, p. 246. In Wagner 2000, p. 25

⁶³Zagorsky, *Civil-Military Relations and Argentine Democracy*. 1994, pp. 431. In Wagner 2000, p. 25

⁶⁴UN 1997, p.2

⁶⁵Stepan, *The military in politics: Changing patterns in Brazil*. 1977. In: Dahl 1989, p. 250.

⁶⁶UN 1997, p. 8.

⁶⁷Cohen 2000, Feaver 2000, Pfaff 2000.

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