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**WHY CONSCRIPTION, SINGAPORE?
THE SOCIAL AND GEOSTRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS**

by

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March 2014

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**WHY CONSCRIPTION, SINGAPORE?
THE SOCIAL AND GEOSTRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS**

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ABSTRACT

Conscription is a centuries-old manpower procurement policy that continues to be used by many countries today; however, in the last few decades, the trend is for developed countries to transition toward all-volunteer forces. Reasons to implement conscription include the presence of a clear military threat and authoritarian intentions, among others, but many nations have since reduced or abolished conscription as they shift toward stable, democratic late-modern prosperity. Singapore adopted conscription shortly after gaining independence in 1965, yet amid similar conditions in the past half-century and facing the same challenges to its model and ideal of conscription, has not made the transition to an all-volunteer force.

This thesis analyzes the reasons for Singapore's continued use of conscription in a world where other developed countries have transitioned toward all-volunteer forces. This insight could provide alternative options for countries seeking to maintain conscription, as well as reframe the civil-military discourse about conscription. Also, Singapore stands out as an anomaly in the globally occurring transitions to all-volunteer forces, thus explaining the Singapore case would further an understanding of why countries end, or retain, conscription.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACCORD	Advisory Council for Community Relations in Defence
ADMM	ASEAN Defence Minister's Meeting
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CNB	Changi Naval Base
CSNS	Committee to Strengthen National Service
DRP	Defense Reform Plan
EU	European Union
FPDA	Five Power Defence Arrangement
HADR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
IDF	Israeli Defense Force
MDES	Military Domain Experts Scheme
MID	Ministry of Interior and Defence
MINDEF	Ministry of Defence
MND	Ministry of National Defense
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NS	National Service
NSF	Full-time National Serviceman
ORNS	Operationally Ready National Serviceman
PRC	People's Republic of China
RECORD	Recognise the Contribution of Operationally Ready National Servicemen
RSN	Republic of Singapore Navy
SAF	Singapore Armed Forces
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SAVER	Savings and Employee Retirement Plan
SLOC	Sea Lines of Communications
TD	Total Defence
UN	United Nations
WOSpecs	Warrant Officers and Specialists
WTO	World Trade Organization

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I. INTRODUCTION

Conscription is a centuries-old manpower procurement policy that continues to be used by many countries today;¹ however, in the last few decades, the trend is for developed countries to transition towards all-volunteer forces. The connection between conscription and democracy remains central to the analysis, but the international landscape today is different from half a century ago, leading developed countries to re-think their conscription policies. Examples of countries reducing conscription, in terms of absolute numbers of young people inducted into the armed forces or of the length of service obligations, include Norway, Denmark, and Austria, while countries that have abolished conscription entirely include Sweden, Germany, and, most recently, the Republic of China (Taiwan). Most of these states account for their new conscription policies by noting the lessening of the kinds of threats that earlier necessitated conscription; the solidification of their democracies; increased income, better education, and improved standard of living; and a change in the nature of the relationship between the state and citizens, with civic duty increasingly defined in terms that exclude armed service.

Singapore adopted conscription shortly after gaining independence in 1965 and, amid similar conditions in the past half-century, faces many of the same challenges to its model and ideal of conscription. Yet Singapore has not made the transition to an all-volunteer force; instead, it has in recent years increased efforts to strengthen conscription. Why, then, has Singapore chosen to retain and adapt—indeed, to enhance—the implementation of conscription rather than abolish it in the same way so many similarly situated countries have done?

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

How does Singapore approach the civil-military balance that informs its conscription policy, and what implications does this view have in the broader, global

¹ According to the CIA's *World Factbook*, 58 countries adopt universal conscription. *The World Factbook*, "Military Service Age and Obligation," Central Intelligence Agency, accessed 20 July 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2024.html>.

question of conscription, citizens at arms, military professionalism, and the rights and duties, as well as the benefits, of citizenship in the globalized 21st century? This thesis will attempt to explain Singapore’s continued use of conscription in spite of the global trend for countries like Singapore to transition towards the use of all-volunteer forces. Based on Singapore’s considerations and experience, the thesis will provide an explanation for retaining conscription, and offer alternative ways to maintain the relevance of conscription in a world where its popularity—but perhaps not its relevance—continues to decline.

B. IMPORTANCE

Conscription, or “National Service” (NS),² is the “cornerstone of Singapore’s defense”³ and the Singapore government takes considerable efforts on policies that will ensure it remains relevant despite changes in the domestic and international environments. A recent move by the Singapore government in this direction is the “Strengthen National Service” initiative. Announced in March 2013, a Committee to Strengthen National Service (CSNS), chaired by the Minister for Defence,⁴ will study and propose “measures to strengthen NS as the critical institution for Singapore’s continued survival and success.”⁵ In light of the global trend toward all-volunteer forces, a comparative study of similar countries may explain Singapore’s persistence in retaining—and strengthening—conscription. This insight could provide alternative options for countries seeking to maintain conscription, as well as reframing the civil-military discourse about conscription, even in states that have already converted to an all-volunteer model.

2 The term “National Service” (NS) is used for conscription in Singapore. A person serving conscription is called a “Full-time National Serviceman” (NSF), and a person on reservist after completing NS is called an “Operationally Ready National Serviceman” (ORNS or NSman).

3 “National Service,” Strengthen National Service website, Government of Singapore, last updated 30 May 2013, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/mindef_websites/topics.

4 Singapore adopts British spelling; formal Singaporean organizational names will be spelled as they are used in Singapore, and words in quotations will be spelled as quoted. The rest of this thesis adopts American spelling.

5 “Strengthen NS,” Singapore Ministry of Defense, last updated 6 February 2014, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/key_topics/strengthen_ns.html.

Another importance of this thesis is the investigation of the balance between advanced technology and the duration of conscript training. The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) has, in the last half a century, developed a military capability that surpasses that of its regional neighbors. Defense spending regularly exceeds its much larger neighbors and has remained robust even during regional and international economic crises, further demonstrating its commitment to building and maintaining a capable military. Critics, however, have argued that conscripts are not suited to operate and maintain the technologically advanced weaponry, especially those habitually acquired by the SAF. An investigation into how the SAF has adapted may explain the consistent and high level of conscription despite the increasing technical requirements required by sophisticated new weapons systems.

Finally, from an academic perspective, Singapore stands out as an anomaly in the globally occurring transitions to all-volunteer forces. Explaining the Singapore case would help refine the understanding of why countries end—or retain—conscription, as well as further an understanding of how similar Singapore is to the various countries to which it is commonly compared. This understanding would also provide credence to, for example, Bacevich’s argument to “revive the concept of a citizen soldier” in the United States in some form of National Service that would begin to overcome Americans’ antipathy toward the draft and “would have the people once again more closely engaged in decisions as to where that army goes and what it is sent to do.”⁶

C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES

In recent decades, many nations have either reduced their reliance on or completely abolished conscription.⁷ The reasons for doing so include a decreasing need for large standing armed forces as a result of decreased immediate threats since the end of the Cold War, an unprecedented period of sustained peace, the forging of close military

6 Robin Young, “Here & Now Radio Interview with Andrew Bacevich: A Push to Bridge the Gap between Soldiers and Citizens,” radio broadcast, Boston’s NPR News Station, 9 September 2013, <http://hereandnow.wbur.org/2013/09/02/bacevich-soldiers-citizens>.

7 Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); James Burk, “The Decline of Mass Armed Forces and Compulsory Military Service,” *Defense Analysis* 8, no. 1 (1992): 45–59, doi: 10.1080/07430179208405523.

alliances that spread the requirements of armed defense among the several members, closer cooperation in international peacekeeping efforts, more advanced weaponry leading to the desire for quality over quantity, deeper information exchange through the ubiquity of the Internet and transportation, increasingly pervasive trade and globalization, and the expectation of advanced societies to resolve conflict through diplomatic and political, as opposed to military, means.⁸ Many of these reasons similarly apply to Singapore, yet Singapore seems to buck the trend of transitioning to an all-volunteer force; instead, its government devotes much attention to adapting conscription to maintain its relevance to the changing domestic and international landscape. The case of conscription in Singapore, however, may be unique because of several conditions that set it apart from Taiwan and the European countries that have abandoned conscription. These include a young and fragile history, its tiny geography, a diverse population, and the fractious regional situation.

This insight leads to two hypotheses that will be investigated in this thesis. The first hypothesis is that Singapore faces a more dangerous external environment compared with other countries that have ended conscription; the second is that Singapore retains conscription because it faces a bigger challenge to national integration than similarly situated countries. The choice, therefore, has been for Singapore to continually adapt conscription to surmount the challenges that it, like other countries, has faced in societal, political, economic, and military progress.

D. THE FUTURE OF CONSCRIPTION

Since the end of the Cold War, critics of conscription have argued for the transition to all-volunteer armed forces, citing mainly military, economic, and political considerations.⁹ In line with these recommendations, many countries that had previously adopted conscription have since reconsidered their manpower policies, including the

⁸ James J. Sheehan, "The Future of Conscription: Some Comparative Reflections," *Daedalus* 140, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 112–121, doi: 10.1162/DAED_a_00102.

⁹ Panu Poutvaara and Andreas Wagener, "Conscription: Economic Costs and Political Allure," *The Economics of Peace and Security Journal* 2, no. 1 (2007): 6–15, http://www.epsjournal.org.uk/abs/Vol2/No1/eps_v2n1_Poutvaara_Wagener.pdf; David R. Henderson, "The Role of Economists in Ending the Draft," *Econ Journal Watch* 2, no. 2 (August 2005): 362–376, <http://econjwatch.org/articles/the-role-of-economists-in-ending-the-draft>; Gwyn Harries-Jenkins, "From Conscription to Volunteer Armies," *The Adelphi Papers* 13, no. 103 (1973): 11–16, doi: 10.1080/05679327308457261.

United States in 1973,¹⁰ the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain, Italy, and the “overwhelming majority of NATO” members—conscription ended before the turn of the century;¹¹ Sweden—conscription abolished in 2010;¹² Germany—conscription suspended in 2011;¹³ Norway and Denmark—conscription intakes significantly reduced;¹⁴ and Taiwan—the transition to an all-volunteer force is in progress and is to be completed in 2015.¹⁵

1. Conscription’s Steady Decline

Trapanis, Archer and Jøger, and Petersson, have hypothesized that conscription’s decline in Western European countries results primarily from the recent absence of a military threat and the newfound collective security available through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).¹⁶ Lu contributes to the abolishment discussion with a rare Asian example, Taiwan, which also happens to be the latest example. Lu explains Taiwan’s decision to end conscription based on political considerations, in particular a marked improvement in bilateral relations with the People’s Republic of China.¹⁷ In their

10 United States abolished conscription after the Vietnam War, on the recommendations of the Gates Commission.

11 Sheehan, “The Future of Conscription: Some Comparative Reflections,” 115

12 Agence France-Presse, “Sweden Ends Compulsory Military Service,” *Defense News*, 1 July 2010, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20100701/DEFSECT04/7010303/Sweden-Ends-Compulsory-Military-Service>.

13 Alan Cowell, “The Draft Ends in Germany, but Questions of Identity Endure,” *New York Times*, 30 June 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/01/world/europe/01germany.html>.

14 Nina Graeger and Halvard Leira, “Norwegian Strategic Culture After World War II: From a Local to a Global Perspective,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 40, no. 1 (2005): 46–66, doi: 10.1177/0010836705049733; Henning Sorensen, “Conscription in Scandinavia during the Last Quarter Century: Developments and Arguments,” *Armed Forces & Society* 26, no. 2 (2000): 313–334, doi: 10.1177/0095327X0002600207.

15 Sarah Mishkin, “Taiwan Prepares for End of Conscription,” *The Financial Times*, 21 November 2012, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/489ed4c4-1eaa-11e2-bebc-00144feabdc0.html>.

16 Burk, “The Decline of Mass Armed Forces and Compulsory Military Service,” quotation in 56; Magnus Petersson, “Defense Transformation and Legitimacy in Scandinavia After the Cold War: Theoretical and Practical Implications,” *Armed Forces & Society* 37, no. 4 (2011): 701–24, doi: 10.1177/0095327X10382216; Clive Archer and Øyvind Jøger, *The Security Policy Doctrines in the Nordic and Baltic Countries: Stability and Change* (Copenhagen: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 1998), 449–63; Jan Arved Trapanis, “The Baltic States: Defence and Geopolitics,” *European Security* 7, no. 3 (1998): 92–100, doi: 10.1080/09662839808407374.

17 Lu Wenhao, “Evolving Cross-Strait Relations and Taiwan’s New Military Service System” (Master’s Thesis, United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 2009), <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA517786>.

analysis of Western countries, Haltiner and Burk offer further explanation, albeit with differing perspectives, for the decline in the popularity of conscription.

Haltiner's analysis of Western European countries concludes that "strategic and military goal-bound factors . . . seem to be more important," and identifies three reasons that facilitate the abolition of conscription: joining a defense alliance, declining susceptibility to a direct military threat, and participation actively in international missions.¹⁸ Sheehan appears aligned with Haltiner's argument that the military reason was the dominant cause of conscription's decline, including the exceptions described by Haltiner.¹⁹

Burk, however, finds that "the spheres of citizenship and military organization overlap," and political and social factors weigh more heavily than military considerations on decisions to abolish conscription. In his comparative study of Britain, France, West Germany, and the United States, Burk finds that the decision to conscript is heavily affected by threats to national integration and the pressures of domestic elections and political gains.²⁰ Vasquez offers an analysis that supports Burk's argument, concurring that "political and social factors together worked against not only conscription . . . but also the possibility of selective service" in Britain.²¹

Yet, despite the various explanations that support the decline of conscription, several countries continue to retain conscription as a fundamental element of national policy.

2. Conscription's Continued Relevance

National defense can pose a challenge for countries with small populations due to a lack of military manpower, especially when faced with larger neighbors endowed with

18 Karl W. Haltiner, "The Definite End of the Mass Army in Western Europe," *Armed Forces & Society* 25, no. 7 (1998): 7–36, quotation in 33, doi: 10.1177/0095327X9802500102.

19 Sheehan, "The Future of Conscription: Some Comparative Reflections," 112–21.

20 Burk, "The Decline of Mass Armed Forces and Compulsory Military Service," 45–59, quotation in 56.

21 Joseph Paul Vasquez III, "More than Meets the Eye: Domestic Politics and the End of British Conscription," *Armed Forces & Society* 37, no. 4 (2011):636–656, quotation in 651, doi: 10.1177/0095327X10390460.

far greater populations and larger militaries. Singapore is no exception to this constraint and, additionally, continues to face challenges to national cohesion because of its largely immigrant population, cultural and racial diversity, and young history. It thus suffices to hypothesize that this mix of factors forces Singapore to deal with these challenges differently—it constantly assesses conscription’s effectiveness and regularly tweaks its implementation to suit the increasingly educated and technologically savvy citizen-military.

Several studies contribute to the understanding of the SAF and the Singapore government’s conscription policies, including Lellenberg’s report on the citizen-army concept in Singapore and other prominent conscription countries in the 1960s;²² Andrew Tan,²³ Felix Chang,²⁴ Tan See Seng and Alvin Chew,²⁵ Bernard Loo,²⁶ and Norman Vasu and Bernard Loo’s insights into the early challenges of Singapore and the SAF’s development;²⁷ Tan Tai Yong’s explanation of the “fusion” model civil-military relations in Singapore;²⁸ and the most comprehensive assessment of the SAF by Huxley.²⁹ The latest initiatives by the Singapore government, in particular the Strengthen National

22 Jon L. Lellenberg, *Overview of the Citizen-Army Concept* (California: Stanford Research Institute, 1972).

23 Andrew T. Tan, “Singapore’s Defence: Capabilities, Trends, and Implications,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 21, no. 3 (December 1999): 451–474, <http://sg.vlex.com/vid/singapore-defence-capabilities-implications-52714844>.

24 Felix K. Chang, “In Defense of Singapore,” *Orbis* 47, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 114–23, <http://www.fpri.org/orbis-archive/4701/chang.defensesingapore.pdf>.

25 See Seng Tan and Alvin Chew, “Governing Singapore’s Security Sector: Problems, Prospects and Paradox,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 30, no. 2 (August 2008): 241–263, http://130.102.44.246/journals/contemporary_southeast_asia_a_journal_of_international_and_strategic_affairs/v030/30.2.tan.pdf.

26 Bernard Fook Weng Loo, “Maturing the Singapore Armed Forces: From Poisonous Shrimp to Dolphin,” in *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong Years in Singapore*, ed. Bridget Welsh and others (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2009), 352–375.

27 Norman Vasu and Bernard Loo, “National Security and Singapore: An Assessment,” in *Management of Success: Singapore Revisited*, ed. Terence Chong (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010), 462–485.

28 Tai Yong Tan, “Singapore: Civil-Military Fusion,” in *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 276–293; Tai Yong Tan, “The Armed Forces and Politics in Singapore: The Persistence of Civil-Military Fusion,” in *The Political Resurgence of the Military in Southeast Asia: Conflict and Leadership*, ed. Marcus Mietzner (New York: Routledge, 2011), 148–166.

29 Tim Huxley, *Defending the Lion City: The Armed Forces of Singapore* (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2000).

Service effort,³⁰ and recent developments in Singapore society, have not yet been studied and will be included in this study.

There exist extensive studies of civil-military relations issues, including military professionalism and civilian control,³¹ and democracies and the military,³² including analyses of these factors in countries that have abolished conscription. Loo, Cunha, and Tan Tai Yong, however, have in recent years discussed these in the context of Singapore;³³ according to Tan Tai Yong, the unique civil-military situation developed by the founders of Singapore, in what he terms “civil-military fusion,” makes objective civilian control “inapplicable in the Singapore case.” He explains that “Singapore does not confront the classic civil-military dilemma” because “the defense of Singapore has always been the collective responsibility of the entire nation, not just the SAF.”³⁴

This thesis will thus attempt to examine the SAF’s responses through the years to explain how the Singapore government has effectively managed the implementation of conscription. The evolution of the military, therefore, is what keeps conscription alive and relevant in Singapore.

30 “Strengthen NS.”

31 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard, 1957); Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1971); Michael C. Desch, *Civilian Control of the Military: The Changing Security Environment* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001); Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Massachusetts, 2003); Peter D. Feaver and Erika Seeler, “Before and After Huntington: The Methodological Maturing of Civil-Military Studies,” in *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, eds. Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 72–90.

32 Richard H. Kohn, “How Democracies Control the Military,” *Journal of Democracy* 8, no. 4 (1977): 141–42, quotation in 141, https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v008/8.4kohn.html; Hans Born, Marina Caparini and Karl Haltiner, “Models of Democratic Control of the Armed Forces: A Multi-Country Study Comparing ‘Good Practices’ of Democratic Control,” *Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Working Paper Series*, no. 47 (2002), http://iskran.ru/cd_data/disk2/rr/011.pdf; Thomas C. Bruneau and Scott D. Tollefson, *Who Guards the Guardians: Democratic Civil-Military Relations*, eds. Thomas C. Bruneau and Scott D. Tollefson (Austin: Texas University Press, 2006); Thomas C. Bruneau and Florina Cristiana Matei, *The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations*, eds. Thomas C. Bruneau and Florina Cristiana Matei (New York: Routledge, 2013).

33 Loo, “Maturing the Singapore Armed Forces: From Poisonous Shrimp to Dolphin”; Derek Da Cunha, “Sociological Aspects of the Singapore Armed Forces,” *Armed Forces & Society* 25, no. 3 (1999): 459–475, doi: 10.1177/0095327X9902500306; Tan, “The Armed Forces and Politics in Singapore: The Persistence of Civil-Military Fusion.”

34 Tan, “The Armed Forces and Politics in Singapore: The Persistence of Civil-Military Fusion,” 149.

E. METHODS AND SOURCES

The present work comprises a comparative study of countries that have abolished conscription to identify the reasons why Singapore has maintained conscription while similarly situated countries have abandoned it. This analysis accounts for differences of country and population size, ethnic diversity, geostrategic environment, military threat, and economic prosperity.

Following the comparisons, the thesis investigates the Singapore government's evolution of the SAF in dealing with the challenges it faces. Data and information from Singapore's Department of Statistics, Ministry of Defence, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, pieced together like a mosaic, demonstrate the development of Singapore's current conscription policy. In addition, the research also relates the military manpower policy changes, in particular those of conscription and the reserve force, to the premise of social integration and its criticality on national success.

Singapore's domestic policies, its national events, and the regional security landscape are also examined in relation to the social cohesion of the population. These non-military factors support the hypothesis that the constant adaptability of the SAF and conscription has allowed it to retain the relevance of conscription as both a military manpower procurement method as well as a nation-building institution.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis aims to explain why Singapore is an anomaly in the global trend away from conscription towards all-volunteer forces.

Chapter II focuses on conscription. It reviews conscription and its popular uses as a military and political tool of the state, and examines countries that have recently abolished conscription and those that are retaining conscription, and their respective reasons for the transition or retention.

Next, Chapter III explains the history of conscription in Singapore to provide a background understanding of the importance of conscription in Singapore. The early years of Singapore and the development of its military are presented, beginning with its fragile independence and a virtually non-existent military at independence in 1965. Here,

Singapore's initial military policies are examined to reveal the rationale behind these decisions.

Chapter IV further explains the evolution of the military through the years and other non-military policies that contributed to the retention of conscription in Singapore. An assessment of the government's adaptability to changing social conditions and international pressures provides evidence that Singapore considers conscription a critical institution and spares no effort to retain it as the bedrock of its survival and success.

Finally, the thesis concludes by comparing Singapore's responses with countries that have abolished conscription to show that although Singapore's situations are somewhat similar, Singapore's approach to conscription is different because of its social and geostrategic uniqueness. The study of the conscription-abolishing countries and the fervor with which the Singapore government has sought to retain the relevance of conscription will contribute to the understanding of Singapore's continued adaptation of conscription instead of transiting to an all-volunteer force.

II. CONSCRIPTION

Conscription has been widely used since the 18th century to fuel the military as well as for national cohesion, but has been on the decline in recent decades with examples aplenty since the end of the Cold War. This chapter will outline the reasons for and against the use of conscription, and focus on the reasons that countries abolish or retain it.

A. CONSCRIPTION REVIEW

Conscription, and more specifically in this discussion universal military service, is a centuries-old practice that has been used for two fundamental reasons: supplying military manpower and nation building. In the traditional military role, nations adopt conscription to rapidly generate vast numbers of soldiers; this reason, however, has steadily declined as a purpose of conscription since the end of the Cold War because the reduction in global hostilities, and the inter-connected and inter-dependence of countries, has made it virtually impossible for states to engage in war, with modern states requiring militaries generally for the purpose of defense. The birth of the many Third World states amid decolonization and nationalist movements at the end of World War II and the Cold War created a need for a nation-building apparatus. Conscription was thus used with a political objective of nationalism; an effective way to bond the population towards a common cause, to counter internal challenges, and to homogenize and coalesce the population.³⁵

1. Conscription as a Military Tactic

The first effective use of conscription as a military tactic—not as a means of last resort, but as a matter of policy—was by Napoleon in France’s *levée en masse* at the end of the 18th century. Conscription thus garnered popular adoption after its successful

³⁵ Yael Hadass, “On the Causes of Military Conscription,” *Social Science Research Network, Working Paper Series* (June 2004), doi: 10.2139/ssrn.564062; Stephen Pfaffenzeller, “Conscription and Democracy: The Mythology of Civil-Military Relations,” *Armed Forces & Society* 36, no. 3 (2010): 481–504, doi: 10.1177/0095327X09351226; Henry Dietz, Jerrold Elkin, and Maurice Roumani, “The Military as a Vehicle for Social Integration,” in *Ethnicity, Integration, and the Military*, eds. Henry Dietz, Jerrold Elkin, and Maurice Roumani (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991), 1–26.

implementation in the French Revolution. As summarized by Charles Tilly, a military comprising “a state’s own citizen, commanded by members of its own ruling classes” were often found to fight “better, more reliably, and more cheaply” when compared with the earlier employment of mercenaries, which had the potential for “foot-dragging, rebellion, and even rivalry for political power.”³⁶

This desire for quick mobilization of soldiers must be tempered with what Peter D. Feaver terms the “civil-military problematique” requiring a delicate balance between military power and military subordination to the civilian government.³⁷ In a democracy, civilian control must be maintained to prevent this unwanted military usurpation. According to Richard H. Kohn, civilian control is civilian leadership maintaining superiority over military influence, “to make security subordinate to the larger purposes of a nation,” to prevent unwanted military usurpation.³⁸ To increase civilian control over the military, Samuel P. Huntington and Morris Janowitz offer professionalization of the military as a way to solve the differences between the military and civilian worlds, yet both differ on the approach toward professionalization: Huntington proposes to militarize the military to maintain a distinct gap between the military and civilian worlds,³⁹ while Morris Janowitz proposes to civilianize the military to close this civilian-military gap.⁴⁰ The theories of professionalism will not be discussed in depth but it is suffice to mention a state’s military is more than the use of force, but also as a political tool of the state.

2. Conscription as a Political Tool

Although conscription has obvious military benefits and seen successes as a tactic for mustering patriotic citizens for war, Eliot A. Cohen analyzes conscription as a primarily political, not military, tool. He analyses comprehensively the relationship between citizenship and soldiering, citing the use of conscription as a platform for nation

36 Charles Tilly, “How War Made States, and Vice Versa,” in *Coercion, Capital, and European States: AD 990–1992* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 83.

37 Peter D. Feaver, “Civil-Military Relations,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (1999): 214, <http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev.polisci.2.1.211>.

38 Kohn, “How Democracies Control the Military,” 141–42, quotation in 141.

39 Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 80–97.

40 Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 422–35.

building with examples from France, Germany, Israel, and the United States. Acknowledging the effectiveness of military service as “a rite of passage by which one both learns and earns citizenship,” Cohen describes national service as a program “to foster national unity by mixing together young men (and in some versions, women) from all parts of the country.”⁴¹ Additionally, in a country where religion, ethnicity, or language is not homogenous, conscription ensures that the military is representative of the population,⁴² reinforcing Kohn’s caution that civil society may be threatened if the proportion of military leaders is skewed towards certain demographic groups.⁴³

Another political advantage of conscription is the enhancement of civilian control of the military. Cohen asserts that having the majority of the armed forces consist of citizen-soldiers, “whose main identity is as citizens and not as soldiers, whose loyalty lies with home and community,” allows the civilian government firm control over the military. His warning seeks to prevent the possible misuse of a professional military for selfish purposes or be manipulated as agents of despots, citing the terrifying examples of Cromwell and King George III who used “professional soldiers to crush popular liberties.”⁴⁴

Morris Janowitz adds to the military sociology discussion with his finding that conscription is also used as a tool of the state to assimilate the less educated and lower classes of society into the productive workforce. Through classes on national history and loyalty to country, and the training of relevant civilian-applicable skills during the period of military training, Janowitz opines that the otherwise deadweight segments of the population would be given a chance to contribute to the state.⁴⁵ The military can thus be a useful apparatus for enhancing the social, political, and economic standard of the state.

41 Eliot A. Cohen, “Military Service and Republican Ideology: Civic Obligations and the Citizen-Soldier,” in *Citizens and Soldiers: The Dilemmas of Military Service*, eds. Robert J. Art and Robert Jervis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985b), 122–28.

42 Ibid., 124; Eliot A. Cohen “Military Service and Republican Ideology: Liberalism and Egalitarianism,” in *Citizens and Soldiers: The Dilemmas of Military Service*, eds. Robert J. Art and Robert Jervis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985c), 145–51.

43 Kohn, “How Democracies Control the Military,” 146.

44 Cohen, *Military Service and Republican Ideology: Civic Obligations and the Citizen-Soldier*, 123–24.

45 Morris Janowitz, *The Military in the Political Development of New Nations* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 81–82.

3. The Case against Conscription

Despite the military and political advantages of conscription, there exist problems with an entire population of males, or males and females, serving compulsory military service in the modern era. Besides the obvious logistical complications, the accompanying budgetary burden, and the argument of freedom curtailment by forcing mandatory military service, there are technological challenges as well.

According to Tilly, our modern world's advanced weaponry, including nuclear technology, has continued the world's "trend toward more frequent, deadlier wars,"⁴⁶ thus the personnel required to defend and fight these advanced wars must possess the requisite technological know-how and professional expertise to engage in these battles. The nature of civilian-soldiers—fundamentally civilians before soldiers, and time-limited in service—makes new technology a burden on a conscript military. Huntington defines "the modern officer corps a professional body,"⁴⁷ thus the military profession must exhibit the three characteristics of a profession: a sense of corporateness, responsibility, and expertise. Military professionalism would therefore enable a military to fulfil the needs of modern warfare with substantial experience in the military trade to build competence, be able to shoulder the heavy responsibility of destructive warfare, and the requisite technical expertise to operate the sophisticated weaponry; this burden and heavy responsibility should not be expected of conscripts who would not have sufficient length of service to build the competence and acquire the necessary expertise for modern warfare.⁴⁸

The decision to implement military service is indeed a complex challenge for any democracy. As aptly summarized by Cohen in political science's most prominent book on conscription, *Citizens and Soldiers*, "the free man does not wish to become a soldier; the democratic man abhors unequal burdens; the military man would like to ignore their

46 Tilly, "How War Made States, and Vice Versa," 67.

47 Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 7.

48 Ibid., 8–18.

claims, but cannot. It is the task of the statesman to reconcile the three, and to do so in a way likely to last.”⁴⁹

B. A DYING CONCEPT

The United States, on the recommendation of the so-called Gates Commission of 1970, was among the early adopters of the all-volunteer force, a club that also included the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. Since the end of the Cold War, critics of conscription have also argued in support of all-volunteer armed forces, with military, economic, and political considerations oft cited.⁵⁰ Not long after in 1996, France, after having used conscription for more than 200 years, announced the end of French conscription, marking the beginning of the widespread decline in the popularity of conscription at the turn of the century. This section will analyze three countries that had once adopted conscription and their decisions to desist.

1. The United States

Although the founding fathers of the United States considered conscription in conflict with personal freedoms, various forms of military service have been used over the last century and a half. Also called the draft, military service was first implemented in the United States during the American Civil War (1861–1865) out of necessity to supply the manpower for both sides of the conflict, albeit not in the true sense of conscription; draftees were allowed to provide a substitute or pay a fee in lieu of service, and less than 3 percent of the fighting force on either side consisted of draftees. After the Civil War, military service was not used again for the next five decades—until World War I. In 1917, after the declaration of World War I, the Selective Draft Law was passed, providing the primary source of manpower for the war effort. In 1940 the draft (officially called the Selective Service System) was again implemented while World War II was still being fought in Europe. There had initially been opposition to this latest initiative because the United States was not yet involved in the war, but the attack on Pearl Harbor

49 Eliot A. Cohen, “Conclusion,” in *Citizens and Soldiers: The Dilemmas of Military Service*, eds. Robert J. Art and Robert Jervis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985a), 188.

50 Poutvaara and Wagener, “Conscription: Economic Costs and Political Allure,” 6–15; Henderson, “The Role of Economists in Ending the Draft,” 362–76; Harries-Jenkins, “From Conscription to Volunteer Armies,” 11–16.

swung public opinion in support of the draft and resulted in the “first genuinely popular system of conscription.”⁵¹

Shortly after the World Wars, the draft was again revived in 1948 as a contingency against Cold War emergencies. More significantly, this iteration of conscription became the standard military recruitment system for the next two decades, through the Korean and Vietnam Wars. While the Vietnam War was ongoing in Southeast Asia in the late 1960s, domestic opposition to the United States’ war participation was growing and the American public called for a review of the draft. President Nixon thus ordered the President’s Commission on an All-Volunteer Force (known also as the Gates Commission, named after its chairman Thomas S. Gates) to review the military manpower options.⁵²

The members of the Gates Commission unanimously recommended in its 1970 report that “the nation’s interests will be better served by an all-volunteer force, supported by an effective standby draft, than by a mixed force of volunteers and conscripts.”⁵³ Motivated primarily by domestic pressure against the draft during the Vietnam War, the decision to abandon the draft in June 1973 was based on comprehensive considerations of “social and demographic factors, military effectiveness, economic efficiency, the role of women in the military, the role of and prospects for reserve forces, and other related concerns.”⁵⁴

Transitioning to an all-volunteer force was initially challenging and the United States almost suffered a manpower crisis in its first years of implementation due to a combination of a healthy economy and the military’s originally inflexible manpower policies. Manpower policy tweaks and the allocation of a larger budget to military salaries eventually stemmed the early problems and resolved the issues of high attrition, which alleviated the downstream effects of higher recruitment costs and decreased

51 *The Report of the President’s Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1970), 162.

52 *Ibid.*, 156–164.

53 *Ibid.*, “Letter of Transmittal by Chairman,” Thomas S. Gates.

54 Cindy Williams, “From Conscripts to Volunteers,” *Naval War College Review* 58, no. 1 (2005): 36, <http://www.usnwc.edu/getattachment/d2cdcd4c-332e-432e-b6b7-2c6502768910/From-Conscripts-to-Volunteers--NATO-s-Transitions-.aspx>.

experience. A plethora of changes answered the teething problems of transition in its early years, enabling the United States all-volunteer force to mature and, as the world's premier armed force today, is a validation of its decision to adopt the all-volunteer force system.⁵⁵

Andrew Bacevich, however, disagrees in his latest book with the all-volunteer system because the country's decision-makers now have no disincentives to wage war. He argues that a gap exists between the military and its citizens, because "as Americans forfeit personal direct responsibility for contributing to the country's defense—abandoning the tradition of the citizen soldier—then the state gains ownership of the military," and that the "greatest defect [of an all-volunteer force] is this disengagement of the people from the military."⁵⁶ Bacevich recalls that the conscription system in World War II raised a military that mirrored the core democratic values of American society that resulted in an inclusive decision-making, and emphasizes that the close citizen-military relationship forged with conscription was lost with the decision to abolish the draft during the Vietnam War. To close this gap and once again humanize the military's involvement in conflict, he recommends the reinstatement of a form of national service—where citizens contribute a number of years of service to the country—to harmonize American citizens with *their* military.⁵⁷ Although the United States military has grown into an undisputed global superpower with its professional and technologically advanced military, Bacevich's argument throws light back onto the oft neglected social benefits of the citizen-soldier concept.

2. Germany

In the most recent example of the abolition of conscription, Germany saw its last batch of conscripts complete their service on 31 June 2011, a turn of events that might have startled the officers and policymakers who implemented mandatory military service

⁵⁵ John T. Warner and Beth J. Asch, "The Record and Prospects of the all-Volunteer Military in the United States," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 15, no. 2 (2001): 169–192, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2696597>.

⁵⁶ Robin Young, "Here & Now Radio Interview with Andrew Bacevich."

⁵⁷ Andrew J. Bacevich, *Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed their Soldiers and their Country* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2013), 17–22, 136–37, and 188–96.

as a core aspect of the Bundeswehr when it was founded in 1955. This iteration of compulsory military service in Germany was a result of its militaristic experiences in and between the World Wars. It served to integrate the armed forces into civilian society; universal conscription was used to increase civilian-military interaction and hence enhance civilian control⁵⁸—including such democratic values as respect for human rights. In 2010, however, Germany’s Ministry of Defense conducted a defense reform and, in line with the changing times and missions and in a decision that “would have been unthinkable even 20 years ago,” suspended conscription.

According to Donald Abenheim and Carolyn Halladay, the main reason for this decision is the realignment of German national interest with its political objectives, hastened by years of severe defense budgetary limitations.⁵⁹ That is, for domestic-political reasons, as well as practical considerations, Germany’s increased role in international combat operations—for example in Afghanistan or Libya—had no room for draftees because conscripts could not be deployed unless they specifically volunteered.⁶⁰ The maturing of the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the European Union (EU) has afforded Germany considerable safety within these collective, or at least multilateral, political and security mechanisms. More specifically, in return for Germany’s active involvement in multinational cooperation and integration to European and international peace efforts, including participation in UN, NATO, and EU missions from the early 1990s, Germany is protected under the umbrella of the UN’s collective security, NATO’s collective defense, and EU’s assurance of solidarity among its member states.

Abenheim and Halladay find also that although compulsory service has been the foundation of its military since the 1950s, it has been constantly “unpopular in Germany as an irrelevant burden on those young people who must serve.” Over the years, the gradual reduction of conscription commitments, eventually to a final duration of six

58 Pfaffenzeller, “Conscription and Democracy: The Mythology of Civil-Military Relations,” 485–86.

59 Donald Abenheim and Carolyn Halladay, “Stability in Flux: Policy, Strategy, and Institutions in Germany,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations*, eds. Thomas C. Bruneau and Florina Cristiana Matei (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 304–5, quotation in 305.

60 *Ibid.*, 311.

months, meant that draftees rarely learned anything of enduring value in or to the military, which further diminished conscription in German eyes.⁶¹ Compounding the unpopularity of conscription, the alternative “civil” service option drew many would-be conscripts away from military service—while the service requirement continued to apply only to young men.

Germany decided to suspend conscription to realign with the changing strategic landscape, in particular the result of the UN, NATO, and EU’s evolution into credible alliances and institutions for conflict resolution. Despite the reduction in manpower due to the loss of conscripts, the significantly smaller military continues to allow Germany to fulfil its contemporary political and strategic objectives while continuing to maintain its sovereignty through enmeshment in international and regional security institutions.

3. Taiwan

Conscription was implemented in Taiwan after the split from mainland China at the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949. On a small island with a small population, conscription was “a perfect military service system” for a Taiwan that was faced with “an overwhelming adversary,” the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which was “always a threat.” For the leaders of Taiwan, therefore, compulsory military service was a natural choice to build its military in defense of its mainland foe.⁶²

A seemingly worrying situation for Taiwan is the PRC military’s clear progress since the turn of the century, including its substantial investment and rapid deployment of advanced aircraft technology, power projection naval platforms, and state-of-the-art weapons capabilities.⁶³ Taiwan’s defense against the PRC must then surely be considered an intimidating undertaking, especially in the face of the ever-growing potential for

61 Abenheim and Halladay, “Stability in Flux: Policy, Strategy, and Institutions in Germany,” 305–11, quotation in 311.

62 Wenhao, “Evolving Cross-Strait Relations and Taiwan’s New Military Service System,” 7–8, quotations on 7.

63 “Chapter Six: Asia,” *The Military Balance* (2013a): 205–16, doi: 10.1080/04597222.2013.757002.

overwhelming force from across the Taiwan Strait.⁶⁴ In spite of this evident military threat, however, Taiwan in 2008 decided to transition to an all-volunteer force after almost six decades of conscription, with the aim of completing the transition by end-2014. When considered against the backdrop of the decisions of the United States, Germany, and other nations that have similarly abolished conscription—where a reduction or absence of threat triggered their decisions to reduce their military manpower—Taiwan’s decision bucks the trend and is made in the face of a threat that continues to grow unabated.

According to Lu Wenhao, three factors weighed heavily on the decision to abandon conscription: a declining population of youth to supply its conscript military, an opportunistic window during which cross-strait relations are at its most peaceful, and political pressures against compulsory military service. The first factor, a declining population that reduces the number of able soldiers to fill the positions required in a mass army, is a compelling argument for the military to transition to an all-volunteer force. Although government policies may eventually inspire population growth, a population decline would take years, if not decades, to reverse and a military would nonetheless prudently prepare for the future with the current statistical trend.⁶⁵

Second, recent cooling of PRC-Taiwan relations has given Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou a window of opportunity to execute the drastic manpower transition. Upon taking office in 2008, Ma reiterated the PRC-Taiwan “1992 Consensus” to maintain a “one China, respective interpretations” status quo on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, presuming peace between the PRC and Taiwan.⁶⁶ This mutually beneficial relationship has produced calm in the cross-strait security landscape and allowed Taiwan’s military to

64 Andrew N. D. Yang, “Taiwan’s Defense Preparation Against the Chinese Military Threat,” in *Assessing the Threat: The Chinese Military and Taiwan’s Security*, eds. Michael D. Swaine, Andrew N. D. Yang and Evan S. Medeiros (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007), 265–284.

65 Wenhao, “Evolving Cross-Strait Relations and Taiwan’s New Military Service System,” 5–10.

66 Ma Ying-jeou, “Full Text of President Ma’s Inaugural Address,” *The China Post*, 21 May 2008, <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/taiwan/national/national-news/2008/05/21/157332/p1/Full-text.htm>.

implement the complex transition to an all-volunteer force, planned to be completed over five years commencing in 2008 and completed by 1 January 2015.⁶⁷

Third, reductions in the length of compulsory military service, from the original three years to the most recent reduction in 2008 to one year of service, has resulted in questions over the utility of conscripts with only 12 months of training. Since the democratization of Taiwan in the 1990s, the decisions to reduce the length of service were thought to be politically motivated—in large part because parents of conscripts frowned upon the national obligation that would interrupt their child’s useful economic contributions—and these successive reductions have ironically raised questions about the competence of an inadequately-trained mass army against a professional and far larger adversary.⁶⁸ The political inclination, therefore, would be to abolish conscription altogether and adopt an all-volunteer force to eliminate doubts over competence, as well as alleviate parents’ worry of an interference to their children’s way of life. To compound the political pressure on military manpower reforms, the recent death of a conscript in 2013 resulting from illegal and excessive punishment for his minor infringement of rules, sparked public outrage and cast doubt over the integrity of, and honor in volunteering in, the Taiwanese military.⁶⁹

Using the U.S. military’s transition from the draft to an all-volunteer force as an example, Stanley A. Horowitz in 2009 outlined the potential challenges in Taiwan’s demographic environment and proposed ways to manage the demand and supply challenges—accurate predictions of the present situation that has resulted in the postponement of full transition. He examined U.S. recruitment experiences in the 1990s and the mid-2000s, and drew the lesson that despite recruitment being “inherently cyclical,” careful management of personnel compensation could be used to maintain the necessary recruitment. He tackled demand issues by recommending the profuse use of civilian manpower where possible to reduce the demand on uniformed personnel and the appropriate rewarding and incentivizing of soldiers to increase retention rates. Horowitz

67 Wenhao, “Evolving Cross-Strait Relations and Taiwan’s New Military Service System,” 10.

68 Ibid., 8–9.

69 “Taiwan’s Army: Blooded,” *The Economist* 408, no. 8848 (10 August 2013): 34.

also proffered supply side solutions, including an increase in pay for new recruits, increasing the resources for advertising and recruiting, and maximizing recruitment during the cyclical economic downturns.⁷⁰

In spite of the military's transition nearing the end of its planned timeline, the Taiwan military today has not achieved the envisaged level of volunteer recruitment. It has only achieved 30 percent of its recruitment target at the end of 2013, thus continues to accept and rely on conscripts to staff its military positions. The poor recruitment has led the Ministry of National Defense (MND) to extend the transition by two years, postponing the completion to 2017, with proposals to reconsider recruitment and manpower policies to further attract volunteers.⁷¹ Although there are many examples of successful transitions from which to learn from, Taiwan is experiencing early implementation problems and, similar to the United States experience that took almost a decade of fine-tuning and understanding of manpower policy dynamics to successfully transition, could overcome these challenges in time with the right mix of policies. The wisdom of a transition, however, will only be revealed by historians scribing the history of Taiwan decades into the future.

C. CONTINUING RELEVANCE

Although many countries have transitioned from conscription to all-volunteer forces, compulsory military service continues to be an important institution in several countries in the modern world. A common reason for retaining conscription is a small country and small population facing a real and imminent threat from neighbors, yet there are also countries that retain conscription despite not having any lurking danger. This section will analyze three countries and their reasons for continuing conscription.

⁷⁰ Stanley A. Horowitz, "Implementing an all-Volunteer Force in Taiwan," *Institute for Defense Analyses* (2009), <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA509059>.

⁷¹ Shang-su Wu, "Taiwan's all-Volunteer Military," *The Diplomat*, 25 December 2013, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/12/taiwans-all-volunteer-military>.

1. Switzerland

George J. Stein notes of Switzerland: “A common and oft repeated observation is that ‘Switzerland does not have an army, Switzerland is an army.’”⁷² This perception was originally realized because of Switzerland’s geostrategic vulnerability—a small land area, a small population, and surrounded by larger, powerful, and more populated neighbors, Switzerland was extremely susceptible to any major European conflict. This small European country therefore relied on conscription to amass a credible fighting force to fulfil its goal of “dissuasion,” Switzerland’s version of deterrence as a national security policy; the idea that any attack would be exceedingly costly and any resulting spoils would not be worth the aggressive endeavor. One convincing aspect of Swiss dissuasion is the military’s remarkable ability to mobilize a fighting force of more than half a million soldiers within 48 hours. This state of readiness is made possible by an initial short but intensive 17 weeks of individualized military training, followed by up to 45 years in three reservist phases requiring a total of 13 refresher courses. This well-oiled system of utilizing reserves allows the military to rely on a small regular force for training and essential daily air operations, yet be able to rely on the quick summoning of a substantial and formidable deterrence against any would-be aggressor in times of war.⁷³

Switzerland’s foreign policy, emphasizing neutrality, contributes significantly to its overall defense strategy. By being an active and useful member of the international community, Switzerland pitches itself as a neutral and responsible mediator that abides by international law. Switzerland also participates in international efforts to enhance Third World progress through funding and development expertise, thereby promoting its “own national interest by being recognized, in an effective way, as a state whose neutrality it is in the interests of others to respect.” Notwithstanding the intimidating headcount of a mobilized Swiss army and its international political measures, Switzerland also utilizes several domestic policies to enhance deterrence.⁷⁴

⁷² George J. Stein, “Total Defense: A Comparative Overview of the Security Policies of Switzerland and Austria,” *Defense Analysis* 6, no. 1 (1990): 17, doi: 10.1080/07430179008405428.

⁷³ Lellenberg, *Overview of the Citizen-Army Concept*, 15–18; Stein, “Total Defense: A Comparative Overview of the Security Policies of Switzerland and Austria,” 21.

⁷⁴ Stein, “Total Defense: A Comparative Overview of the Security Policies of Switzerland and Austria,” 20–21.

Known as comprehensive defense, or General Defense, “the coordination of political, military, economic and psychological factors to produce an effective ‘deterrent’”⁷⁵ includes the maintenance of sufficient bomb shelters for the vast majority of its population, diversity in imports to prevent the risk of being blockaded or sanctioned into submission, and the comprehensive education and awareness programs to reduce the risk of educated citizens being subverted or psychologically attacked. Switzerland’s domestic measures include heavy investment in reliable civil defense processes and every effort to be transparent with their policies to offer its citizens a confidence that they are well protected. This assurance is felt most notably through its public and private bomb shelters that can accommodate up to 90 percent of the population against nuclear fallout and blast protection. The protection of its people, key national assets, and a protected headquarters from which to function during war also prevents possible aggressors from considering blackmail.⁷⁶

The successful implementation of dissuasion together with its well-known policy of armed neutrality has resulted in a country that has successfully, and remarkably, avoided conflict since the late 1700s. Switzerland has managed to normalize military service as part of the Swiss lifestyle and continues to implement it with a “near 100 percent conscription ratio”⁷⁷ while continuing to receive overwhelming popular support.⁷⁸ One of few unique examples to use conscription despite there being no immediate threat, Switzerland’s ability to avoid conflict is testament to its robust defense policy, including compulsory military service and the use of Total Defense. Although Switzerland continues to use conscription to back up its dissuasion message, the lack of aggressors and the benign regional security environment may force it to reconsider conscription.

75 Lellenberg, *Overview of the Citizen-Army Concept*, 19.

76 Ibid., 15–20.

77 Haltiner, “The Definite End of the Mass Army in Western Europe,” 17.

78 “Volksinitiative ‘Für Eine Glaubwürdige Sicherheitspolitik Und Eine Schweiz Ohne Armee,’” Government of Switzerland, 2 December 2001, <http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/va/20011202/det482.html>.

2. South Korea

With the annexation by the Japanese in 1910 and sufferance in the Korean War in 1950–1953, South Korea was anxious for military security. Although introduced in the Military Service Law in 1948, conscription was only fully implemented in 1957 to build South Korea's massive military. Under the requirements of South Korean conscription, all males are required to serve a period of 26 months, followed by eight years of annual refresher training in the reserves. After two coups and three and a half decades of military dictatorship, a booming economy, globalization, and the period of relative calm towards the end of the Cold War led South Koreans to favor “Western rather than Confucian views of life” that led to South Korea's democratization.⁷⁹

Even though South Korea had built up a significant and credible military, it faced four challenges to its conscription system as it approached the turn of the century. Firstly, the growth of the South Korean economy led to a growth in its population, causing an over population of conscripts. The military implemented a partial conscription system to deal with this overflow, but this created conscription inequality and resulted in unhappiness in the population. Second, the end of the Cold War resulted in increased discussions between South and North Korea, signifying a warming of relations, possible reconciliation, and a reduced reliance on the military. Third, the shift in U.S. military posture at the end of the Cold War meant a modification of the U.S.-South Korea security arrangement and the subsequent reorganizing of the South Korean military to gradually take greater control, beginning with the returning of peacetime Operational Control of South Korean forces to South Korea. Finally, the international trend towards a global peace following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 raises South Korean expectations of a new security situation that would rely on economic cooperation, reducing the need for the large military.⁸⁰

79 Chae Ha Pak, “ROK Defense Manpower Policy: Problems and Perspectives,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 5, no. 2 (1993): 52–57, quotation in 56, doi: 10.1080/10163279309464519; Seungsook Moon, “Trouble with Conscription, Entertaining Soldiers: Popular Culture and the Politics of Militarized Masculinity in South Korea,” *Men and Masculinities* 8, no. 64 (2005): 69, doi: 10.1177/1097184X04268800.

80 Pak, “ROK Defense Manpower Policy: Problems and Perspectives,” 57–59.

These four challenges, together with international and domestic developments that hint at a prolonged global peace, have motivated South Korea's Ministry of Defense to submit the draft Defense Reform Basic Law in 2005 that specified a transformation of its military. This plan, titled *Defense Reform Plan (DRP) 2020*, aims to enhance the military's capabilities and address its manpower issues in consideration of the economic, social, and political environment of the 21st century, including the reduction in manpower from 681,000 to 500,000 by 2020.⁸¹

Most significantly for South Korea's security is its alliance with the United States. Admittedly, growing tensions have arisen from the United States' close relationship with South Korea—including creeping involvement in South Korea's domestic politics, the United States' bilateral inclination in North Korea policy that may conflict with South Korean interests, crimes committed by U.S. military personnel causing complications in the alliance, and South Korea's growing confidence and desire for “greater respect from Washington”—however, “the trajectory of bilateral ties appears generally promising over the long-run.”⁸² This alliance has reinforced South Korean security for more than half a century and looks set to continue into at least the near future. In spite of the security provided by the alliance with the United States, South Korea continues to retain conscription and does not appear ready to reduce its reliance on conscription before 2020.

In 2007, Jung Woo Yim evaluated the feasibility of transitioning the South Korean military to an all-volunteer force and concluded that conscription should be maintained in the near future. His recommendations were based on economic limitations due to its presently large size, the uncertainty in its geopolitical situation, and the inherent threat from North Korea. Although he concludes the short to mid-term preservation of conscription, Yim recommends that South Korea consider a longer-term phased transition

81 Fred L. Huh, *Azimuth Check: An Analysis of Military Transformation in the Republic of Korea—Is it Sufficient?* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2009), 13–14, <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll3/id/2542>.

82 Weston S. Konishi and Mark E. Manyin, “South Korea: Its Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy Outlook,” *United States Congressional Research Service* (30 September 2009), 14–16, quotations in 14 and 16, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=32756>.

to an all-volunteer force because of growing negative sentiments towards conscription in a modernizing society and the decreasing birth rate.⁸³

Fred L. Huh examined the DRP 2020 in 2009 and similarly concluded that conscription will be retained. His assessment was predominantly based on the “unpredictable security threat from North Korea,” and the “absolute necessity” to maintain a large number of personnel for stability operations in a post-North Korea scenario, a number that would be far larger than economically viable with an all-volunteer force.⁸⁴

3. Israel

Surrounded by significantly larger and traditionally antagonistic enemies, Israel has been in constant conflict since its creation in 1947. The Israel Defense Force (IDF) options are limited by its scarce land and small population, which offers no strategic depth and necessary reaction time for military buildup and prevents the employment of a sufficiently-sized standing army without suffering from the economic tradeoff. It thus implements conscription to supply the much-needed manpower for its military because in its geostrategic environment with an ever-present and deadly danger, “Israel’s hope for victory in war rests largely in the ability to respond rapidly to threats.”⁸⁵

In its geopolitical predicament of constant and imminent threat, the imperative for military dominance in all state affairs naturally results in Israel becoming a garrison state, where the state functions primarily for its need for military security. Military policy is of utmost importance to state survival and affects all walks of life. All males serve three years of compulsory military service and, because of the acute military manpower shortage, women are also conscripted—about 50 percent of females are required to serve two years in all units of the army, and especially noncombat roles.⁸⁶

⁸³ Woo Yim Jung, “Feasibility of Implementing an all-Volunteer Force for the ROK Armed Forces” (Master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2007), <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/795220353>.

⁸⁴ Huh, *Azimuth Check: An Analysis of Military Transformation in the Republic of Korea—Is it Sufficient?*, 61.

⁸⁵ Lellenberg, *Overview of the Citizen-Army Concept*, 15–18, and 27.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 23–29, quotation in 27.

In addition to its military function, conscription also plays an equally important role in Israeli nation-building. Conscription is used “as a mechanism for integrating, socializing, and melting together the divergent cultural backgrounds of immigrants to Israel”⁸⁷ because a half of the population is comprised of immigrants from over seventy countries with such diverse fundamental differences in religion, politics, and language. The IDF also contributes significantly to education and the economy: compulsory service provides many opportunities to educate new inductees who are new to the Hebrew language and Jewish culture, the army’s large research and development facilities encourage the development of state of the art technology that are eventually produced in the military production lines for both military and civilian use, including a significant portion of which is exported to foreign markets.⁸⁸

With the end of the Cold War, an improving international security environment, its modernizing domestic situation, and a close security relationship with the United States,⁸⁹ however, Israel has tweaked its military policies to keep up with the times. According to Stuart A. Cohen, the IDF has reduced the frequency and age limit of its reserves, relaxed exemption requirements for females, and reorganized its manpower structure in response to the changing demography, economic progress, technology advancement, and security relations with its neighbors and allies. He opines that although domestic and international developments have presented new challenges that have led to these changes, Israel has decided to adapt instead of abolish conscription because, in its inherent strategic precariousness, it ultimately requires the numbers to compensate for its lack of strategic depth.⁹⁰

It is clear, therefore, that the function of conscription in Israel is for fundamental military defense, as well as an “important vehicle for social integration, economic and

87 Ayad Al-Qazzaz, “Army and Society in Israel,” *The Pacific Sociological Review* 16, no. 2 (1973), 158–62, quotation in 158.

88 *Ibid.*, 158–63.

89 “U.S. Relations with Israel,” Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Department of State, Government of the United States (28 November 2012), <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3581.htm>.

90 Stuart A. Cohen, “The Israel Defense Forces (IDF): From a ‘People’s Army’ to a ‘Professional Military’ – Causes and Implications,” *Armed Forces & Society* 21, no. 2 (1995), 237–254.

social modernization and, above all, nation-building.”⁹¹ The pervasiveness of the IDF, which encompasses more than three quarters of the population and is a constant presence in every household, is fittingly summarized by Al-Qazzaz: “[O]ne can say without too much exaggeration that the Israeli army is the Israeli society and the Israeli society is the Israeli army.”⁹² The IDF is unequivocally the lifeblood of Israel and, considering the critically of the military purpose and social effects of conscription, it would be impossible for Israel to abandon compulsory military service.

91 Al-Qazzaz, “Army and Society in Israel,” 162–63.

92 Ibid., 144.

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III. NATIONAL SERVICE FOR SINGAPORE

Singapore, a small island located at the Southern-most tip of the Malay Peninsula in Southeast Asia, was once a trading colony and major naval base of the British Empire for much of the 19th century up to the end of World War II. It had no military of its own, with security provided for by its British colonial rulers and augmented by Australia, Malaya, and New Zealand. The 1967 economic collapse, however, forced Britain to reconsider its widespread deployment of overseas forces—Britain decided to decrease their military emphasis east of the Suez and withdraw their military forces from Malaysia and Singapore.⁹³ Singapore in 1967 had only an army of a few hundred soldiers consisting of mainly Malaysian citizens, a navy with two hand-me-down boats from Britain, no air force of its own, and a significant reliance on British bases and workers for 20 percent of GNP—Britain’s decision to withdraw thus necessitated Singapore’s exigency to fill the impending gap created by the withdrawal of the British military.⁹⁴

A. ORIGINS OF NATIONAL SERVICE

A tiny island nation with a majority Chinese population, surrounded by larger and more populous Malay neighbors, Singapore suffered from a dearth of natural resources and was in its early years dependent on international trade and heavily reliant on Malaysia for water. Moreover, Singapore’s relations with Malaysia in the early 1960s were fraught with Malaysian tempest and animosity because of political differences, and Singapore felt acutely the lack of a military. On 9 August 1965, the day of separation from Malaysia—the day of Singapore’s independence—Singapore’s first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, believed that Malaysian leaders “thought they [Malaysia] could station troops in Singapore, squat on us and if necessary close the Causeway and cut off our water supply.”⁹⁵

⁹³ Philip Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947–1968* (London: Oxford University Press, for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1973), 325.

⁹⁴ Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965–2000* (New York: Harper Collins Publications, 2000), 60–62 and 69–70; Huxley, *Defending the Lion City*, 9–12.

⁹⁵ Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1998), 648–664, quotation in 663.

Singapore's geostrategic environment and heavy dependence on external trade also exacerbated its seemingly diminutive position. To Lee, this vulnerability was the "inescapable, permanent condition of Singapore as an independent republic" and even when enjoying neighborly relations "at their fraternal best . . . tiny yet tenacious Singapore was seen as the 'interloper' of the region."⁹⁶ The early sense of vulnerability in the region was not confined to the region, but also Lee's concern in the international environment at that time. Acutely cognizant of the international "undisguised open contempt . . . displayed for governments seen to live in a political day-dream marked by anti-colonial rhetoric," Lee and his new government "felt obliged to reach out well beyond its immediate regional locale in order to demonstrate universal confirmation of its independent status."⁹⁷

The sense of vulnerability in Singapore was almost identical to Britain at the turn of the 19th century. In Britain's historic progress, "the vast rise in her population . . . together with the industrialization . . . led to an enormous increase in the demand for foodstuffs and raw materials . . . [with] rising prosperity accelerat[ing] this trend . . . [and becoming] *dependent as no other country was for its prosperity upon the import and export of commodities* [emphasis added]."⁹⁸ Lee, who had close ties to Britain, had the astuteness and foresight to realize Singapore's inherent vulnerability as an island nation, analogous with Britain's rise in the early 1800s, and sought to mitigate this vulnerability by increasing Singapore's international stature.

To further Singapore's diplomatic significance and to weigh in on international relations, Lee relied primarily on two Realist principles that guided Singapore's foreign policy: the first foundational consideration was that "as a small state, Singapore has no illusions about the state of our region or the world," which implied that self-sufficiency was of paramount importance; and the second was for Singapore to "always maintain a

96 Fook Kwang Han et al., ed., *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going* (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2011), 17–20 and 26–28, quotations in 17.

97 Michael Leifer, *Singapore's Foreign Policy: Coping with Vulnerability* (London: Routledge, 2000), 62.

98 Paul M. Kennedy, "Chapter 7: Mahan versus Mackinder (1859–97)," in *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Ashfield Press, 1976), 200.

credible and deterrent military defence as the fundamental underpinning for an effective foreign policy.”⁹⁹

When Britain announced in 1967, shortly after Singapore’s independence, that its forces were to be withdrawn following its drawdown of commitments east of the Suez, Singapore’s leaders knew that it needed to address two critical issues: rapid buildup of a military to defend itself from external threats, and national integration for internal stability.

B. MILITARY SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Although a former stronghold serving Britain’s strategic in the east, Singapore’s military was not a priority for the British and thus did not equip Singapore with an indigenous military—Singapore had no military at independence and found itself in perilous need of a self-sufficient defense. Moreover, the fateful examples of Sri Lanka, Lebanon, and Kuwait were vivid reminders to the Singaporean leadership of small state vulnerabilities if national security were not taken seriously and if a nation did not have a self-sufficient military.¹⁰⁰

1. A Serious Defender’s Challenge

Singapore’s small size, however, presented a serious defender’s challenge. As a small island lacking in strategic depth, Singapore had no option to surrender territory with the hope of subsequently recapturing it. The defense of Singapore, therefore, necessitated an air force that would provide air defense and interdiction beyond the island’s shores, a formidable task considering the requirement to create an air force from nothing. Singapore was similarly susceptible to disruption to its maritime environment. Land scarce and devoid of natural resources, and before the proliferation of affordable air transport, sea trade was Singapore’s lifeline. Besides, Singapore was in a prime position to capitalize on sea trade as it was situated at the confluence of shipping traffic from Europe and the Middle East to the Orient through the Strait of Malacca. Mindful that

⁹⁹ Huxley, *Defending the Lion City*, xix.

¹⁰⁰ Tan, “The Armed Forces and Politics in Singapore: The Persistence of Civil-Military Fusion,” 151–52; Leifer, *Singapore’s Foreign Policy*, 56–67; Lee, *From Third World to First*, 26–28.

maritime trade denial and a blockade could potentially cripple maritime Singapore, the navy's capability was built up to protect Singapore's maritime environment and ensure Singapore's trade routes remain open.¹⁰¹

Singapore thus created its defense policy based on the tenets of *diplomacy* and *deterrence*. Diplomacy to enable Singapore, in spite of its small size, to seek an equal footing in the interconnectedness of an interdependent world; nevertheless, should diplomacy fail, Singapore would possess the capability to defend itself.¹⁰² Lee's first order of business was therefore to establish military self-sufficiency to defend its sovereignty and mitigate its vulnerability. This challenging task of budding Singapore's defense was proffered to Lee's close aide and political partner, the adroit Goh Keng Swee, as Singapore's first Minister in charge of the Ministry of Interior and Defence (MID).¹⁰³

2. Conscription for National Defense

The most challenging task for Goh was to conjure the requisite manpower from this small island nation with a population of only two million to create a credible military before the exodus of the British—a critical task with a deadline of four years. According to Lee, it was “important for people in and outside Singapore to know that despite our small population, we could mobilise a large fighting force at short notice.”¹⁰⁴ At that time, without yet a stable and growing economy, Lee explained that Singapore could not afford a big army.¹⁰⁵

101 Huxley, *Defending the Lion City*, 9–16 and 19–22; Lee, *From Third World to First*, 37–41; Republic of Singapore Navy, *Onwards and Upwards: Celebrating 40 Years of the Navy* (Singapore: SNP International, 2007), 32; Republic of Singapore Navy, “Mission Statement,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, last updated 10 August 2010, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/mindef_websites/atozlistings/navy/about_us/crest.html.

102 *Defending Singapore in the 21st Century* (Singapore: Singapore Ministry of Defence, 2000), 6–13, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/dam/publications/eBooks/More_eBooks/ds21.pdf.

103 Lee, *From Third World to First*, 22–23.

104 *Ibid.*, 33.

105 “Lee Calls for a Territorial Army of 10,000 in Five Years,” *The Straits Times*, 1 November 1965, <http://newspapers.nl.sg/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19651101-1.2.92.aspx>.

In 1967 Defence Minister Goh thus proposed adopting the Israeli practice of conscription that would allow “mobilizing the maximum number possible in the shortest time possible.”¹⁰⁶ Singapore’s military would comprise a small regular force augmented by a two-year compulsory military service to train and build up a large population of reserves over time. After the two years of full-time conscript service, they would flow into the reserves and undergo a refresher of 40 days annually until 40 years of age, or 50 for officers. According to Goh’s plan, Singapore by 1970 was to “have available on immediate mobilization 45,000 well trained troops. This is a substantial force by any standard. It should be adequate to protect Singapore against any foreseeable military threat.”¹⁰⁷ This arrangement would provide for a military that could be called upon in wartime to provide a large fighting force without having to spend excessively on burdensome manpower costs and draining Singapore of its economic workforce.¹⁰⁸ Singapore implemented compulsory military service, or “National Service” (NS), in 1967.¹⁰⁹

C. SOCIAL FRAGILITY

Besides external vulnerabilities, Singapore’s young independence was also troubled by domestic instability as racial factions frequently incited communal disturbances, including common occurrences of full-scale racial riots. Its ethnic mix also stuck out like a sore thumb in its geostrategic environment: It was a small majority-Chinese migrant country located in close proximity to its significantly larger, more populated, and Malay-dominated neighbors, Malaysia and Indonesia. Haunted by fresh memories of deadly racial conflict and recent race-inspired disturbances—Indonesia’s

¹⁰⁶ Lee, *From Third World to First*, 33.

¹⁰⁷ Speech by Goh Keng Swee at the presentation of the Annual Budget Statement in Parliament on 3 December 1968, in Goh Keng Swee, “Chapter 1: Budget Day Speech,” in *Wealth of East Asian Nations: The Essays and Speeches of Goh Keng Swee*, ed. Linda Low (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International, 2013a), 7.

¹⁰⁸ Lee, *From Third World to First*, 35.

¹⁰⁹ The term “National Service” (NS) is used for conscription in Singapore, a person serving conscription is called a “Full-time National Serviceman” (NSF), and a person on reservist after completing NS is called an “Operationally Ready National Serviceman” (ORNS, or NSman). Singapore introduced military service, or NS, with the “*National Service (Amendment) Act*” on 17 March 1967, two years after independence.

Konfrontasi that ended in 1965, a racial riot between the Chinese and Malays in February 1966 over as slight an issue as misunderstanding of instructions that seemed to discriminate against Malays in the military, and a deteriorating racial situation in neighboring Malaysia in November 1967 that had the potential to spill over into Singapore—Lee was cognizant that Singapore “had to deal with matters of race with the utmost sensitivity.”¹¹⁰

Singapore, an entrepôt nation with a largely immigrant population,¹¹¹ had just been relinquished by its British colonial rulers and was experiencing the effects of divisive colonialism, poverty, and disorder; one way to foster social cohesion was through conscription.¹¹² According to Kwok Kian-Woon, it was Goh Keng Swee, one of Singapore’s premier statesmen and undoubtedly Singapore’s social architect, who “built up the foundations of the SAF almost from scratch” and purposed the SAF as an institution for social integration, in addition to defense.¹¹³

1. Effectiveness of Conscription

Several authors have studied the effect of the military for social integration—as a “school for the nation.” Dietz, Elkin, and Roumani found that social integration through the military is difficult,¹¹⁴ and their 1991 finding is supported by Krebs who argues that the use of the “military as potential nation builder is in large part misguided.”¹¹⁵ Indeed, the increasing number of countries abolishing conscription appears to support their

110 Global Security, “Konfrontasi (Confrontation),” GlobalSecurity.org, last updated 7 November 2011, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/konfrontasi.htm>; Lee, *From Third World to First*, 23, 26–33, and 39–40, quotation in 29.

111 Singapore’s migrant population in the 1960s comprised Chinese (77 percent), who were mainly traders and coolies; Malays (14.8 percent), who were mainly immigrants from nearby Indonesian islands and Malaya, Indians (7 percent), who eventually settled after expatriation by British colonial rulers as workers, soldiers, and convicts; and Eurasians and others (1.2 percent).

112 Lee, *From Third World to First*; Han et al., *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*.

113 Kian-Woon Kwok, “The Social Architect: Goh Keng Swee,” in *Lee’s Lieutenants: Singapore’s Old Guard*, eds. Er Lan Peng and Kevin Tan (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 45–69, quotation in 58.

114 Dietz, Elkin, and Roumani, “The Military as a Vehicle for Social Integration,” 1–26.

115 Ronald R. Krebs, “A School for the Nation? How Military Service does Not Build Nations, and how it Might,” *International Security* 28, no. 4 (Spring 2004): 120, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/international_security/v028/28.4krebs.pdf.

argument. Simonsen, however, asserts: “A national army could, if not build a new nation on its own, then at least influence perceptions of what a nation might constitute.”¹¹⁶ Nair, Wilkinson, Cunha, Mutalib, and Walsh support Simonsen’s view, specifically from the Singaporean context.¹¹⁷

The reality was that racial divisions and social disunity in Singapore was rife, and the fragile domestic situation was a growing problem that the government of Singapore could not afford to let deteriorate. Lee understood the importance of a common identity and the urgent need to bond the population during Singapore’s early years of independence—the cultivation of this singular cohesive and distinctive Singaporean identity was of paramount importance and they chose conscription as the conduit through which to achieve this effect.

2. Conscription for National Integration

Besides the critical supply of necessary military headcount in this manpower-scarce country, the government designed NS as a vehicle to fashion an identity unique to Singapore. At the age of 18, every Singaporean male—regardless of language, race, religion, or social background—was mandated to eat, live, and train together with his peers through two years of his life as a National Serviceman. This requirement to live in proximity with one another resulted in the inevitable understanding and eventual acceptance of his different, yet identifiably *Singaporean*, fellow citizen.¹¹⁸

Among other carefully planned national institutions to integrate the society, the military was the cornerstone of the Singapore identity. In explaining how Singapore overcame its vulnerabilities as a small nation, Cabinet Minister George Yeo listed the

116 Sven Gunnar Simonsen, “Building ‘National’ Armies—Building Nations? Determinants of Success for Postintervention Integration Efforts,” *Armed Forces & Society* 33, no. 4 (July 2007): 586, doi: 10.1177/0095327X06291347.

117 Elizabeth Nair, *Conscription and Nation-Building in Singapore: A Psychological Analysis* (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 1994); Barry Wilkinson, “Social Engineering in Singapore,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 18, no. 2 (1998): 165–88; Cunha, “Sociological Aspects of the Singapore Armed Forces,” 459–475; Hussin Mutalib, “The Socio-Economic Dimension in Singapore’s Quest for Security and Stability,” *Pacific Affairs* 75, no. 1 (2002): 39–56, <http://www.pacificaffairs.ubc.ca/files/2011/07/Volume75.pdf>; Sean P. Walsh, “The Roar of the Lion City,” *Armed Forces & Society* 33, no. 2 (2007): 265–285, doi: 10.1177/0095327X06291854.

118 Lee, *From Third World to First*, 35–36.

institution of NS as a “social distillery” that was essential in creating the “Singapore essence,” and elaborating that “the key, therefore, is not economic growth or military strength or technology, but our sense of identity as Singaporeans. Whatever may be our race, language or religion, provided we have deep within us a sense of being Singaporean, we will survive.”¹¹⁹

The common experience shared by Singaporean males in their two years of NS intermingling started to cultivate Singaporeans who were more tolerant of one another and ultimately led a common Singaporean identity amongst a once diverse and divisive population.¹²⁰ Recalling Singapore’s progress in the past few decades, Lee described NS as having had a “profound impact on Singapore society” since its inception to the extent that Singaporeans have viewed it as a “rite of passage” and a “way of life that has helped to unify our people.”¹²¹

D. THE IMPORTANCE OF NATIONAL SERVICE

At independence, Singapore was an infant state, extremely fragile, and largely considered “another basket case within the underdeveloped Third World”¹²²—a small and weak post-colonial nation; it possessed the requisite internal disunity, was situated in a relatively rough neighborhood, but blessed yet cursed with a particular geostrategic importance—fraught with security uncertainty and social fraction.

The absence of any semblance of a military and the prevalence of social unrest in the turbulent years after independence were critical problems for Singapore’s founding fathers. Notwithstanding its humble beginnings and the herculean effort required to solve the significant challenges of external defense and domestic strife, Lee and his team implemented conscription to stabilize and subsequently grow Singapore into the military

119 George Yeo, “Speech by George Yeo, Minister for Information & the Arts and Minister for Health, at the Temasek Seminar,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, 7 November 1996, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/sp/1996/07nov96_speech2.html.

120 Huxley, *Defending the Lion City*, 251.

121 Lee, *From Third World to First*, 44.

122 Ian Patrick Austin, *Goh Keng Swee and Southeast Asian Governance* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2004), 40.

and economic success it is today; this “basket case” had developed in less than half a century from a simple fishing port to a thriving nation with a stature par excellence in Southeast Asia.

It is therefore not an exaggeration to say that NS was the fundamental element in the survival and growth of Singapore by fulfilling the two imperatives of this nascent country: national defense and national cohesion.

Militarily, the SAF is widely respected and equipped with arguably the most advanced technologies in Southeast Asia. Importantly, the SAF has not faced any new or imminent traditional military threat in recent decades.¹²³ Economically, Singapore experienced unprecedented growth and unsurpassed economic progress; it ranks among the top economies of the world today.¹²⁴ This prosperity has afforded Singapore citizens an increased standard of living, greater income, and better education—a society that is not too dissimilar from the European examples.

In other words, Singapore has much in common with the countries that have abandoned conscription but, unlike those countries, Singapore has maintained conscription and appears highly unlikely to end conscription in the future. The following chapter will examine how Singapore has managed the evolution of its military and retained the relevance of conscription in Singapore.

123 “Chapter Six: Asia,” *The Military Balance* (2014): 275–76, doi: 10.1080/04597222.2014.871879.

124 The 2013 Index of Economic Freedom ranks Singapore #2 in the Asia Pacific region (behind Hong Kong) and #1 in Southeast Asia with a GDP per capita of \$59,711. “2013 Index of Economic Freedom,” The Heritage Foundation, accessed 5 August 2013, <http://www.heritage.org/index/country/singapore>.

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IV. RETAINING NATIONAL SERVICE

At the onset, the idea of NS was not well received because of the colonial-era distaste for the military and the social stigma towards soldiering. Culturally, the predominantly Chinese population was prejudiced against serving in the military because, as Lee noted, every Chinese parent was familiar with the Chinese proverb: “*hao han bu dang bing, hao tie bu da ding* (a good lad does not become a soldier, good steel does not become nails).”¹²⁵ The government consequently endeavored to reduce this apprehension by incorporating the national cadet corps and national police cadet corps in schools, with Goh working closely with the Ministry of Education to integrate the uniformed groups as a major part of the schools’ extra curriculum activities. The aim was to alleviate trepidation of the uniformed services by infusing the concept of uniformed service in early education, and by encouraging the honor of servitude ubiquitous throughout society.¹²⁶ This was to be the first of many examples in the history of changes to alleviate the challenges of conscription in Singapore.

Although there has been a consistent emphasis on the military and a continual review of government policies since the inception of NS, there were three major developments in the last half century that provide an insight into the Singapore government’s penchant for retaining the system of conscription: increasing prosperity, a modernizing population, and a globalizing world.

A. INCREASING PROSPERITY

In addition to the critical need to initiate the creation of a respectable military, Singapore’s founding fathers also understood the importance of Singapore’s economic viability. Lee admitted that this was his “biggest headache,” that “extraordinary efforts” had to be made to make Singaporeans a “tightly knit, rugged and adaptable people who could do things better and cheaper than our neighbours, because they wanted to bypass us

¹²⁵ Lee, *From Third World to First*, 33.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 33–34.

and render obsolete our role as the entrepôt and middleman for the trade of the region.”¹²⁷

Lee set out to increase literacy, create jobs, and encourage economic growth by attracting multinational companies and foreign investment to build Singapore’s economy. Most importantly in this mix of developments, he decided that Singapore’s success would be rooted in being a financial center of the region. Singapore created the necessary supporting apparatuses, including fast and reliable telecommunications and transport linkages, favorable policies for investment and finance, and a stable and incorrupt government. The success of these policies led to unrivalled growth and positioned Singapore as the principal hub in the region between 1968 and 1985.¹²⁸ Affirming this explosion of success and newfound prosperity, Goh remarked in 1984 that “we [Singaporeans] enjoy full employment, the overseas reserves are abundant, economic growth has been strong even during the world recession of 1979–82, personal incomes have been rising, and human skills are improving as we learn new technology.”¹²⁹

Singapore’s fresh wealth, however, brought about the jealousy of its neighbors, which did not develop as rapidly. During the first two decades of independence, Singapore had especially thorny bilateral relations with Malaysia. As Singapore’s economic development accelerated, Malaysia sought to impede Singapore’s trade and economic success. Arising from the anti-Singapore sentiment in Malaysia, “the Malaysians had formed an ‘S’ committee to coordinate Malaysian policies on problems with Singapore . . . to choke [Singapore’s] economic growth wherever their economy gave them leverage over [Singapore’s].”¹³⁰ Examples of Malaysia’s anti-Singapore efforts included the imposition of tariffs on imports through Singapore, accusations of pollution and flooding in neighboring Johor state caused by Singapore’s developments,

127 Lee, *From Third World to First*, 23–25.

128 Han et al., *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*, 137–43 and 147–60; Lee, *From Third World to First*, 89–97.

129 Speech delivered by Goh Keng Swee on 25 September 1984, in Goh Keng Swee, “Chapter 12: Old Guard, New Guard and Other Establishments,” in *Wealth of East Asian Nations: The Essays and Speeches of Goh Keng Swee*, ed. Linda Low (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International, 2013b), 153.

130 Lee, *From Third World to First*, 269.

defamation against Singaporean leaders, and threats to close the Singapore-Malaysia rail link in order to route trade through its newly opened Pasir Gudang Port and to shut off the water supply.¹³¹ This bullying and perennial susceptibility in a volatile environment necessitated a defense force to deter possible escalated aggression.

1. A Competent SAF for National Defense

Having attained a measure of domestic stability after the end of *Konfrontasi* and the successful inception of the MID under Goh's leadership in the early years of independence, Singapore split the MID into two entities: the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF). The establishment of MINDEF in 1970 allowed Singapore to focus resources on building the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) to defend against external threats.¹³² Lee again entrusted Goh Keng Swee with a heavy responsibility, this time to lead the newly established MINDEF.

Despite being land scarce and devoid of natural resources, Singapore was well positioned to capitalize on sea trade at the confluence of shipping traffic from Europe and the Middle East to the Orient through the Strait of Malacca. At the same time, Goh was also fully aware that sea trade was critical to Singapore's economic survival—a strong navy was thus necessary. Cognizant also of the lack of its strategic depth to defend against any aggressor, an extended defense capability was to be acquired—an air force with fighters and air defense would provide this extended ring of protection. Goh thus started to develop the navy and air force to ensure Singapore's Sea Lines of Communications (SLOC) remain open and to protect against external threats.¹³³ As Minister for Defence from 1970 to 1979, Goh oversaw the rapid development of the SAF for basic national security, transforming the SAF into a regional heavyweight built on the tenets of diplomacy and deterrence.¹³⁴

131 Lee, *From Third World to First*, 257–82.

132 Huxley, *Defending the Lion City*, 16.

133 Tim Huxley and David Boey, "Singapore's Army: Boosting Capabilities," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 8, no. 4 (1996): 174–80, <https://janes.ihs.com/CustomPages/Janes/DisplayPage.aspx?DocType=News&ItemId=+++1676642&Pubabbrev=JIR>; Republic of Singapore Navy, *Onwards and Upwards*, 32; Republic of Singapore Navy, "Mission Statement."

134 Tan, "Singapore's Defence: Capabilities, Trends, and Implications," 458.

Within a span of two decades, Singapore evolved from a hapless newly independent island state with an almost negligible military to a nation with a credible army, navy, and air force. NS was a significant enabler of this effort in the budding years because the steady supply of conscripts filled out the new positions in the rapidly growing SAF. The flow of full time conscripts to the reserves further added to the population of reserves available for mobilization, enhancing the message of deterrence. The increased security and assurance of peace and stability in turn built foreign investor confidence, with a growing economy resulting in more funds for the development of the SAF—an envious, yet worrisome, position in the context of jealous neighbors.

Faced with the lack of strategic depth, Singapore’s reliance on NS provided the military manpower required for quick mobilization of forces to defend its small territory. Equally important was the augmentation by conscripts to fulfil the growing personnel demand for the buildup of a capable navy and air force, which further increased the SAF’s sphere of protection to minimize Singapore’s strategic vulnerability. Against the backdrop of a relatively peaceful period during Singapore’s development in the 1970s and 1980s, Singapore’s decision to continue its military buildup without relent attests to its unremitting appreciation of its inherent vulnerability in its volatile geostrategic environment.

Obtaining military manpower and upgrading of military hardware to build credence for this small military were relatively straightforward and fairly reliable through conscription and acquisitions funded by a growing economy. Singapore made exceptional military and economic progress since independence, and by the 1980s “most—particularly those who have been through the formative experience of NS—[had been] imbued with at least a modicum of patriotism and would almost certainly be willing to defend their country and their families against clear external threats.”¹³⁵

In spite of its admirable military progress, Singapore similarly understood the importance of a national approach to defense “premised on the belief that Singapore can survive a war only if the entire society, and not just the military, is prepared and ready for

135 Huxley, *Defending the Lion City*, 250.

defense.”¹³⁶ Singapore thus solicited another important element--“societal heartware”—for a more comprehensive security strategy to capitalize on its citizens’ sense of loyalty to involve the entire population in defense.¹³⁷ Not wanting to reinvent the wheel in total defense, Singapore thus sought a ready-made model to fulfil this whole-of-society strategy—Switzerland’s remarkably successful system of comprehensive defense. Adapting from the political, military, economic, and psychological aspects of the Swiss model, Singapore implemented “Total Defence” (TD) concept in 1984.¹³⁸

2. “Total Defence” for National Identity

Comprising five pillars—Military, Civil, Economic, Social, and Psychological—TD was designed to unite Singapore’s citizens in times of crisis and present a deterrent larger than its military alone. Because Singapore’s conscription policy had always allocated conscripts into both the homeland defense and military services, conscription facilitated the implementation of TD with the permeation of at least one member who was currently serving, or had previously served, in uniform in all of Singapore society. This approach increased the deterrence against external threats as well as built resilience internally to mitigate the effects of asymmetric threats.¹³⁹ An example of the effectiveness of TD was displayed during the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) where “Singaporeans from all sectors of society . . . came together and worked closely with health authorities to fight the deadly virus. . . . Without the cooperation and active involvement of every Singaporean, it would probably have taken a longer time to overcome the SARS epidemic.”¹⁴⁰

In addition to its contribution to deterrence, TD also plays an important social function. Through encouraging every citizen to contribute to TD, the government fosters

136 Tan, “Singapore: Civil-Military Fusion,” 285.

137 Ron Matthews and Nellie Zhang Yan, “Small Country ‘Total Defence’: A Case Study of Singapore,” *Defence Studies* 7, no. 3 (2007): 380–81, doi: 10.1080/14702430701559289.

138 Tan, “Singapore: Civil-Military Fusion,” 155–56.

139 K. U. Menon, “National Resilience: From Bouncing Back to Prevention,” *Ethos* (January 2005): 14–17.

140 Total Defence website, “What is Total Defence,” Government of Singapore, last updated 23 July 2010, http://www.totaldefence.sg/imindef/mindef_websites/topics/totaldefence/about_td.html.

a sense of national belonging and identity as a stakeholder in the success of Singapore.

The objective of TD is to involve

. . . every Singaporean playing a part—the young and the old, men and women, regardless of race or religion. Every small act counts—whether it is being vigilant against suspicious activities, being tolerant and respecting people of different ethnic backgrounds, taking care of our environment, showing support for our servicemen on duty at home or abroad, or simply looking out for each other. This is the essence of Total Defence—that when we each play our part, we help to strengthen the nation as well as ourselves.¹⁴¹

TD and NS were thus the quintessence of social integration for Goh who “was convinced that ‘nothing creates loyalty and national consciousness more thoroughly than participation in defence . . . [and] nation-building aspects will be more significant if its participation is spread over all levels of society.’”¹⁴² This significance is evident in TD’s endurance even after three decades and continues to be relevant in Singapore today, as will be discussed in a subsequent section.

By the end of his tenure in 1979, Defence Minister Goh had stabilized the implementation of NS, recruited a healthy stable of career soldiers, and transformed the SAF from a rudimentary military focused on domestic challenges to one that was able to punch above its weight. The SAF’s evolution and a national TD framework for whole-of-society contribution to defense endowed Singapore in the late 1980s with the security of a “‘poison shrimp,’ which meant simply that while the small country could not resist a determined invader, the cost of any aggression would be made so high as to be an effective deterrent.”¹⁴³

Within two decades of its implementation and the stabilization of conscription, the public perception of NS had changed. In 1984, Goh spoke of his confidence in, and Singaporeans’ acceptance of, the NS system:

141 Total Defence website.

142 Goh Keng Swee, quoted in Tan, “The Armed Forces and Politics in Singapore: The Persistence of Civil-Military Fusion,” 157.

143 Tan, “Singapore’s Defence: Capabilities, Trends, and Implications,” 457–58.

National Service imposes not only a great sacrifice of time and money on the young men called up. It is also unpleasant as military training in the combat arms aims to push the soldier to the limits of human endurance. Yet in every election since National Service was introduced, its abolition has never been an election issue . . . the average Singapore citizen may not be a towering intellect versed in the latest doctrine on military deterrence, but deep in his heart, he knows the dangers that he faces are real and not hypothetical. A kind of folk wisdom has grown on the need to defend ourselves.¹⁴⁴

B. A MODERNIZING POPULATION

Singapore's robust commitment to defense and uninterrupted military investment has afforded the SAF the most technologically advanced and competent military in the region going into the 21st century.¹⁴⁵ An example of this resolve was seen in the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. Despite the crisis taking a heavy economic toll on Southeast Asia, Singapore remained undeterred in military spending; starkly contrasting with the rest of the region where military program suspensions or cancellations were widespread. Singapore's continued military investment and persistence in the system of NS maintained the SAF's ability to harness a large proportion of its population to defend its turf and, in spite of its significantly smaller size and population, fully mobilize an armed force that outnumbers other larger countries in the Asia-Pacific region, including those of Japan, Malaysia, and the Philippines.¹⁴⁶ This strong reputation and competence provided Singapore a security assurance and a safe investment environment, boosting investor confidence and maintaining Singapore's economic growth through the turn of the century.

The stability and peace enjoyed by Singapore going into the new millennium contributed to a more educated and modern society; yet this affluence led to new challenges that affected the system of NS. To identify and tackle these new challenges,

¹⁴⁴ Speech delivered by Goh Keng Swee on 25 September 1984, in Goh, *Chapter 12: Old Guard, New Guard and Other Establishments*, 152.

¹⁴⁵ Chang, "In Defense of Singapore," 108–9; Tan, "Singapore's Defence: Capabilities, Trends, and Implications," 452; "East Asia and Australasia," *The Military Balance* (1999): 171–209, doi: 10.1080/04597229908460133: 173; *Defending Singapore in the 21st Century*, 51.

¹⁴⁶ "Chapter Ten: Country Comparisons – Force Levels and Economics," *The Military Balance* (2013b): 549–50, doi: 10.1080/04597222.2013.757006.

MINDEF convened the Committee to Recognise the Contribution of Operationally Ready National Servicemen to Total Defence (RECORD) in 1990. The aim of RECORD was to recommend ways to “recognize the contribution of Singaporeans, especially ORNS, to Total Defence; and enhance the contribution of ORNS, their families and employers to Total Defence,”¹⁴⁷ to enable NS to remain relevant. Five iterations of RECORD (RECORD I-V) convened between 1990 and 2009 produced a plethora of recommendations, most of which were implemented by MINDEF through the years.¹⁴⁸

Notwithstanding the recommendations by RECORD, MINDEF also conducts its own regular reviews to adapt to Singapore’s fast-paced society. Most pertinent of the turn-of-the-century issues was a changing demography, presenting MINDEF with different manpower and societal pressures that threatened to weaken the NS institution. These included a tightening labor market, changes in population trends, and the changing expectations of a modern society.

1. Revising Remuneration

Although not directly affecting conscripts per se, volunteer remuneration has a significant impact on NS. Besides forming the core of the SAF’s navy and air force, volunteers are, more importantly and with respect to NS, heavily involved in the training and management of the large conscript and reservist army; volunteer competence and morale thus directly affect the conscripts they interact with. MINDEF must therefore constantly maintain its career competitiveness especially because “Singapore’s usual economic buoyancy has made recruiting and retaining regulars an uphill struggle.”¹⁴⁹

While Singapore enjoyed economic success in the mid-1990s, before the Asian Financial Crisis, MINDEF remained focused on maintaining the core of the SAF’s sharp edge, its personnel. It conducted a wage review in 1996 to remain competitive to attract and retain the necessary talent. Dr Tony Tan, then Minister for Defence, explained that

¹⁴⁷ “RECORD Committee Reports,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, last updated 30 May 2013, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/content/imindef/mindef_websites/topics/strengthenNS/resources/record.html.

¹⁴⁸ MINDEF highlights RECORD recommendations during the Government of Singapore’s annual Committee of Supply debates.

¹⁴⁹ Huxley, *Defending the Lion City*, 108–18.

MINDEF “must continue to invest in our people and build a first-class armed force which is the bedrock of our economic success.”¹⁵⁰ Working with a management consultant to develop “The New Partnership,” MINDEF laid out the Savings & Employee Retirement Plan (SAVER) scheme in 1998 to “encourage officers to serve a full 23-year career in the SAF and provide financial security to transit into their second careers confidently.”¹⁵¹

A decade later, in the mid-2000s, a more competitive labor market inspired MINDEF to conduct another major remuneration review. Taking into consideration “new market realities,” MINDEF in 2008 “made several refinements to strengthen [the SAF’s] career proposition.” The changes to attract and retain quality personnel included “additional mid-term retention bonuses” to encourage officers to remain until the end of their military careers, adjusted wage structures “to be more responsive to market conditions,” and opportunities for “part-time degree sponsorships for non-graduate officers to upgrade themselves” and “degree sponsorships for WOSpecs [Warrant Officers and Specialists].”¹⁵²

A sure sign of the fast-paced changes in contemporary Singapore and, more importantly, MINDEF’s adaptability was MINDEF’s new employment scheme in 2010, barely two years after the last revision. The impetus of this change reflected not only the competitiveness of labor demand in the private sector but also the changing expectations of Singapore’s modern society—MINDEF was adapting to preserve its “single-most important resource” so as to “better match the aspirations of people seeking a career within the SAF.” Called the Military Domain Experts Scheme (MDES), this new service scheme was intended “to build and retain deep professional expertise in critical military domain areas such as engineering and intelligence,” which also fulfilled the 3rd

150 Tony Tan, “Speech by Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, at the Launch of ‘The New Partnership,’” Singapore Ministry of Defence, 12 January 1998, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/1998/jan/12jan98_nr/12jan98_speech.html.

151 “Savings and Employee Retirement Plan (SAVER),” Singapore Ministry of Defence, last updated 12 January 1998, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/content/imindef/mindef_websites/topics/strengthenNS/resources/record.html.

152 Eng Hen Ng, “Speech by Dr Ng Eng Hen, 2nd Minister for Defence, at Committee of Supply Debate 2008,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, 29 February 2008, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/ps/2012/06mar12_ps/06mar12_ps.html.

Generation SAF's requirement of "deep professional competency in many vocations." In tandem with MDES, the existing Warrant Officers and Officers schemes were also enhanced to maintain employment competitiveness. Additional professional development opportunities, including collaborations with academic institutions for accreditation programs, were also introduced to provide more avenues for personal and professional development.¹⁵³

2. Revising the National Service Training System

Members of Parliament occasionally raise concerns on behalf of their constituents and enquire on the duration of NS during Singapore's regular Parliamentary sessions, with their main concern being the opportunity costs on conscripts. In response to these queries, MINDEF unfailingly reiterates the three fundamental principles of NS that have remained unchanged since its implementation in 1967: NS must be for the fulfilment of Singapore's "critical national need . . . [that is] national security and our survival," NS must be universally applied to all eligible Singaporeans without bias or unfairness, and the treatment of conscripts must be equal "regardless of background or status."¹⁵⁴ MINDEF has remained adamant on the three principles of NS and had not budged on calls to shorten or reconsider the implementation of NS—until the mid-2000s.

As the SAF force structure expanded in the 1970s and 1980s, MINDEF realized that there was a steady decline in its NSF intake as a result of population control policies since the mid-1960s. This presented a critical problem as there was to be insufficient soldiers to defend Singapore; thus, Singapore in 1987 implemented measures to increase the birth rate. These policies to encourage reproduction were successful but the results would only be realized in the mid-2000s when the babies of the late 1980s and early 1990s reached conscription age.¹⁵⁵ Notwithstanding government policies to encourage

¹⁵³ Eng Hen Ng, "Speech by Minister for Education and Second Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen at the Committee of Supply Debate 2010," Singapore Ministry of Defence, 2 March 2011, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/ps/2010/05mar10_ps.html.

¹⁵⁴ Chee Hean Teo, "Ministerial Statement on National Service Defaulters by Minister for Defence Teo Chee Hean," Singapore Ministry of Defence, 16 January 2006, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2006/jan/16jan06_nr.html.

¹⁵⁵ Huxley, *Defending the Lion City*, 95–96.

immigrants to settle in Singapore—in large part for their economic contributions—and the Enlistment Act requiring second-generation Permanent Residents to serve NS, most of whom had no qualms about sending their sons to fulfil national service obligations and were “quite happy to stay here,”¹⁵⁶ the supply of NSF’s continued to fall until shortly after the turn of the century.¹⁵⁷

Meanwhile, in the interim years between the implementation and fruition of Singapore’s population growth policies, MINDEF managed the shortfall of NSF’s by reducing the demand of NSF’s. Measures included outsourcing non-combat support services, restructuring the army order of battle, and introducing automation and computers to increase productivity.¹⁵⁸ The population boom after 1987 would eventually take effect in 2006, allowing MINDEF to amend the NS and reservist lengths of service. According to Defence Minister Teo, the birthrate spurt in 1988 to 1997 was the “key enabler” that allowed MINDEF to reduce conscription in 2004 from 36 months to 24 months, while the maturing of the SAF’s 3rd Generation transformation into a more technologically-effective military was the “key driver” of this reduction.¹⁵⁹ By the same token, the duration of reservist commitments was similarly rationalized in 2005, reducing reservist obligations from 13 to 10 years.¹⁶⁰

The see-saw in conscript supply will nevertheless continue because of the delayed effect of population policies, with the next round of shortages expected in 2016, most worryingly because of a resident population that has been reproducing below the rate of

156 Han et al., *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*, 283 and 285–86.

157 Singapore Ministry of Trade and Industry, *Population Trends 2013* (Singapore: Government of Singapore, 2013), 22, http://www.singstat.gov.sg/publications/publications_and_papers/population_and_population_structure/population2013.pdf.

158 Huxley, *Defending the Lion City*, 96–97.

159 Teo, “Ministerial Statement on National Service Defaulters by Minister for Defence Teo Chee Hean.”

160 “Enhancing the National Service Training System,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, 11 August 2005, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2005/aug/11aug05_nr.html.

replacement for the past three decades.¹⁶¹ MINDEF continues to be conscious of Singapore's population trends, remains cautious of the impact of manpower supply on national defense, and is wary of public pressure to re-think further reductions in NS duration. With each request for reconsideration, MINDEF's consistent reply has been the restatement of the fundamental principles of NS and the explanation that the time required for training and operational contributions necessitates a service of two years, which means that any further "reduction will result in a drop in the size of [Singapore's] standing force and adversely affect the ability of the SAF to meet operational requirements."¹⁶²

3. Leveraging Technology

From the get-go, Singapore has dedicated a generous portion of its annual budget to the SAF. This constant, yet prudent, expenditure—approximately 20 percent of the government's budget and 3–5 percent of GDP, with a ceiling of 6 percent, annually—allowed the young conscript military to leverage on advanced equipment to overcome the lack of manpower. MINDEF's principle to substantially and relentlessly invest in the military contributed to the rapid development of the SAF through the years, resulting in a substantive arsenal that quickly exceeded those of its potential aggressors.¹⁶³

Again, the military transformation into a 3rd Generation SAF was a key driver of that decision. This transformation was made possible with a healthy defense spending

161 Singapore's Population White Paper in 2013 reported that Singapore's Total Fertility Rate was 1.20 in 2011 and has been below the replacement rate of 2.1 for more than three decades. Singapore National Population and Talent Division, *Population White Paper 2013: A Sustainable Population for a Dynamic Singapore* (Singapore: Government of Singapore, 2013), 9, http://www.nptd.gov.sg/content/NPTD/news/_jcr_content/par_content/download_98/file.res/population-white-paper.pdf.

162 "Factsheet – Frequently Asked Questions on Full-Time National Service Duration," Singapore Ministry of Defence, 15 June 2004, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2004/jun/15jun04_nr/15jun04_fs.html.

163 "Tables," *The Military Balance* (1987): 221, doi: 10.1080/04597228708459990; "Tables and Analyses," *The Military Balance* (1992): 220, doi: 10.1080/04597229208460047; "Analyses," *The Military Balance* (2000): 299, doi: 10.1080/04597220008460148; "Chapter Six: Asia," *The Military Balance* (2013a): 251, doi: 10.1080/04597222.2013.757002; Chang, "In Defense of Singapore," 108–9; Tan, "Singapore's Defence: Capabilities, Trends, and Implications," 452; "East Asia and Australasia," *The Military Balance* (1999): 173, doi: 10.1080/04597229908460133; *Defending Singapore in the 21st Century*, 51; IHS Global Limited, "Singapore: Defence Budget Overview," *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - Southeast Asia* (19 February 2013), <https://janes.ihs.com.libproxy.nps.edu/CustomPages/Janes/DisplayPage.aspx?DocType=Reference&ItemId=+++1305137&Pubabbrev=SEA>.

that is consistently among the highest in Southeast Asia in the past three decades, permitting MINDEF to continually acquire cutting-edge and specialized hardware. Examples of such modernization include acquiring the region's first anti-ship missiles, executing a far-sighted submarine program, and evaluating, purchasing, then operating advanced F-16 and F-15 fighter aircraft with the requisite comprehensive logistics and training support; typifying Singapore's knack to plan for and operate sophisticated platforms and capabilities. MINDEF also implemented networked capabilities to operationalize joint missions and maximize the effectiveness of each service.¹⁶⁴

When faced with the threat of military survivability, above the immediate requirement of creating a military, Singapore's founding leaders also had the foresight to grow Singapore's defense industry to provide indigenous support for the SAF. Lee and his team acknowledged that "strong capabilities are at the centre of the SAF's defence strategy" and that "the SAF's future capabilities will depend on its ability to exploit the technological changes for military advantage,"¹⁶⁵ in addition to contributing significantly to job-creation and the economy. Singapore's three key defense-related entities include manufacturing, production, and industrial support; research and development; and procurement and management. These three entities support the SAF's evolution with the planning, development, and implementation of indigenously designed weapons, ships, vehicles, and combat systems. Singapore's plethora of homegrown defense expertise has also contributed to specialized upgrading programs customized to the SAF's unique needs that extend the effectiveness of its major platforms, doubling their original shelf lives and maximizing defense spending.¹⁶⁶

When asked in Parliament to elaborate on the developments of the 3rd Generation SAF, Defence Minister Dr Ng Eng Hen reminded Parliament Members that, in spite of the generous allocation of up to 6 percent of GDP on defense, MINDEF's spending will remain prudent. He reiterated MINDEF's military investment principle; that the "first

164 Eng Hen Ng, "Speech by Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen at the Committee of Supply Debate 2012," Singapore Ministry of Defence, 6 March 2012, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/ps/2012/06mar12_ps/06mar12_ps.html.

165 *Defending Singapore in the 21st Century*, 45.

166 *Ibid.*, 63–71; Huxley, *Defending the Lion City*, 182–95.

instinct is to upgrade existing platforms to extend their lifespan, instead of purchasing new ones . . . only acquire new platforms when the capabilities they provide are considered critical . . . [and] when it is more cost-effective to do so, we build our own.”¹⁶⁷

The SAF’s fondness for advanced weaponry applies similarly to investments in simulator and trainers. The use of these training technologies saved on time required to travel to live-firing ranges, reduced wear and tear on actual field equipment and weapons, and improved operational competence because of the opportunities for additional practice at reduced costs. Besides the tactical and operational level uses of trainers, war gaming and battlefield management simulators have also been used by the SAF in strategic-level exercises to enhance inter-service interoperability without having to spend time in the field on actual exercises. This leverage on advanced technology has allowed the SAF to maintain its training and operational effectiveness despite having faced a shortage of manpower and a reduction in the duration of conscription service.¹⁶⁸

C. A GLOBALIZING WORLD

Even though Singapore was extremely susceptible to external pressures and did not possess any semblance of a capable military during its independence in 1967, it did not commit itself to any alliances. Yet Singapore’s founding fathers were cognizant of its precarious position and established Singapore’s defense policy of deterrence and diplomacy knowing the importance of international cooperation and understanding:

Singapore’s defence policy is fundamentally based on the twin pillars of deterrence and diplomacy. The first pillar of deterrence is provided by developing a strong and capable SAF and a resilient Singapore, through the institutions of NS and TD, as well as by taking a prudent and stable approach to defence spending. The second pillar of defence diplomacy is built *by establishing strong and friendly ties, through extensive*

¹⁶⁷ Ng, “Speech by Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen at the Committee of Supply Debate 2012.”

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

*interactions and cooperation, with defence establishments and armed forces in the region and around the world [emphasis added].*¹⁶⁹

The end of the Cold War and globalization, however, has created a world where interconnectivity and cooperation are now commonplace. The maturing of institutions like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), UN, EU, NATO, and World Trade Organization (WTO) has resulted in a more cooperative regional and international environment; yet, in spite of its inherent vulnerability in a volatile region, Singapore maintains its refrain from alliances.

1. Establishing Partnerships

Notwithstanding the abstinence from alliances, whether deliberate or incidental, Singapore understood that “apart from an adequate defensive force, its security depends on an articulate foreign policy and therefore maintains a web of diplomatic links with its neighbours.”¹⁷⁰ Singapore therefore actively participates in various cooperative arrangements and international organizations with the purpose of developing understanding, building confidence, and reducing the risk of misunderstandings. The first of these arrangements of significance is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, of which Singapore was a founding member. Although ASEAN is not a military cooperative, it is nonetheless a platform to “accelerate the economic growth, social, and cultural development in the region” to increase understanding and collaboration, thus leading to peace and stability.¹⁷¹

Singapore also fervently establishes and maintains close ties with its partners through regular exercises and participation in regional and international fora. In this respect, MINDEF contributes as an active player in maintaining these ties, particularly through the use of the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN). An example of this engagement is the use of its sprawling naval base at the eastern corner of Singapore.

¹⁶⁹ “Defence Policy and Diplomacy,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, last updated 18 October 2012, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/key_topics/defence_policy.html.

¹⁷⁰ Tan, “Singapore: Civil-Military Fusion,” 286.

¹⁷¹ “Overview of ASEAN,” ASEAN Secretariat, accessed 31 January 2014, <http://www.asean.org/asean/about-asean/overview>.

Designed as one of the largest SAF facilities in Singapore, Changi Naval Base (CNB) was built for the expanded requirements of a growing RSN and, most notably, “the only facility in Southeast Asia that can dock a U.S. aircraft carrier.”¹⁷² As acknowledged by the United States *Chargé d’Affaires* at the inaugural docking of a USN aircraft carrier in Singapore in 2001, Singapore “reached out to us [the United States] to ensure that it also matched U.S. aircraft carrier requirements.”¹⁷³ Besides the hospitality towards the United States, the base “is also open to the navies of other friendly countries . . . [and] facilitates the RSN’s collaboration with other navies to fight common threats.” Even before its official opening in 2004, CNB welcomed a plethora of international guests, with “close to 100 ships from 11 navies” in 2003 alone—ships and submarines from “ASEAN countries like Malaysia and Indonesia . . . UK, Australia and New Zealand . . . France, China, Japan, and India.”¹⁷⁴

The SAF has, since the turn of the century, developed into a “highly regarded and potent military force in Southeast Asia” and was subsequently able to relinquish the fundamentally “defeatist” poisonous shrimp strategy in an updated defense posture.¹⁷⁵ Singapore’s increasingly competent and professional military has led the SAF to extend her principle of defense diplomacy further afield by participating actively in international missions. Significant and successful contributions to UN-led peace support operations, and regional and international Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations have given the SAF a strong reputation and credibility in the international security arena. A mature defense capability consisting of a well-equipped land force, missile-armed ships and stealthy submarines, and a potent air force, combined with a resilient society in the TD concept, has allowed Singapore the confidence to assume a

172 Emma Chanlett-Avery, “Singapore: Background and U.S. Relations,” *Congressional Research Service* (26 July 2013): 3, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=741587>.

173 Herbert W. Shultz, “Address by Herbert W. Shultz, Charge D’Affaires, U.S. Embassy Singapore at the Ceremony of the First Visit by U.S. Aircraft Carrier, U.S.S. Kitty Hawk to Changi Naval Base,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, 23 March 2001, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/sp/2001/23mar01_speech2.html.

174 Chok Tong Goh, “Speech by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at the Opening Ceremony of Changi Naval Base,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, 21 May 2004, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2004/may/21may04_nr3.html.

175 Loo, “Maturing the Singapore Armed Forces: From Poisonous Shrimp to Dolphin,” 182.

new and more diplomatic role akin to that of a “dolphin.” Singapore would now be “willing to use its wits, its flexibility, and its maneuverability to outwit potential aggressors, confident that if such non-violent measures failed to dissuade the potential aggressor, it still possessed sufficient military capability to defend the island.”¹⁷⁶ This newly-defined defense posture afforded Singapore a wider range of options in international relations, and was now “regarded as a strong regional security cooperation advocate.”¹⁷⁷ Singapore was thus able to represent itself “as a useful balancer and intermediary between major powers in the region,”¹⁷⁸ enhancing its policy of espousing diplomacy.

Not one to rest on its laurels, and with its newfound “dolphin” role in international relations, Singapore continues its courtship of maritime powers near and far, enmeshing them in the regional maritime security network. Two examples are the welcoming of a Chinese surveillance vessel to CNB in 2011 as “part of an ongoing exchange on technical cooperation on maritime safety with Beijing,” and the facilitating of the “U.S. strategy of ‘places-not-bases’ in the region” in 2013 with the hosting of USS Freedom (LCS 1), the first of four littoral combat ships on a rotational deployment to the Pacific. The RSN continues to support Singapore’s defense diplomacy by regularly hosting ships and bilateral, multilateral, and international exercises, conferences, and exhibitions to deepen defense cooperation.¹⁷⁹ This intense defense interaction is not limited to the RSN, but is also evident through the efforts of the Singapore Army and Republic of Singapore Air Force in exercises and training deployments in the United

176 Loo, “Maturing the Singapore Armed Forces: From Poisonous Shrimp to Dolphin,” 179.

177 Collin Koh, “Pan-ASEAN Maritime Security Cooperation: Prospects for Pooling Resources,” *RSIS Commentaries*, no. 96 (17 May 2013), <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/Perspective/RSIS0962013.pdf>.

178 Chanlett-Avery, *Singapore: Background and U.S. Relations*, 4.

179 Examples of exercises, conferences, and exhibitions hosted by the RSN at Changi Naval Base include Ex LION KING (Singapore-India), Ex SINGAROO (Singapore-Australia), Ex CARAT (Singapore-United States), MALSINDO (Malaysia-Singapore-Indonesia), Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) and Exercises, Five Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA) Exercises, and International Maritime Defence Exhibition and Conference (IMDEX).

States, China, France, France, Australia, New Zealand, India, Thailand, Brunei and Indonesia, among many others.¹⁸⁰

Singapore's policy of defense diplomacy applies beyond the SAF's operational units and into regional and international security fora as well. Examples of these are regularly highlighted in Parliamentary discussions as a reminder of the versatility of MINDEF at representing Singapore in all levels of diplomacy. As reported by Defence Minister Ng in the 2013 Parliamentary Committee of Supply Debate: "MINDEF is working hard within the platforms . . . the ADMM (ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting), the ADMM-Plus, the Shangri-La Dialogue, the FPDA (Five Power Defence Arrangements), and other bilateral or multi-lateral platforms, because we want to improve military-to-military relations to build confidence and reduce the risk of miscalculation."¹⁸¹

Hence, despite Singapore's aversion to alliances—or the absence of the term "alliance" in any of its partnerships—Singapore's defense diplomacy strategy is actively promoted through these numerous engagements. The cooperation and understanding of these partners gives the international community, especially Singapore's ASEAN partners and the major powers, an increased stake in regional security, with the aim of promoting stability in the region that will consequently enhance Singapore's security.¹⁸²

D. NATIONAL SERVICE TODAY

Conscription in Singapore's early years was more than just a manpower technicality. In addition to personnel procurement for the SAF, NS was intended as a social institution: to create a unique Singaporean identity in a volatile region in an unstable and uncertain Cold War era, and to integrate a divided society in a fledgling

180 Eng Hen Ng, "Speech by Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen at the Committee of Supply Debate 2013," Singapore Ministry of Defence, 12 March 2013, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/sp/2013/12mar13_speech.html.

181 Ibid.

182 David Capie, "Structures, Shocks and Norm Change: Explaining the Late Rise of Asia's Defence Diplomacy," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 35, no. 1 (2013): 1–26, doi: 10.1355/cs35-1a; Ralf Emmers, "The Five Power Defence Arrangements and Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," *Asian Security* 8, no. 3 (2012): 271–86, doi: 10.1080/14799855.2012.723921; "Defence Policy and Diplomacy."

nation where racial and social unrest was common. After the initial implementation of NS and development of the SAF had taken root, and with the society fairly well integrated through almost two decades of NS, Singapore reinforced its security with the TD concept in 1984. This whole-of-society defense further enhanced Singapore's deterrence with the message that a painful "poison" would befall an aggressor even after, and only if, Singapore succumbed militarily.

Notwithstanding the largely intangible but effective benefit of TD producing resilience against internal national issues, Singapore's latter challenges were solved with NS satisfying a military, rather than social, need. The social efficacy of TD, however, cannot be discounted simply because its effects are intangible—akin to an insurance policy, one would never know the true value of social cohesion and national unity until an untoward social conflict occurs, by which time a remedy may already be too late.

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V. CONCLUSION

For nearly five decades, NS has remained the bedrock of the SAF. In every aspect of the SAF—whether in a domestic patrol or an international interaction, a routine exercise or a spontaneously activated relief mission—it is almost certain that a fair number of conscripts would be among the uniformed personnel deployed. The ubiquity of NS in society is indeed a testament to Singapore’s efforts to adapt conscription to changing domestic and international conditions. Indeed, MINDEF’s responsiveness to the challenges arising from a modern society and a globalized world is evidence that NS continues to function as a critical institution in Singapore.

A. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Since the end of the Cold War, many countries have reduced their reliance on conscription either because they believe the world has entered a relatively peaceful era where major wars are a thing of the past or because it no longer suits their increasingly educated and prosperous societies. By contrast, Singapore continues to maintain its practice of conscription. Its reasons and experiences—as compared to those of the United States, Germany, Taiwan, Switzerland, South Korea, and Israel—reflect a lack of change in the social and geostrategic conditions it faces.

1. Comparing Responses to Remuneration

In tackling the challenge of recruitment and retention, Singapore’s responses were similar to those of the United States and Taiwan. All three countries heavily depend on volunteers in their militaries; except Singapore’s review of volunteer remuneration was not intended to transition to an all-volunteer force, but to reinforce the attractiveness of volunteers alongside Singapore’s continued reliance on conscripts. Although there are differences in the use of volunteer soldiers in their militaries, the importance of volunteer employment was critical to each system’s success and the principles of these remuneration reviews in all three countries were identical—to attract quality personnel, retain experienced personnel, and ultimately reduce volunteer turnover. Apart from Taiwan’s early problems with attracting sufficient volunteers during the initial years of

transition, the success of the United States' eventual transition lends credence to the responsive remuneration mechanism that is paramount to recruitment and retention of volunteers for a healthy military.

An example of this constant evolution is the progress of women volunteers in the SAF. To a 2013 Parliamentary question on the contributions of women volunteers in the SAF, Defence Minister Ng replied with the following statistics: about 1500 women, or 7 percent of the volunteer population, receive equivalent scholarship opportunities, are deployed in various combat and non-combat arms of the military, are given equal prospects for progression based on the principle of meritocracy, and undertake the same missions and operations together with their male counterparts.¹⁸³

Singapore's reliance on a stable volunteer force to positively influence the conscripts, whom they are responsible for training and managing, is a critical enabler of the overall progress of its military. The frequent and substantial iterations in this responsive remuneration system is not simply MINDEF's commitment to maintaining a strong SAF—it is Singapore's smart adaptation to integrate the experience and talent of professional soldiers, exclusive to a volunteer force, with the societal benefits of conscription. Instead of throwing out conscription to conform to a modernizing society and succumb to the prevailing global trend, Singapore continues to both strengthen the commitment towards its volunteer force, applying the same workforce approaches as other countries have adopted, and actively adapt the relevance of all-inclusive conscription.

2. Comparing Responses to Duration Reduction

As seen in the examination of Germany, Taiwan, Israel, South Korea, and Switzerland in Chapter II, the issue of conscription length is not unique to Singapore. In both Germany and Taiwan's responses to popular pressure, the steady reductions in service lengths eventually led to a common public perception that conscription had lost its relevance. Although South Korea has initiated a service reduction of 6 months, the

¹⁸³ Eng Hen Ng, "Written Reply by Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen to Parliamentary Question on Women in the Singapore Armed Forces," Singapore Ministry of Defence, 21 October 2013, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/ps/2013/21oct13_ps4.html.

conscripts will serve a minimum of 18 months, which is deemed sufficient to receive the necessary training and still remain relevant in the eyes of the population. Israel and Switzerland, on the other hand, did not significantly reduce their conscription time and, more importantly, they maintain the comprehensive use of their conscripts during active and reserve service, continuing the relevance—or perception of relevance—in public opinion.

Singapore occasionally faces the same domestic pressures and calls to reduce the length of service but, similar to Israel, Switzerland, and South Korea, maintains a firm position on a minimum duration of service. This insistence on maintaining the 24-month minimum—12 months of training followed by 12 months of operational duties—retains the relevance and contribution of NS to national defense even as Goh Keng Swee’s reminder in 1984 continues to ring true of Singapore in modern times: that the sacrifice of two years of a Singaporean life is necessary to maintain the sovereignty of Singapore.

We must never forget that our existence as an independent sovereign state cannot be made to depend on the sufferance [sic] of others. The most dependable guarantee of our independence is a strong SAF. A strong SAF, in turn, depends on the political will to make the effort and pay the price.¹⁸⁴

Most recent Parliamentary responses by MINDEF—to questions of the impact of the declining birth rate on the SAF and the feasibility of employing conscripts to alternative non-military forms of national service—continue to reiterate the fundamental principle of NS for Singapore. In response to the declining birth rate, Defence Minister Ng gave assurances of MINDEF’s forward-looking plans, including of the NS population three decades into the future, and cemented the principal ingredient of a strong SAF: the NS personnel that constitute the bulk of the military.¹⁸⁵ His response to the second concern highlighted the necessarily military nature of conscription, with a reminder that any non-universal contribution to NS “would be unwise and inequitable, as it would

184 Speech delivered by Goh Keng Swee on 25 September 1984, in Goh, *Chapter 12: Old Guard, New Guard and Other Establishments*, 152.

185 Eng Hen Ng, “Reply by Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen to Parliamentary Question on Singapore’s Declining Birth Rate and Impact to the Singapore Armed Forces,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, 12 November 2012, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/ps/2012/12nov12_ps.html.

erode the support for NS, where every enlistee performs his duties, whether it is within the Singapore Police Force, Singapore Civil Defence Force, or the SAF,”¹⁸⁶ echoing Eliot Cohen’s warning that the implementation of conscription be egalitarian.¹⁸⁷

The strategic foresight, constant assertion of the principles of NS, and consistence in MINDEF’s stand on its NS policies through the years is thus a strong indication that Singapore seeks to retain conscription well into the future.

3. Comparing Responses to Leveraging Technology

Technology is a key component of an armed force and the maximizing of advanced weapons and training systems would benefit any military, as seen in Taiwan and Israel, which use technology to reduce their manpower burden. Although Taiwan benefits from the acquisition of advanced weaponry, technology alone will not resolve Taiwan’s problems of recruitment and retention. As a result, Taiwan has had to extend the eventual implementation deadline and implement additional personnel remuneration measures as it continues in its transition towards an all-volunteer force.

Israel’s example, on the other hand, provides a more cautionary tale on the use of technology. In spite of its technological superiority resulting from its national research and development institutions that directly feed its weaponry, Israel has not reduced its reliance on conscription but instead uses the advanced technology to enhance the IDF’s potency. Singapore’s attitude can be likened to this approach as explained in the decision to reduce the duration of NS: advanced technology is the *driver* of MINDEF’s NS policy change, while the *enabler* of change is its personnel. Along the same vein is a caution by Defence Minister Ng at the 2013 Committee of Supply Debate:

Even if we have the most sophisticated platforms and systems, ultimately our defences are only as strong as the resolve and the commitment of our people . . . we ought to be wary of complacency because we have a technologically advanced SAF. Because the temptation is always that

¹⁸⁶ Eng Hen Ng, “Reply by Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen to Parliamentary Question on Deployment of NSFs to Navy Shipboard Vocations,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, 12 November 2013, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/ps/2013/12nov13_ps.html.

¹⁸⁷ Cohen “Military Service and Republican Ideology: Liberalism and Egalitarianism,” 145–51.

because it's so sophisticated, you don't need the man in the loop. And that would be a tragic and costly mistake.¹⁸⁸

Notwithstanding the reminder that its people are the bedrock of the SAF, MINDEF continues to invest in technology to evolve with the changing threat environment. Since the turn of the century, the SAF has kept up with the wider range of threats by using technology “to have better command and control, strike with more precision, and use more unmanned systems” to counter the non-conventional threats “of terrorism, piracy, natural disasters, and cyber-threats.” In addition to technology, the SAF maintains its edge by re-organizing into more focused task forces “to be more responsive and potent” to these modern threats.¹⁸⁹

4. Comparing Responses to Establishing Partnerships

Countries have placed considerable weight on alliances when deciding whether to maintain or abolish conscription, as Chapter II made clear. Germany, for example, transitioned to an all-volunteer force in large part because of its reliance on the UN, NATO, and EU for collective security, collective defense, and membership solidarity. By contrast, Switzerland is a rare example of the use of non-alliance to avoid conflict, relying on its principle of armed neutrality to avoid involvement in any conflict that has led it to possess the noteworthy record of avoiding conflict since the 1700s. There are also countries that, despite having alliances and strong security partnerships, maintain a self-reliant military through conscription; South Korea and Israel fall into this category of countries that have decided to invest in defense, rather than rely on their allies and partners, in the face of extreme uncertainty and severe threat.

Singapore has maintained a non-aligned position since its independence, yet invests in healthy military and diplomatic relations to foster military-to-military understanding to promote regional peace and stability. Several regional and international frameworks exist to which Singapore is an active member, including ASEAN, ADMM,

¹⁸⁸ Ng, “Speech by Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen at the Committee of Supply Debate 2012.”

¹⁸⁹ Eng Hen Ng, “Written Reply by Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen to Parliamentary Question on Regional Security and Development of the SAF,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, 18 February 2014, www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/ps/2014/18feb14_ps3.html.

ADMM-Plus, and FPDA. Although not security or military pacts, these are vital vehicles to increase dialogue, build trust and confidence, and enhance interoperability with the goal of closer relationships. Bilateral defense relations—including, notably, with regional neighbors—and international deployments also play a significant role in building Singapore’s diplomatic influence. Regular multi-level tri-service interactions with Malaysia and a plethora of joint exercises with Indonesia, and close ties with the United States, China, and “with partners such as Brunei, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, India, France, and Germany remain strong.”¹⁹⁰ Additionally, the SAF’s continued contributions to UN-led operations and disaster relief operations both near and far allow Singapore to weigh in on international issues and be counted as a valuable member of the international community.¹⁹¹

As Singapore uses its unique blend of diplomacy in concert with military self-reliance, enabled through its determination to maintain conscription, its defense diplomacy policy has enabled the country to stand on its own feet. This independence gives Singapore the ability to enjoy “the political space and the freedom to act in [Singapore’s] best interests.”¹⁹²

B. STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT UNCHANGED

Vulnerabilities from a lack of strategic depth, a heavy reliance on imports, and close proximity to far larger and more populous neighbors constantly highlight the country’s status as an inherently enticing target. As if to remind the world of Singapore’s predicament, Indonesian President B. J. Habibie in 1998 made a snide remark in the

¹⁹⁰ Ng, “Speech by Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen at the Committee of Supply Debate 2013.”

¹⁹¹ Ibid.; “RSAF Helicopters Complete Hurricane Katrina Relief Operations,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, 10 September 2005, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2005/sep/09sep05_news.html; Republic of Singapore Navy, “About the Navy,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, last accessed 14 January 2014, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/navy/careers/about_the_navy_overseas_missions.html.

¹⁹² “Defence Policy and Diplomacy.”

Asian Wall Street Journal alluding to Singapore's insignificance as a little "red dot" on a map.¹⁹³

The reality is that Singapore is occasionally threatened and belittled by some of its neighbors. Various bilateral and regional events in the last two decades continue to reinforce a conservative yet pragmatic view of security among Singapore's leaders. On Singapore's National Day in 1991, for example, Malaysia and Indonesia conducted their largest ever bilateral military exercise, involving a paratroop drop in Malaysia's state of Johor, which lies just across the border from Singapore.¹⁹⁴ Other incidents include anti-Chinese trouble in neighboring Indonesia; niggling bilateral issues between Singapore and Malaysia over immigration land; the banning of sand exports by Malaysia and Indonesia to Singapore in 1997 and 2007;¹⁹⁵ complaints over Singapore's alleged infringement of air space in 1998;¹⁹⁶ and Malaysia's regular threats to turn off the tap on Singapore's supply of freshwater;¹⁹⁷ and a long-standing territorial dispute with Malaysia over the island of Pedra Branca.¹⁹⁸ Additionally, nationalistic rhetoric in neighboring countries continues to cause ripples in bilateral relations, especially during election years in those countries.¹⁹⁹

Besides niggling neighborly differences, regional and international disturbances also affect this globalized island, including possible spillovers from growing tensions over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, and uncertainty over growing powers

193 In an *Asian Wall Street Journal* article on 4 August 1998, Indonesian President B. J. Habibie made a snide remark about the insignificance of Singapore, commenting "It's O.K. with me, but there are 211 million people [in Indonesia]. All the green [area] is Indonesia. And that red dot is Singapore."

194 Tim Huxley, "A Strong and Silent Keeper of the Peace," *The Straits Times*, 1 July 2008; Huxley and Boey, "Singapore's Army: Boosting Capabilities," 175.

195 Azhar Ghani, "Jakarta Bans Sand Exports, Cutting off Singapore's Main Supply," *The Straits Times*, 25 January 2007; Han et al., *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*, 26–27.

196 Brendan Pereira, "KL Curbs Airspace Use by RSAF Jets," *The Straits Times*, 18 September 1998; Matthews and Zhang Yan, "Small Country 'Total Defence,'" 376–395.

197 Zuraidah Ibrahim, "Water Row Not about Money; Issue is Singapore's Sovereignty and About Honouring Agreements," *The Straits Times*, 26 January 2003; Lee, *From Third World to First*, 276; Han et al., *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*, 26–28 and 31.

198 S. Jayakumar and Tommy Koh, *Pedra Branca: The Road to the World Court* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), 1–19.

199 Lee, *From Third World to First*, 257–328.

seeking to assert their authority internationally that may inevitably draw Singapore into polarizing power struggles.²⁰⁰ These incidents may seem individually insignificant, but when viewed together they demonstrate that Singapore continues to face a volatile region with players of uncertain intentions. In other words, the fundamental challenges that Singapore faces have not disappeared, even if they have become less serious since independence in 1965.

It appears likely that Singapore will continue to experience harrying by its neighbors from time to time and international events will continue to pose challenges to its globalized economy. These regional and international dynamics have remained unchanged in the past half a century and will continue their effects on Singapore into the future, thus warranting Singapore's continued emphasis on the principle of a self-sufficient defense. This self-sufficiency will allow Singapore to "chart [its] own course as an independent sovereign nation, without having to buckle under pressure from larger states, or to become subservient to their strategic imperatives."²⁰¹

C. DOMESTIC SITUATION UNCHANGED

Equally important are the internal threats to the NS institution because Singapore's domestic situation, too, has not changed drastically since its independence. Although the standard of living has improved significantly in this rapidly growing economy and globalism has crept into every aspect of the Singaporean way of life, the population remains a steadily growing mix of ethnicities, religions, and cultures. There were occasional domestic hiccups in the last two decades—the heightened security following the 9/11 incident in 2001 and Bali bombings in 2002, the national effort to contain SARS in 2003, the economic challenges due to the global financial crisis in 2008,

200 Matthews and Zhang Yan, "Small Country 'Total Defence,'" 377–78; Clive Schofield et al., "From Disputed Waters to Seas of Opportunity: Overcoming Barriers to Maritime Cooperation in East and Southeast Asia," *NBR Special Report* 30 (2011): 3–8, <http://www.nbr.org/publications/issue.aspx?id=233>; Carlyle A. Thayer, "Chapter 2: Major Trends Shaping the Security Environment," "Chapter 3: Patterns of Security Cooperation," and "Chapter 4: Key Tensions," in *Southeast Asia: Patterns of Security Cooperation* (Barton, ACT: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2010), 13–40.

201 Chee Hean Teo, "Lunch Talk on 'Defending Singapore: Strategies for a Small State,'" Singapore Ministry of Defence, 21 April 2005, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2005/apr/21apr05_nr2.html.

and the regular bouts of haze with poor air quality reaching unprecedented levels in 2012—but Singapore weathered through these incidents relatively unscathed and emerged stronger, with a resilience that is significantly underwritten by TD.²⁰²

The importance of NS in this TD framework cannot be understated; the pervasiveness of conscription throughout Singapore society is its core ingredient. Although mandatory only for males, their inescapable presence permeates the population through family and work, consequently affecting children and peers alike. Conscription’s societal influence thus infuses into society as a result of the common 24-month experience that all males can relate to, and an enforced communal environment that fosters tolerance for fellow Singaporeans regardless of race, language, or religion. This common experience and an intimate understanding of his fellow Singaporean citizen are the foundation on which the pillars of TD—civil, economic, social, psychological, and military—are built.

As it is of paramount importance to the defense of Singapore, Total Defence Day is commemorated on 15 February annually. The date marks Singapore’s fall in 1942 and serves as a reminder “that Singapore is defensible and is worth defending, and we [Singaporeans] must defend Singapore.”²⁰³ In addition to themed activities held in schools and TD exhibitions held nationwide on Total Defence Day, MINDEF also extends the message of TD throughout the year to reinforce the importance of TD. This message encompasses Singaporeans in all walks of life and remains an integral part of the TD effort.

1. Engaging the Stakeholders

MINDEF engages these stakeholders through feedback and dialogues to understand the challenges that may arise with the changing times because it is cognizant that employers directly affect the functioning of the reservist system. This engagement is

²⁰² Eng Hen Ng, “Speech by Minister for Defence on Total Defence Day at the National Museum of Singapore,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, 15 February 2014, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/sp/2014/15feb14_speech.html.

²⁰³ “Core Events,” National Education, Singapore Ministry of Education, accessed 15 January 2014, http://www.ne.edu.sg/core_events.htm.

done through the Advisory Council for Community Relations in Defence (ACCORD), which conducts regular dialogue sessions and visits to military units for grassroots leaders, employers, and trade union leaders to facilitate a deeper understanding and importance of the SAF. Incentives and policies are also used to encourage support for the reservist system by lessening the burden on companies when they have to release their employees for their annual refresher obligations. Such measures reduce the apprehension of employing these individuals and at the same time encourage ORNS-friendly behavior so that ORNS do not feel encumbered to return for their annual refresher stints.²⁰⁴

Since 2007, MINDEF acknowledged that “women are very much part of our [Singaporean] NS journey” and endeavored to include the female half of the population in the feedback loop. In addition to seeking feedback and suggestions from women’s groups to improve the NS experience and commitment to defense, MINDEF also produced a 12-part web mini-series called “Basic Military Talk” to share the life of an NSF with those who do not undergo the two years of service, in particular women.²⁰⁵

2. Engaging through Schools

Singapore’s compulsory education system facilitates the TD outreach to the youth. Besides traditional National Education classes that impart national history and values, and the annual Total Defence Day to remind students of the importance of TD, various other activities are also implemented to broaden the engagement. In partnership with the Ministry of Education, MINDEF conducts regular student engagement activities for students both within their school where members of the SAF hold sharing and discussion sessions, and outside of school where students get to see and experience SAF training, similar to the ACCORD visits for stakeholders. More contemporary methods

204 Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman, “Speech by Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Defence and National Development Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman at the Committee of Supply Debate 2013,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, 12 March 2013, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/content/imindef/press_room/official_releases/sp/2013/12mar13_speech3.html.

205 Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman, “Speech by Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Defence and National Development Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman at the Committee of Supply Debate 2012,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, 6 March 2012, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/ps/2012/06mar12_ps.html; “Basic Military Talk,” CyberPioneerTV YouTube page, accessed 16 January 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0DCF11422A4DF300>.

like media competitions have also been introduced in a nation-wide effort to engage Singapore's youth. For example, *N.E.mation!*, a digital animation competition, was launched in 2005 to capitalize on more modern forms of engagement targeted at the media-savvy youth of today.²⁰⁶

3. Engaging the Masses

The use of new media goes beyond targeted groups but, more importantly, to the general population of Singapore. Examples of these are *ciNE65*, a “short film competition for film enthusiasts to tell their Singapore story . . . to harness the potential of short films to touch the hearts and minds of Singaporeans”;²⁰⁷ various reality and documentary-styled factual entertainment channels that tell the different stories of life in the SAF, including the two-season, 39-episode *Every Singaporean Son*, the ten-part *The Passage: A Midshipman's Journey*, and the 12-part *I'm a Soldier, Sailor, and Airman*;²⁰⁸ a two-part full length NS movie *Ah Boys to Men* in collaboration with local film producer Jack Neo,²⁰⁹ and the popular social media platform *Facebook*.²¹⁰ Additionally, videos on key military exercises and events are also regularly produced by CyberPioneerTV and uploaded on *YouTube* to keep the public updated in matters of Singapore's defense

206 Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman, “Speech by Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Defence and National Development Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman at the Committee of Supply Debate 2013”; “N.E.mation!,” accessed 16 January 2014, <http://nemation.sg>.

207 “ciNE65,” Nexus, last updated 10 February 2014, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/mindef_websites/topics/nexus/our_microsites/cine65.html.

208 “Every Singaporean Son,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, accessed 16 January 2014, <http://www.mindef.gov.sg/every singaporeanson>; “The Passage: A Midshipman's Journey,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, last updated 15 March 2012, <http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/resourcelibrary/videos/docus/mstd.html>; “I'm a Soldier, Sailor, Airman,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, last updated 16 August 2011, <http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/resourcelibrary/videos/docus/SSA.html>.

209 Sherlyn Quek, “Growing Up from ‘Ah Boys’ to Men,” CyberPioneer, 19 July 2012, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/resourcelibrary/cyberpioneer/topics/articles/news/2012/jul/19jul12_news.html.

210 “CyberPioneer,” Facebook, accessed 16 January 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/cyberpioneer.connect>.

through easily accessible means,²¹¹ which “help to deepen the public’s understanding of and support for NS, and enhance their commitment to defence.”²¹²

Military roadshows and exhibitions were other methods used by MINDEF to instil confidence and engage Singaporeans. Traditionally held in military camps, the 2012 edition of the Army Open House was brought into the heart of the city where the public could easily interact with the soldiers and learn about the Army. This non-traditional method attracted record attendance figures and facilitated the Navy’s exhibition of a frigate and subsequently an LST at the promenade of a popular waterside shopping mall.²¹³

These proactive engagements have brought the military and its soldiers closer to the non-military segment of Singaporeans. This, in turn, builds a more intimate link between the military and society to enhance awareness of the need for a resilience that can only be achieved through the contribution of not just the soldiers in the SAF, but every member of the community.

4. Committee to Strengthen National Service

Although the domestic mix of multi-cultural, multi-racial, and multi-religious Singaporeans have remained the same since independence, MINDEF acknowledges that Singapore’s modernized society has evolved and is different from when NS first started in 1967. In order to “respond to these changes and ensure that the commitment of a new generation of NSmen remains strong,”²¹⁴ MINDEF thus convened the Committee to Strengthen National Service (CSNS) in 2013. Chaired by the Minister for Defence, CSNS will consist of the “Support for NS” and “Recognition and Benefits for National Service”

211 “CyberPioneerTV Channel,” YouTube, accessed 16 January 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/user/cyberpioneertv>.

212 Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman, “Speech by Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Defence and National Development Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman at the Committee of Supply Debate 2012.”

213 “Army Open House 2012,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, accessed 16 January 2014, <http://www.mindef.gov.sg/aoh12/index.html>; Benita Teo, “RSN Returns to VivoCity,” CyberPioneer, 14 November 2013, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/resourcelibrary/cyberpioneer/topics/articles/news/2013/nov/14nov13_news.html.

214 Ng, “Speech by Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen at the Committee of Supply Debate 2013.”

working groups to “explore how to better allow National Servicemen to maximise their contributions and abilities to serve NS,” and “explore ways to promote the recognition and appreciation of National Servicemen’s contributions.” By engaging Singaporeans in dialogues and focus groups, CSNS is expected to “recommend measures to strengthen NS as the critical institution for Singapore’s continued survival and success.”²¹⁵

MINDEF’s determination to evolve and adapt to the dynamics of contemporary society is indicative of the essence of NS to the SAF and Singapore. Instead of relenting to public pressure to reconsider conscription, Singapore remains persistent in preserving the NS system and endeavors to maintain the relevance of TD for the defense of Singapore.

D. CONCLUSION

Singapore, like many other small countries, faces a plethora of challenges to its survival and sovereignty but has thus far succeeded in dealing with these challenges. Singapore’s responsiveness in revising remuneration, being flexible yet firm on the duration of NS, developing a technologically superior and capable military, forging robust military and diplomatic regional and international relationships, and implementing and maintaining the importance of Total Defense has enabled the country to succeed beyond the imagination of the naysayers who greeted its independence. Despite recent global developments, however, Singapore’s fundamental societal make up and geostrategic environment have remained largely unchanged—it is still a diverse population of multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-cultural peoples living on a small island with a small population situated among larger and more populous neighbors in a volatile Southeast Asian region. The reality, then, is that Singapore must maintain its ability to stand up against intimidation or it will have to accept being bullied into submission, and the SAF remains instrumental to the prosperity and sovereignty of Singapore in the face of such pressures.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ “Committee to Strengthen NS,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, last updated 13 November 2013, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/mindef_websites/topics/strengthenNS/about/csns.html.

²¹⁶ Leifer, *Singapore’s Foreign Policy*, 142–45; Lee, *From Third World to First*, 257–328; Han et al., *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*, 17–20 and 322–23.

NS will continue, therefore, to be the cornerstone of the SAF and Singapore: for the SAF to preserve Singapore's sovereignty so that Singapore is afforded the political space to act independently, and as a national unifier to tackle domestic challenges with resilience to support and fuel the Singapore economy. Even today, Singapore's founding father, Lee Kuan Yew, continues to espouse the gravity of the SAF's contribution to Singapore's autonomy and unparalleled success: "From the day we started, I knew that we needed a strong SAF, and I believe that still remains today. Without a strong SAF, there is no economic future, there is no security."²¹⁷

217 "Mr Lee Kuan Yew Speaks with SAF Officers and Defence Officials at Dinner Dialogue," Singapore Ministry of Defence, 18 May 2012, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2012/may/18may12_nr.html.

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