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Competitive National Service

How the Scandinavian Model Can Be Adapted
by the UK

Elisabeth Braw



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Executive Summary

IN 2019, NATIONAL service emerged again as a policy issue in the UK, with interest primarily fuelled by Conservative leadership contender Rory Stewart's proposal for a mandatory National Citizen Service. Stewart, then a Tory MP and international development secretary, proposed a mandatory, four-week course for all British 16-year-olds that would combine two weeks of learning with two weeks of 'giving back'.¹ This overture, together with other national and international initiatives such as former Prime Minister David Cameron's National Citizen Service,² highlights the increasing interest in involving youth in the wellbeing of society. At the same time, the armed forces – not just in the UK – struggle to recruit enough personnel, and especially enough personnel of the right calibre.

The underlying question is how to best involve youth in the wellbeing of society in a country such as the UK, and how the armed forces can be an avenue for such involvement. Specifically, can the armed forces also benefit from contributions by a wider segment of young citizens than the ones currently signing up to serve as soldiers and officers? One approach is competitive national service, a model pioneered by Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Although their respective national services are mandatory, they are also highly selective and thus competitive. This paper examines the Scandinavian model and discusses how it can be adapted by the UK to fit its national security needs and acquaint a wider segment of youth with service within national security. To provide a broader view on national service models, the paper also examines Finland's universal mandatory national service for men. This paper presents the specifics of each approach, including their respective weaknesses. Countries such as the UK could gainfully adapt elements of these models to build national service models tailored to their needs.

The paper proposes that the UK use the Scandinavian model to develop highly selective and highly targeted national service along the following lines:

- The armed forces and civilian government agencies (such as GCHQ) would be able to select a small number of trainees from among the complete annual cohort of teenagers.
- Those selected would spend two years within their specialty, following either a military or a civilian strand: one year of training followed by one year of service.

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1. Rory Stewart, 'If I become Prime Minister I will introduce National Citizen Service - universal - for every young person. Purpose. Character. Coming together across the United Kingdom.' [Twitter Post], 7:14am, 7 June 2019, <<https://twitter.com/rorystewartuk/status/1136999787167961088?lang=en>>, accessed 13 September 2019.
 2. David Cameron, 'Big Society Speech', speech given in Liverpool, 19 July 2010, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/big-society-speech>>, accessed 4 October 2019.

- Following their training, participants would move to reservist status within their specialty unless they opt to join in a full-time capacity. The civilian strand participants would have contracts similar to those of military reservists.
- Participants choosing to pursue further education in their field would be eligible for government subsidies.

Introduction

IN AUGUST 2019, *The Telegraph* reported that the British Army was being accused of ‘leaning on’ under-18s to plug a recruitment gap. This criticism, from NGOs such as Child Rights International Network, was prompted by the release of the Army’s latest recruitment statistics, which showed that 16- and 17-year-olds made up nearly one-third of the Army’s new recruits.¹ The British Army is far from the only army struggling with recruitment and retention. In 2018, Germany’s ministry of defence said it was considering recruiting EU citizens to the German armed forces (*Bundeswehr*),² which is suffering from chronic recruitment gaps. The challenge the UK armed forces face is that while they enjoy extremely high approval ratings, the majority of the public has little understanding of their role and duties. It should come as no surprise, then, that the armed forces struggle to recruit. It could be posited that if more British citizens were familiar with the wide-ranging duties of the armed forces, they would receive applications far in excess of openings and would enjoy the luxury of greater selectivity.

Major change for defence is underway in the form of Mobilise, Modernise, and Transform.³ Yet, in recognising new challenges and threats, and in seeking solutions, politicians and military leaders of most Western states, including the UK, have ignored any discussion of changing the all-volunteer approach to the armed forces. To many, even the word ‘conscription’ is toxic, with an aura of amateurism – or coercion – rather than the professionalism on which their own uniformed service has been based. Yet there are states across Europe where various forms of national defence service exist. These countries also boast high public acceptance of national service, including among the young people asked to serve. Indeed, in the countries discussed in this paper that feature selective conscription, there are many more candidates than positions for conscription positions, leading to a seemingly paradoxical situation where young people compete to participate in a scheme that is mandatory.

Although no existing national service solution is perfect, such examples provide support for the idea that conscription need not have the catastrophic consequences for military standards and performance that some seem to presume. To be sure, military national service is clearly easier to execute in countries whose citizens are accustomed to a strong and benevolent government, and to the idea of citizens contributing to the national good. The argument could, however, be

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1. Jamie Johnson, ‘British Army Accused of “Leaning On” Under-18s to Plug Recruitment Gap’, *The Telegraph*, 21 August 2019.
 2. *Die Zeit*, ‘Bundeswehr Prüft Rekrutierung Von EU-Bürgern’, 27 December 2018.
 3. Ministry of Defence, ‘Mobilising, Modernising & Transforming Defence: A Report on the Modernising Defence Programme’, 2018.

reversed: notable personalities such as US Army General (ret.) Stanley McChrystal have extolled national service as a policy solution to the challenges faced by leaders today.⁴

4. Stanley A McChrystal and Michael E O'Hanlon, 'Order from Chaos: How a Focus on National Service Can Unify Our Divided Country', Brookings Institute, 5 March 2019.

I. Military Service: Definition, History and the Current Debate

UNIVERSAL MILITARY SERVICE, often referred to as ‘conscription’ or ‘the draft’, is the mandatory enlistment of citizens in the armed forces. Although used in ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, conscription for men – and the notion of the citizen soldier – did not become common in Europe until the 18th century, when several European countries led by revolutionary France, then Prussia and Russia, introduced early versions. *La levée en masse*, the citizen-soldier concept introduced by France in 1793, obliged all men (as opposed to certain societal groups) to serve in the armed forces, thus establishing the model that – with modifications – remains in use today.⁵ Conscription was further popularised during the 19th century, when Prussia – following its defeat at the hands of France – modified its conscription and made national service mandatory for all men; other countries, including Russia, Sweden and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, followed. Indeed, the only major European holdout was the UK. Thanks to its geographically advantageous position, which protected it from the immediate danger of invasion felt by continental European countries, the UK did not see the need for conscripted armed forces and introduced conscription only during the First World War. The reason for this being the overwhelming need for manpower, which was of a magnitude the British armed forces had never before experienced.

In most European countries, military service remained in place, with variations, until the years following the end of the Cold War. Notable variations are the UK, which ended national service in 1963, after Prime Minister Anthony Eden concluded that the public would not support its continuation unless the UK’s security situation deteriorated.⁶ In 1960, West Germany launched a dual-track civilian-military model that saw large numbers of young men perform their national service in hospitals, assisted-living facilities and other social institutions. This was to guarantee citizens’ rights – encoded in Germany’s Basic Law – to not be obliged to perform military service.⁷ Outside Europe, the US experienced the drawbacks of the draft during the Vietnam War and moved to fully professional armed forces, although all male US citizens and residents aged 18–25 must still register for the Selective Service System, essentially a registry of men who could be called up for military service in case of military need as

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5. Iver Johansen, ‘Praktisering av verneplikten i Norge 1814-2000’ [‘Practice of Conscription in Norway 1814-2000’], Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2000, <<http://rapporter.ffi.no/rapporter/2000/02708.pdf>>, accessed 4 October 2019.
 6. Martin S Navias, ‘Terminating Conscription? The British National Service Controversy 1955-56’, *Journal of Contemporary History* (Vol. 24, No. 2, 1989), pp. 195–208.
 7. Peter Steinbach, ‘Die Wehrpflicht. Eine historische Betrachtung’, <<https://www.bpb.de/politik/grundfragen/deutsche-verteidigungspolitik/203136/wehrpflicht>>, accessed 7 October 2019.

decreed by the US president.⁸ Israel has the developed world's most comprehensive military service system, requiring all Jewish citizens to perform military service, although ultra-Orthodox Jews may be exempted if they can prove they are in full-time religious study.

Following the end of the Cold War, numerous European countries suspended military service: France in 1996;⁹ Italy in 2004; Lithuania in 2008; Sweden in 2010;¹⁰ and Germany in 2011.¹¹ Other countries, such as Denmark and Norway, maintained military service, but with fewer young men serving. Finland and Estonia have retained military service for all men, with women serving on a voluntary basis.

Especially since Russia's annexation of Crimea, but also in response to chronic military recruitment challenges, European countries and even the US have discussed reinstating military service. Lithuania did so in 2015, with a new selective model.¹² Sweden followed two years later. The country's armed forces had for several years struggled to recruit enough soldiers, and its new military service model was designed to top up the number of soldiers to the level required by the armed forces.¹³ In 2016, Norway expanded its selective military service to women, making it gender-neutral while not increasing the number of conscripts drafted annually.¹⁴

Since then, France has introduced a new model of national service. During the 2017 presidential campaign, President Emmanuel Macron called for military service of at least one month for all French citizens aged 18–21. His government's plan, called Universal National Service and unveiled in 2018, has a somewhat different setup: national service for all 16-year-olds consisting of a one-month mandatory placement with a focus on civic culture to 'enable young people to create new relationships and develop their role in society'. This can be followed by voluntary service between three months and one year 'in an area linked to defence and security' or, if the candidate prefers, in areas linked to heritage, the environment or social care.¹⁵ For many years Italy has maintained a similar scheme, the fully civilian Universal Civil Service.¹⁶ In the UK, meanwhile, prominent voices including Prince Harry have called for a return of national service.¹⁷ In 2019, UK Conservative Party leadership campaign candidate Rory Stewart proposed

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8. US Government, 'Selective Service System', <<https://www.sss.gov>>, accessed 7 October 2019.
 9. Ian Phillips, 'Conscription Drummed Out as France Gets Professional', *The Independent*, 29 May 1996.
 10. Elisabeth Braw, 'The Return of the Military Draft', Issue Brief, Atlantic Council, 15 February 2017.
 11. Deutscher Bundestag, 'Aussetzung der allgemeinen Wehrpflicht beschlossen', <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2011/33831649_kw12_de_wehrdienst/204958>, accessed 4 October 2019.
 12. Braw, 'The Return of the Military Draft'.
 13. *Ibid.*
 14. Elisabeth Braw, 'Norway's Gender-Neutral Draft', *War on the Rocks*, 23 June 2016.
 15. Lucy Williamson, 'France's Macron Brings Back National Service', *BBC*, 27 June 2018.
 16. Dipartimento per le Politiche Giovanili e il Servizio Civile Universale [Department for Youth Policy and Universal Civil Service], 'Cosa è il Servizio Civile' ['What is Civil Service?'], <<https://www.serviziocivile.gov.it/menusx/servizio-civile-nazionale/cosa-e-il-sc.aspx>>, accessed 4 October 2019.
 17. Nicola Harley, 'Prince Harry Calls to Bring Back National Service', *The Telegraph*, 16 May 2015.

a compulsory national citizen service.¹⁸ In the US, US Army General (ret.) Stanley McChrystal argued for national service in a 2019 op-ed, not for military reasons but because ‘the real product of national service, as much as the good work that participants carry out, is the group of alumni that it produces—individuals with increased maturity, civic awareness, and the empathy that comes from working with people from different backgrounds and different zip codes’.¹⁹

18. Stewart, ‘If I become Prime Minister I will introduce National Citizen Service’.

19. McChrystal and O’Hanlon, ‘Order from Chaos’.

II. Objectives of National Service

MCCHRYSTAL'S ARGUMENT HIGHLIGHTS a stark – and potentially irreconcilable – divide between the perceived objectives of national service. As in the past, today's military service models are designed to enhance a country's national defence, both by boosting professional forces with conscripts during their training and by subsequently bolstering the reserves through the addition of newly graduated conscripts. Military service is, thus, an efficient way of building reserves.

There is also recognition that with young people called up to serve the same national cause, national service contributes to national identity and unity. The UK has such ambitions with its National Citizen Service. The programme, which invites 16- and 17-year-olds to participate in community projects during their school holidays,²⁰ was launched in 2011 under the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government led by David Cameron, as a completely civilian attempt to improve national cohesion and unity, and formed part of Cameron's Big Society Agenda.²¹ By the end of 2017, 400,000 teenagers had participated in the programme.²² Compared to military-focused national service models, the National Citizen Service is modest in size and societal objectives. Nevertheless, its results suggest that developments such as those seen in Scandinavian countries are possible in Britain as well. A 2016 evaluation of the programme reports that 85% of summer participants feel confident in 'having a go at things that are new to me', compared to the baseline figure of 67%.²³ Corresponding results have been identified beginning with conscription's early years in the 19th century, analysed by, for example, Eugene Weber, an American scholar of Western civilisation.²⁴ The unity objective has been particularly important in new countries. Referring to newly united Italy, Vanda Wilcox points out that 'to be called up meant to acknowledge the existence of Italy and the power of the state to intervene

20. UK Government, 'National Citizen Service', <<https://www.gov.uk/government/get-involved/take-part/national-citizen-service>>, accessed 4 October 2019.

21. Cameron, 'Big Society Speech'.

22. National Citizen Service, 'Annual Reports & Accounts, Year Ending 31st March 2018', <<https://www.ncsyes.co.uk/sites/default/files/2018-11/Annual%20Report%202017%20-%202018.pdf>>, accessed 7 October 2019.

23. Kantar Public and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 'National Citizen Service 2016 Evaluation: Main Report', December 2017, <<https://www.ncsyes.co.uk/sites/default/files/2018-10/NCS%202016%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf>>, accessed 13 September 2019.

24. Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976).

in citizens' lives'.²⁵ As Carol Armisted Grigsby notes, '[c]olonial militias, requiring the service of every able-bodied (nonslave) man, were a feature of life in early America',²⁶ while East Germany placed enormous emphasis on (male) citizen service in the National People's Army as a means of shaping national identity.²⁷

Military service, with its focus on work, community and discipline, has also been seen as a useful tool with which to further young citizens' personal development. Referring to newly independent Finland's efforts to build a military service model from scratch between the First and Second World Wars, Anders Ahlbäck notes that 'almost everyone seemed to hope or fear that soldiering and military training carried great significance for young men's development and thus for the nation's future'.²⁸ Primarily because it is thus far the only nationwide programme that captures nearly all members of an adult year-group (albeit mostly male ones), military service has also been seen as a tool for other societal objectives, including:

- Social advancement for underprivileged classes of society.
- Levelling of the social playing field.
- Creating a sense of community spirit and service to the community.
- Increased societal cohesion.

Good citizenship is, for example, the clear objective of the UAE's national service, which was launched in 2014 and now mandates military service for 16 months for all young men; indeed, national service has been credited with a 75% drop in crime among young Emiratis.²⁹ With such areas of focus in the foreground, the original military purpose can recede to secondary or minimal importance. A 2016 government audit of Britain's National Citizen Service determined that the programme had had a positive impact on matters such as participants' views on their interactions with people of other races, their self-confidence and their transition to adulthood.³⁰ Even within purely military national service models, there is also an expectation that the experience will generate an enhanced sense of civic responsibility among its participants. Indeed, Ståle Ulriksen argues that conscription has morphed from the means to an end (military defence)

25. Vanda Wilcox, 'Encountering Italy: Military Service and National Identity During the First World War', *Bulletin of Italian Politics* (Vol. 3, No. 2, 2011), pp. 283–302.

26. Carol Armisted Grigsby, 'Binding the Nation: National Service in America', Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, *Parameters* (Winter 2008–2009), <<https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/Parameters/articles/08winter/grigsby.pdf>>, accessed 13 September 2019.

27. Rüdiger Wenzke, *Ulbrichts Soldaten: Die Nationale Volksarmee 1956 bis 1971* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2013).

28. Anders Ahlbäck, *Manhood and the Making of the Military: Conscription, Military Service and Masculinity in Finland, 1917–1939* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p. 2.

29. Gillian Duncan, 'Emiratis to Serve Longer in Military as National Service is Extended', *The National*, 8 July 2018.

30. Kantar Public and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 'National Citizen Service 2016 Evaluation'.

to an end in itself.³¹ Taking an opposite viewpoint, Magnus Håkenstad sees military service as an integral part of national defence in Norway and points out that ‘military service, extensive popular participation and a defensive concept [have come] to be viewed as a guarantee for democratic rootedness and insurance against militarism’.³²

Military defence thus remains conscription’s *raison d’être* in countries where it still operates, but in addition military service often serves a societal purpose – what could be labelled a ‘collateral benefit’ – that could be beneficial to the UK were it to introduce a (well-executed) version of national service.

31. Ståle Ulriksen, *Den norske forsvarstradisjonen: militærmakt eller folkeforsvar?* [*The Norwegian Defence Tradition: Military Power or People’s Defence?*] (Oslo: Pax forlag AS, 2002), p. 266.

32. Magnus Håkenstad, *Den norske mobiliseringshæren 1950–1970: Rasjonelt kompromiss eller nasjonal livsløgn?* [*The Norwegian Mobilisation Army 1950-1970: Rational Compromise or National Lie?*] (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, 2010), p. 69.

III. Current Approaches to National Service

THIS CHAPTER EXAMINES different approaches to national service, focusing on four case studies: Denmark, which combines selective military service for men with voluntary military service for women and selective national service in the country's civil contingencies agency; Norway, which has a model of selective, gender-neutral national service in the armed forces; Sweden, which combines professional armed forces with selective, gender-neutral national service where conscripts feed professional ranks as needed; and Finland, which has universal national service for men. The chapter details the setup of each system and highlights aspects that could be adapted by other countries.

Denmark

Conscription has existed in Denmark since the 1800s. After the end of the Cold War, Denmark opted to retain its conscription system, with mandatory service for all men. Today, women can also serve on a voluntary basis. However, because the armed forces' personnel needs do not require the involvement of all men born each year, only a small percentage of men are selected for national service. They serve in units in the army (all regiments have conscripts), the navy, the air force or the Danish Emergency Management Agency (DEMA). Between 2013 and 2018, an average of 4,200 individuals were called up by the armed forces each year, and another 420 by DEMA, out of an annual cohort of 71,000 19-year-olds. That means that only 6.5% of Danes within a given year-group are selected for conscription. Last year's numbers are representative of the distribution: 3,791 conscripts served in the army, while 141 and 96 conscripts served in the navy and the air force, respectively. Navy conscripts serve on the country's royal yacht, while air force conscripts serve in a training regiment and do not have access to high-end platforms. Soldiers are paid a daily stipend of DKK 298 (£36).³³

Despite women not being obliged to serve, one-fifth of all conscripts in the same period were women.³⁴ Although the government will increase the annual number of conscripts by 500 over the next five years, military service will remain highly selective, with the armed forces choosing the top performers in a combination of evaluations. Those selected are obliged to serve, but with the number of willing candidates far exceeding those unwilling to serve, in reality the armed forces rarely select a reluctant candidate. Selection is conducted in two stages: an online self-evaluation conducted by each male Dane turning 18 that year, followed by mental and physical aptitude tests for a smaller number chosen by the armed forces based on the online

33. Author email correspondence with Danish armed forces' personnel office, 18 July 2019

34. *Ibid.* The armed forces provided the monthly figure paid to conscripts, DKK 8,943, which translates into DKK 298.1 per day.

evaluation. During the tests, potential conscripts are also given the option of choosing their preferred regiments and functions. Applicants are also interviewed by officers. Women wanting to volunteer for military service can sign up for the online assessment and then follow the same process as men.

Military training lasts four months; conscripts selected for the country's three royal regiments as well as the royal yacht serve for up to 12 months.³⁵ 'The conscripts view the professional units that live in the same barracks with interest and curiosity. They don't get access to the same sophisticated equipment, just the basic infantry items. We don't make them fully formed infantrymen, logisticians, and so on', explained Lieutenant Colonel Peter Gutfeld, director of the Danish armed forces' military service and recruitment department.³⁶ Gutfeld previously commanded a battalion comprising both active-duty troops and conscripts. The short initial training period does separate conscripts from professional service members. Although conscripts will, by definition, not reach the same standards as their professional counterparts, there is a case to be made for an extension of the initial service, a move currently underway in Sweden.

Somewhat surprisingly, the Danish armed forces have managed to reach a high female participation rate among conscripts despite a long history of not mandating military service for women. To reach it, the armed forces have pursued a strategy of intense outreach to young women, including annual 'Inspiration Days'. They are also accommodating to female soldiers, for example by allowing them ten minute comfort breaks as opposed to two minute for men. Now the armed forces are hoping to further increase the number of female (voluntary) conscripts, although they have not yet set a target rate. Their success has, however, caused other headaches. '[More than half] of male conscripts feel that there are too many women now; they feel military service is not a male bonding experience anymore. That is obviously something we have to address as we bring in more women', said Gutfeld.³⁷

DEMA conscripts, meanwhile, serve for nine months in the agency's regional centres and learn disaster-response techniques including fire-fighting. While the armed forces have mixed-gender sleeping quarters (usually rooms sleeping 12 persons), toilets and shower facilities, DEMA does not, although it is planning to make the switch.

DEMA conscripts are not just trainees, they accompany professional DEMA staff on domestic deployments; the agency is usually activated when a disaster exceeds the capacities of local first responders, or when it requires highly specialised capabilities. 'Conscripts leave DEMA equipped to be part of national security, in a disaster-response function', explained Charlotte Bro, DEMA's head of crisis management. 'Many of them go on to civilian careers but choose to join DEMA or the Home Guard (*Hjaemmevaernet*) as volunteers. They are often very active until

35. *Borger.dk*, 'Værnepligt: Der er værnepligt for alle mænd i Danmark' ['Mandatory National Service: There is Mandatory National Service for all Men in Denmark'], <<https://www.borger.dk/politi-retsvaesen-forsvar/Forsvar-og-beredskab/Vaernepligt>>, accessed 4 October 2019.

36. Author telephone interview with Peter Gutfeld, 25 June 2019.

37. *Ibid.*

they have families, then their involvement recedes a bit, then picks up again when they are empty nesters'.³⁸ Like its Norwegian and Swedish counterparts, the *Hjaemmevaernet* – which, like the reserves, primarily consists of former conscripts – acts as a pillar of whole-of-society defence comprising a range of military as well as non-military tasks. Its members assist the police with duties such as evacuations and guarding of crime scenes and can also be deployed with active-duty armed forces members.

Although the armed forces can force young men to serve, the fact that conscription is selective means that they can choose those best suited, and those motivated to serve. Only in a very few cases, involving professional specialists, do the Danish armed forces call up a young man who has not declared an interest in serving.

Denmark is also planning to begin admitting 30 cyber conscripts each year.³⁹ They will serve for a total of 12 months: four months' basic training followed by eight months' specialist training.

Norway

In 1814, the Norwegian parliament passed a law requiring all able-bodied men to perform military service if the armed forces needed them. That meant that the government had access to every man, although not all served. Furthermore, the move was designed to strengthen the link between the armed forces and the wider public, a motivation that remains true today.⁴⁰ However, training was brief: conscripts only served for a period of 74 or 84 days.

Norwegian conscripts' performance against the invading German armed forces (*Wehrmacht*) during the Second World War was patchy. Given conscripts' highly insufficient training and preparation, it was hardly surprising that they were often vastly outperformed by the *Wehrmacht*. For the same reason, the relative success achieved by army reservists and conscripts in areas such as Narvik is remarkable. Civilians, meanwhile, ably organised themselves in underground home-guard resistance units and fought the invaders. Like Denmark, post-war Norway retained and expanded its model of general conscription, and significantly improved the level of training. Service was extended from a maximum of 84 days to 12 months, and all able-bodied men were called up for service, remaining in the reserves until age 44. Along with Sweden and Denmark, Norway also introduced a formal home guard (*Heimevernet*),⁴¹ an organisation that operates under the armed forces, with active-duty top commanders, and whose members – who possess basic military skills – have performed military service.

38. Author telephone interview with Charlotte Bro, 19 June 2019.

39. *SVT Nyheter*, 'Danmark vill införa cybervärnplik' ['Denmark Wants to Introduce Cyber Conscription], 20 April 2019, <<https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/skane/danmark-vill-infora-cybervarnplik>>, accessed 4 October 2019.

40. Norges Offisersforbund [Norwegian Officer's Union], 'Verneplikt: historie och framtid' ['Conscription: History and Future'], <https://www.nof.no/images/Marketing/brosjyrer/NOF_verneplikt_historie_og_fremtid.pdf>, accessed 4 October 2019.

41. The *Heimevernet* is Norway's largest military branch, operating alongside the army, navy and air force.

Like most other European countries, after the Cold War Norway initially maintained national service for all men. In so doing, the government adhered to the principle that ‘all must serve’. This created a situation – reflected in other European countries – where large numbers of men performed military service, the purpose of which was unclear to them and to the wider population. In addition, the large conscript numbers strained the armed forces’ resources. Beginning in 2001, numbers were eventually reduced.⁴² In more recent years, the Norwegian armed forces selected even fewer conscripts: around 7,000 annually, which currently corresponds to less than one third of all male 18-year-olds.⁴³

With the expansion of mandatory military service to women in 2016, the armed forces’ selection pool has now doubled and selection been made even more competitive.⁴⁴ Every citizen reaching the age of 18 is asked to complete an initial online assessment, similar to the one conducted by the Danish armed forces. As in Denmark and Sweden, teenagers are legally obliged to complete the evaluation. Candidates deemed suitable for military service are invited to selection examinations, which include mental aptitude and IQ tests as well as a physical assessment. In countries struggling with conscription-dodging, such as Russia, these tests would pose an opportunity for candidates to deliberately perform poorly, thus removing themselves from consideration. That appears not to be the case in Norway. Candidates are instructed to do their best in the selection tests; while it is hard to identify cases of conscious underachievement, there is no evidence of widespread test-flunking.⁴⁵ Because Norwegian law does not permit ethnic or sexual-identity profiling, it is impossible to scientifically document how ethnic and social minorities fare in the selection process. However, in 2018, 7,346 conscripts were selected for military service, 25% of them women. That is approximately the same number, and the same percentage, as the year before.

During their initial 12- to 16-month military service – depending on the role – conscripts join an active-duty force currently comprising 11,515 service personnel.⁴⁶ Conscripts receive a daily stipend of NOK 180 (£16), as well as a one-time stipend of NOK 35,000 (£3,200). The armed forces also help cover expenses such as rent and, where applicable, childcare.⁴⁷ ‘The conscripts serve in virtually all units, where we mix them with active-duty forces’, explained Lieutenant Colonel Petter Lysholm, head of the Norwegian armed forces’ conscription service. ‘They do everything together with the active-duty forces except living together. Because

42. Magnus Håkenstad and Olav Christoffer Bogen, *Balansegang: Forsvarets omstilling etter den kalde krigen* [Balancing Act: The Armed Forces’ Transformation after the Cold War] (Oslo: Dreyer Forlag A/S, 2015), pp. 52–53.

43. Statistisk Sentralbyrå [Statistics Norway], ‘Fakta om Befolkningen’ [‘Facts About the Population’], <<https://www.ssb.no/befolkning/faktaside/befolkningen>>, accessed 4 October 2019.

44. Braw, ‘Norway’s Gender-Neutral Conscription’.

45. Author email correspondence with Nina Hellum, anthropologist at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2 September 2019.

46. Norwegian Armed Forces, ‘Forsvarets årsrapport 2018’ [‘The Armed Forces’ Annual Report’], <<https://forsvaret.no/aarsrapport/statistikk/personell>>, accessed 4 October 2019.

47. Author email correspondence with the Norwegian armed forces’ public affairs office, 8 September 2019.

Norwegian law affords [active-duty] armed forces personnel individual rooms, conscripts are housed separately'.⁴⁸

Male and female conscripts in the Norwegian army share tents and bedrooms (the latter usually sleeping six people), which during the night are divided by curtains. Because there are fewer female than male conscripts, in practice that means that female conscripts typically share a bedroom with male soldiers, while not all male soldiers may have a female colleague in their room.⁴⁹ They have separate toilets and shower rooms, although in the field facilities are often mixed. The regiments of the navy and air force have a range of different arrangements regarding conscripts' sleeping quarters. According to a study of a pioneering 50/50 gender mix in Norwegian air defence battalions conducted by anthropologist Nina Hellum, mixed sleeping quarters are on the whole beneficial to the armed forces.⁵⁰

The highly selective nature of Norway's military service makes it very attractive among young Norwegians – indeed, somewhat paradoxically, the exclusivity rather than the actual duties appear to appeal to young Norwegians. 'Today military service is seen as exclusive and prestigious', says Hellum. 'It looks good on one's CV. The only people the armed forces have to draft against their will are a small number with specialist skills, such as electricians'.⁵¹

Precisely because military service is so selective, the Norwegian armed forces can select the country's very best 19-year-olds, as measured by physical ability, mental ability and motivation. That is clearly beneficial to the armed forces but less good for social inclusion. Furthermore, although the selectivity benefits the armed forces' capability and reputation, it poses unexpected challenges for recruitment, as conscripts choose a full-time military career less often than the armed forces might like. 'It's not easy to get conscripts to remain in the armed forces', Hellum said. 'Many do military service simply because it looks good on the CV and will help them in their subsequent civilian careers. And because the people we take are the best, they have good employment opportunities outside the armed forces'.⁵²

The tough competition for conscript places has led to veritable lobbying efforts by Norwegian parents. 'Often parents call someone they know in the armed forces and ask them to support their teenager's candidacy. But we have to tell them that their teenager is legally an adult and that we will talk to him or her directly', Lysholm said.⁵³

48. Author telephone interview with Nina Hellum, 26 June 2019.

49. *Ibid.*

50. Nina Hellum, *"Not Focusing on Whether It's a Spout or a Handle": An Anthropological Study of Even Gender Balance Among Conscripts in a Norwegian Air Force Battalion* (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 10 May 2017).

51. Author telephone interview with Nina Hellum, 19 June 2019.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*

The economics of conscription versus an all-volunteer forces have long been hotly debated in the political arena ever since conscription was first introduced. During the Cold War, and until military service was suspended in most of Europe, several academic studies also examined economic aspects of conscription versus all-volunteer forces. As detailed later in this paper, the cost to the taxpayer per soldier is significantly lower for conscripts than for professional soldiers.

However, in evaluating military service models in 2009, Panu Poutvaara and Andreas Wegener noted that

accounting costs do not reflect the real opportunity costs of a conscript army; the use of compulsion in itself suggests that real costs are higher. The social cost of drafting someone to be a soldier is not what the government chooses to pay [them] but the minimum amount for which [they] would be willing to join the army voluntarily.⁵⁴

Universal conscription for men was – and is, in the countries that retain the model – effectively a tax on young men. Although there are no authoritative studies on the economics of today's selective conscription models, they will certainly be produced, because the selective model turns the tax-on-young-men argument on its head. Under their countries' selective systems, Danes, Norwegians and Swedes put themselves forward for conscription not just out of a sense of duty to the country but, importantly, also thanks to the prestige and workplace advantages they expect their service to bring. The element of compulsion is required for the armed forces to get access to the complete year-group; without it, they would simply choose from a self-selecting group that would not represent the full talent and breadth of society.

About half of Norwegian conscripts serve in the army, where they provide essential support to infantry battalions and support battalions. After completing their service, conscripts can opt to join the armed forces as active-duty personnel, although the largest need is in the *Heimevernet*. The *Heimevernet* – in charge of local security around the country and thus the mostly highly regarded pillar of territorial defence – requires some 4,000 recruits each year. 'Because the *Heimevernet* provides local defence, we choose people according to where they live. Each region has to be fully staffed', said Lysholm.⁵⁵ The *Heimevernet*, which comprises some 40,000 reservists and only 800 active-duty staff, also assists civilian agencies.

Perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, the competitive aspect of Norway's conscription should be considered an asset to deterrence of hostile-state aggression. This is not just because it provides the Norwegian armed forces with the best and brightest of each year-group, but because the resulting attractiveness of the military lends them prestige that is useful in attracting full-time civilian and military personnel. In the 2018 edition of most-attractive-employer poll of Norwegian

54. Panu Poutvaara and Andreas Wegener, *The Political Economy of Conscription* (Helsinki: Helsinki Center of Economic Research, 2009).

55. Author's telephone interview with Petter Lysholm, 27 June 2019.

university students conducted by the recruitment agency Universum, the armed forces rank third among IT students, after Google and Microsoft, and 10th among engineering students.⁵⁶

Sweden

Until the end of the Cold War, Sweden pursued much the same model as its Nordic neighbours. During the Second World War, the country's armed forces consisted of 1 million active-duty and conscripted men (serving conscripts and former conscripts serving in the reserves), about 16% of the population. During the conscription peak of the 1960s and early 1970s, virtually every young man was drafted and remained eligible for service in the armed forces until age 47, creating a mobilised force of some 800,000.⁵⁷ At most, Sweden had 52,295 conscripts in a single year.⁵⁸ In 1990, its armed forces still had 41,349 conscripts and a total mobilised force of 500,000, with conscription lasting between nine and fifteen months. Although military service was not fully suspended until 2009, it was gradually reduced, with the number of young men selected eventually cut to about 10% of the year-group. In 2008, when the final intake of conscripts was selected, 6,804 young Swedes (mostly men, along with a small group of women volunteers) were called up for military service, serving until 2009.⁵⁹

All-volunteer armed forces did, however, turn out to be a disappointing experiment. Between 2011 and 2015, the armed forces managed only to recruit an average of 2,500 soldiers per year – 60% of the number needed. 'To fill the gaps, we brought in previous cohorts of conscripts, specifically those who served during the final four years of military service [2006-2009], back for training, so the ranks were never depleted', explained Colonel Peter Nilsson, the Swedish armed forces' recruitment coordinator.⁶⁰

Although previous conscripts did manage to fill the country's mobilisation needs, with each passing year there would have been fewer former conscripts to call on. The lack of new intakes affected permanent staffing as well: in 2016, the Swedish armed forces were unable to fill 600 active-duty positions and 6,600 reservist positions, leaving the country in a perilous position in case of hostile-state aggression.⁶¹ The previous year, Defence Minister Peter Hultqvist

56. *Universum*, 'Norges mest attraktive arbeidsgivere 2018 er kåret' ['Norway's Most Attractive Employers 2018 Have Been Crowned'], 5 May 2018, <<https://universumglobal.com/no/norges-mest-attraktive-arbeidsgivere-2018-er-karet/>>, accessed 4 October 2019.

57. Försvarsmakten [Swedish Armed Forces]: 'Värnplikten Genom Åren' ['National Service Through the Years'], <<https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/information-och-fakta/var-historia/artiklar/varnplikt-under-109-ar/>>, accessed 4 October 2019.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Lars Ericson Wolke, 'Ett Folk I Vapen – Värnpliktens Historia' ['An Armed People: The History of Conscription'], *Populär Historia*, 22 December 2009, <<https://popularhistoria.se/samhalle/utbildning/ett-folk-i-vapen-varnpliktens-historia>>, accessed 4 October 2019.

60. Author telephone interview with Peter Nilsson, 25 June 2019.

61. Regeringskansliet [Swedish Government], 'En robust personalförsörjning av det militära försvaret' ['Robust Personnel Supply of the Armed Forces'], 28 September 2016, <<https://www.regeringen.se/>>

commissioned a government inquiry into the armed forces' personnel supply.⁶² The inquiry, presented in 2016, recommended partial conscription in combination with volunteer forces.⁶³

Acting on the inquiry's recommendations, in 2017 the government reinstated conscription, although in a limited fashion and only as a supplement to volunteer forces. The new model was also made gender-neutral. Basic training is shorter than it was during the Cold War: between four and eleven months, with most soldiers serving for nine or eleven months. Around 2,750 men and women were selected for the 2018–2019 intake (the first since the new model was introduced); they reported for duty alongside 1,000 volunteers. 84% were men. During the final year of all-volunteer forces, a total of 2,200 men and women had enlisted for initial training.⁶⁴

During the 2019–2020 period, 3,500 conscripts will do their initial military service (alongside 1,000 volunteers), and in 2020–2021, the figure is expected to rise to a total of 5,000. The conscripts receive a stipend of SEK 553 (£46.50) per day.

Even though the number will be further increased during the coming years – up to an estimated 8,000 – conscription is extremely selective. The fact that, logistics permitting, the number of conscripts can be increased or reduced based on prevailing security needs offers a distinct advantage vis-à-vis fully professional forces, which would have to be painstakingly recruited. However, the system works only if military service is considered attractive.

Nilsson describes Sweden's current arrangement: 'To be accepted for mandatory military service, you have to be motivated and really also volunteer to do it'.⁶⁵ Thanks to the selective nature of military service, the armed forces rarely have to oblige a candidate to serve. However, as with Denmark and Norway, the mandatory aspect of conscription gives the armed forces' selection broad access to the complete year-group, as opposed to the self-selecting and inevitably limited group that would otherwise present itself. This gives the armed forces access to a much wider talent pool across all parts of society. The considerable appeal of selective national service is that it is a hybrid of voluntary and mandated service, with the attractiveness resulting from the selective element making the mandatory element recede into the background. It is perhaps indicative that the Q&A section on the Swedish armed forces' webpage on conscription features

rattsliga-dokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/2016/09/201663/>, accessed 4 October 2019.

62. Swedish Ministry of Defence, 'Annika Nordgren Christensen utredare för personalförsörjningen' ['Annika Nordgren Christensen Appointed to Lead Personnel Supply Enquiry], press release, 1 October 2015, <<https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2015/10/annika-nordgren-christensen-utredare-for-personalforsorjningen/>>, accessed 4 October 2019.

63. Regeringskansliet [Swedish Government], 'En robust personalförsörjning av det militära försvaret' ['Robust Personnel Supply of the Armed Forces'].

64. Author email correspondence with Peter Nilsson, 26 June 2019.

65. *Ibid.*

questions such as: 'What should I do if I'm not called up for military service?'.⁶⁶ Those rejected can apply for positions as professional soldiers, and for officer training.

The conscripts serve in most of the armed forces' regiments, although the army has by far the largest number. In 2019, the armed forces called up its first group of cyber soldiers, who will serve for 11 months.⁶⁷ 'The new personnel increase our capabilities', Nilsson said.⁶⁸ With conscripts by definition being less skilled than full-time soldiers and officers, the armed forces want to extend specialist training from 11 to 15 months. 'Of course, the professional units are more effective than conscript units because the professional soldiers and officers are personally more skilled than conscripts, but the difference is relatively small', Nilsson explained.

The Swedish armed forces' ambition to extend specialist soldiers' training underscores a dilemma inherent to conscription. Today, with even relatively basic equipment featuring sophisticated technology, training soldiers to the desired standard requires time, and for national security to benefit, conscripts should remain in the armed forces for some time after completing their training. Referring to Israeli discussions about conscription time in the Israel Defense Forces potentially being reduced from today's standard of three years, Yaakov Lifshitz, a former director-general of the Israel ministry of finance now active at Bar-Ilan University, notes:

If the length of service is reduced, it can be assumed that the period of time devoted to exercises and training will exceed the time devoted to the production of output. As a result, the army will have little time, if any, to reap the fruit of its investment, as the trained soldier will be discharged shortly after completing his training.⁶⁹

East Germany's standard military service lasted for 18 months; young men who committed themselves to military service of three or more years received preferential treatment in their subsequent university applications. The country's active-duty forces were thus always supplemented with highly skilled conscripts. In a liberal democracy, however, conscripts – even ones expecting labour-market advantages from their participation in military service – would be less motivated if the service comprised, say, three years rather than one.

In Sweden, the introduction of a new form of conscription has helped the armed forces to bounce back from a decade of negative developments and public perception. During its

66. Försvarsmakten [Swedish Armed Forces], 'Vad händer när du fyller 18 år?' ['What Happens When You Turn 18?'], <<https://jobb.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/utbildning/grundutbildning/vad-hander-nar-jag-fyller-18/>>, accessed 4 October 2019.

67. Försvarsmakten [Swedish Armed Forces], 'Försvarsmakten utbildar cybersoldater' ['The Armed Forces [Will] Train Cyber Soldiers'], 15 February 2019, <<https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/aktuellt/2019/02/forsvarsmakten-utbildar-cybersoldater/>>, accessed 4 October 2019.

68. Author telephone interview with Peter Nilsson, 25 June 2019.

69. Yaakov Lifshitz, 'Compulsory Conscription or Mobilization Using Market Forces: Economic Aspects', in Meir Elran and Gabi Sheffer (eds), *Military Service in Israel: Challenges and Ramifications* (Ramat Gan: Institute of National Strategic Studies, 2016), pp. 31–32.

near-decade of fully professional armed forces, Sweden had a soldier attrition rate of 20–25% during initial training; the figure has since declined to around 8%.⁷⁰ In 1998, 28% of Swedes regarded conscription as a civic duty, down from 47% just three years previously, while 64% argued that conscripts should receive special – monetary – compensation, up from 45% in 1995.⁷¹ In 2011, 46% argued that Sweden should ‘absolutely’ have military defence, the lowest figure since the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (Myndigheten för Samhällsskydd och Beredskap, or MSB) began its annual surveys on security and defence in 1979.⁷² In 2013, 50% of Swedes called Sweden’s defence ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ compared with only 25% who considered it ‘good’ or ‘very good’.⁷³ Five years later, the percentage of Swedes arguing that Sweden should ‘absolutely’ have military defence had risen to 66% in the MSB’s annual survey. It is noteworthy that 70% of respondents considered universal conscription important for the country’s defence, making it the fifth most important factor in defence among the Swedish public. The top four factors were: the armed forces’ ability to defend the whole country; modern weapons systems; citizens’ will to defend the country; and the size of the defence budget.⁷⁴ Although Sweden abandoned its policy of neutrality on joining the EU in 1994, it still maintains a policy of military non-alignment, which plays a role in citizens’ views on defence.

The question facing the Swedish armed forces now is whether the positive momentum brought about by selective conscription can be sustained as conscript numbers grow according to the timeline set by the government.

Finland

After gaining independence from Russia in 1917, Finland swiftly built armed forces that included universal conscription for men. During the Second World War, Finnish soldiers – volunteers and conscripts – fought valiantly against a vastly superior Red Army. Although the Soviets eventually defeated Finland, the universal conscription model had been vital to the country’s defence. National service still plays a vital role in Finnish defence.

70. Author email correspondence with Peter Nilsson, 26 June 2019.

71. Göran Stütz, *Svenskarnas syn på samhället, säkerhetspolitiken och försvaret hösten 1999* [Swedes’ View on Society, Security Policy and Defence, Autumn 1999] (Stockholm: Styrelsen för psykologiskt försvar, 1999).

72. Myndigheten för Samhällsskydd och Beredskap (MSB), *Opinioner 2011: Allmänhetens syn på samhällsskydd, beredskap, säkerhetspolitik och försvar* [Opinions 2011: The Public’s Views on Societal Protection, Preparedness, Security Policy and Defence] (Karlstad: Myndigheten För Samhällsskydd och Beredskap, 2011)

73. Statsrådsberedningen [Government Offices of Sweden], *Försvarmakten i samhället – en långsiktigt hållbar militär personalförsörjning och en modern folkförankring av försvaret* [The Armed Forces in Society – Sustainable Personnel Supply and Modern Anchoring of the Armed Forces in the Population] (Stockholm: Statens Offentliga Utredningar, 2014).

74. MSB, ‘Allmänhetens syn på samhällsskydd, beredskap, säkerhetspolitik och försvar’ [‘The Public’s Views on Societal Protection, Preparedness, Security Policy and Defence’], <<https://rib.msb.se/filer/pdf/28769.pdf>>, accessed 7 October 2019.

Of the Finnish Defence Forces' (FDF) current mobilised strength of 280,000 personnel, professional soldiers and officers account for a mere 3%; the rest are reservists (and as such, former conscripts). Today, as during the Cold War, men who have passed physical and mental assessment tests are called up for military service the year they reach the age of 19. The number of men deemed fit for military service ranges between 75–80%. Only those medically certified to be physically or mentally unable to perform military service are exempt; currently some 70% of Finnish men complete military service.⁷⁵ Only a tiny number of Finnish conscripts request weapons-free assignments.⁷⁶ Although men can postpone military service – for example, due to mental health issues or academic studies – until they are 29, the vast majority perform military service aged 19 or 20.

That means an annual intake of around 24,500 male conscripts along with some 600 female volunteer conscripts.⁷⁷ The conscripts serve in the army, the navy and the air force, with training in brigades across the country. Conscripts sleep in single-gender rooms of 12 in barracks, while professional soldiers and officers live in their own homes. Although the FDF emphasise that conscripts undergo ambitious training, their main contribution to the Finnish defence posture is mass, not specialist expertise.

The FDF conducts rigorous assessments in selecting 18-year-olds for the roles they will have during their military service. In addition to testing each candidate, assessors also examine information from their secondary schools. The FDF also places strong emphasis on refresher training for reservists. The fundamental question for any country that has mandatory universal national service is, of course, how to motivate those who are conscripted. 'We trust the conscripts, we trust them later as reservists, and we give them responsibility', said Lieutenant Colonel Ari Lehmuslehti, the FDF's deputy assistant chief of staff for training.⁷⁸

75. Author telephone interview with Ari Lehmuslehti, Finnish Defence Forces, 4 July 2019.

76. *Ibid.*

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Ibid.*

IV. Selective National Service: Opportunities for Adoption by the UK

VIRTUALLY ALL EXISTING conscription models have a military objective. For one country examined in this paper, Finland, the objective is mass manpower. Denmark, Norway and Sweden, in turn, use conscription with a combination of objectives: to boost existing numbers of professional forces; to widen the recruitment pool for active-duty forces; occasionally to access specific capabilities (such as cyber expertise or electricians); and as a feeder for their reserve forces. Through national service, all four states' armed forces are able to efficiently select the young people needed for particular tasks. The civil–military connection formed by national service, in turn, provides an attractive side benefit. The obvious downside is that even highly capable young men and women cannot be trained to a professional standard during a conscription period of around one year.

The UK, or even Sweden and Norway, faces a less immediate threat from Russia than Finland. Britain does, however, have to prepare for a growing range of homeland contingencies short of armed invasion, such as extreme weather events and cyber attacks. While UK society expects the armed forces to intervene in contingencies, this is not a sustainable model. In addition, Britain's armed forces struggle with recruitment; a 2018 inquiry by the UK Parliament Public Accounts Committee noted that the UK armed forces are short of 8,200 active-duty personnel, 5.7% of the total.⁷⁹ The picture is similar in other all-volunteer force countries. Recruitment challenges mean the US Army will not reach its desired 500,000 active-duty soldier strength until 2025.⁸⁰ In an interim report issued in January 2019, the US National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service – a bipartisan committee tasked with examining the growing civil–military divide and proposing solutions – reported that about four out of ten young Americans have never considered serving in the armed forces.⁸¹ In Germany, 80% of

79. House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 'Skill Shortages in the Armed Forces', HC 1027, Fifty-Ninth Report of Session 2017–19, 12 September 2018.

80. Meghann Myers, 'Report: Recruiting Challenges Might Have Pushed the Army's End Strength Plans Back a Few Years', *Army Times*, 7 February 2019.

81. US National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, 'Interim Report: A Report to the American People, the Congress, and the President', January 2019, <<https://www.inspire2serve.gov/reports/interim>>, accessed 16 September 2019.

residents consider the *Bundeswehr* important,⁸² but an average of 15% of *Bundeswehr* positions are chronically unfilled.⁸³

In the UK, retention may be a bigger problem still. In the 2018 Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey, officers' and other ranks' satisfaction with service life in general was 41%, down from 61% in 2009.⁸⁴

In its report, the Swedish government inquiry into the armed forces' personnel supply noted that 'the recruitment base for officers should be widened'.⁸⁵ This is a crucial consideration. Conscription exposes young citizens, from many backgrounds and possessing a wide range of skills, to a professional field they may otherwise not have considered. If organised and managed well, conscription can aid recruitment into the active-duty forces. Of the soldiers in Sweden's first cohort of conscripts since the introduction of selective national service, 40% applied to officer training or professional soldier positions. In Denmark, some 20% of conscripts apply to officer training or professional soldier positions.⁸⁶ However, as Norway's armed forces have discovered, highly capable conscripts also have a range of civilian employment opportunities and indeed see military service as an opportunity to enhance their career options.

In addition, military service can function as a social leveller. 'It doesn't matter what you have done before, which school you attended; you all start from the same level', Lehmuslehti pointed out.⁸⁷ In a 2015 study of Swedish men who performed military service in the 1980s, Erik Grönqvist and Erik Lindqvist established that conscripts who served between 1970 and 1988 and who were selected for officer training as part of their training – about 30% of all conscripts – were 75% more likely than privates to have reached leadership positions by the age of 30–40.⁸⁸ This benefits the labour market too, and illustrates that military service – if done right – generates considerable value to society

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- 82. Markus Steinbrecher, Heiko Biehl and Chariklia Rothbart, 'Sicherheits- und verteidigungspolitisches Meinungsbild in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Erste Ergebnisse der Bevölkerungsbefragung 2017', Zentrum für Militärgeschichte und Sozialwissenschaften der Bundeswehr, October 2017, <http://zmsbw.de/html/einsatzunterstuetzung/downloads/1_171220kurzberichtbevoelkerungsumfragezmsbw2017aktualisiertneu.pdf>, accessed 4 October 2019.
 - 83. *Spiegel Online*, 'Personalmangel bei der Bundeswehr: Verteidigungsministerium will verstärkt auf Reservisten zurückgreifen', 27 February 2019.
 - 84. UK Ministry of Defence, 'UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2018', 24 May 2018, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/716976/AFCAS_2018_Main_Report_FINAL.pdf>, accessed 7 October 2019.
 - 85. Regeringskansliet [Swedish Government], 'En robust personalförsörjning av det militära försvaret' ['Robust Personnel Supply of the Armed Forces'], p. 18.
 - 86. Author telephone interview with Peter Gutfeld, 25 June 2019.
 - 87. Author telephone interview with Ari Lehmuslehti, 4 July 2019.
 - 88. Erik Grönqvist and Erik Lindqvist, *Kan man lära sig ledarskap? Befälsutbildning under värnplikten och utfall på arbetsmarknaden* [Can One Learn Leadership? Officer Training During Military Service

Potential for Capability-Building

If a country opts not to call up all eligible men for military service, what is the appropriate number of conscripts required? Is it, as in Sweden, simply the number of soldiers that cannot be recruited for professional positions? This paper does not set out to answer the question of how many active-duty and reservist service members a country needs, only to examine today's approaches to military service models and draw lessons from them.

The fact that the selectivity of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish approaches makes military service attractive could form a starting point for a potential national service model in the UK and other all-volunteer-force countries. This is especially true as geography no longer provides the safety barrier some of these countries' policymakers have become accustomed to; as the 2018 US National Security Strategy underlines, 'the homeland is no longer a sanctuary'.⁸⁹ In the UK, territorial invasion remains a slim prospect, while crippling cyber attacks on critical national infrastructure are not. Young men and women with special skills and talent in areas necessary to modern full-spectrum defence could be selected for specialist national service units, with the units and their setup adjusting to prevailing national security needs. As in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, having been selected and served in such specialist positions – much like the Israel Defense Forces' selection of especially talented soldiers for its Unit 8200 (focusing on signals, intelligence and cyber security) – would be a significant asset on their CVs.

Under the overarching objective of improving national defence against a growing number of threats that do not fall squarely within the current UK armed forces setup, the government could select the most talented teenagers for training and service in such areas, which would involve training by, service in and funding by the armed forces as well as national security agencies, such as GCHQ. The programme would thus be clearly situated within the Fusion Doctrine.⁹⁰

As previously indicated, this would not involve territorial defence but rather specialist units where the armed forces compete head-to-head with civilian employers. Once such area is cyber. In the UK, the shortage of cyber engineers is a fast-growing national security challenge that could be partially addressed through such a specialised and highly selective conscript unit.

and Results on the Labour Market] (Uppsala: Institutet för arbetsmarknads- och utbildningspolitisk utvärdering, 2015).

89. US Department of Defense, 'Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive'.

90. The Fusion Doctrine was introduced by the UK government in its 2018 National Security Capability Review, which stated that 'we will use a new national security doctrine, the Fusion Doctrine, to improve our collective approach to national security, building on the creation of the NSC eight years ago so that we use our security, economic and influence capabilities to maximum effect to protect, promote and project our national security, economic and influence goals'. See HM Government, 'National Security Capability Review', March 2018, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/705347/6.4391_CO_National-Security-Review_web.pdf>, accessed 4 October 2019.

According to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, the gap between supply and demand of cyber expertise is now approaching a crisis, with industry and the government fishing from the same talent pool.⁹¹ In addition, because the legal framework does not allow businesses to engage in offensive cyber and because virtually no business is equipped to defend itself against cyber aggression by states or their proxies, there is a considerable need for experts who would be available for a government surge in case of serious attacks on civil society. While the British Army's 77th Brigade covers cyber defence, it is a combined regular and reserve unit.⁹² With a designated training programme, the government would be able to select and train the most promising cyber talent in a given year-group, who would emerge with extremely attractive skills and remain a valuable asset as reservists, if they do not opt to join the regular forces.

Indeed, the selective approach would be an opportunity for the UK to further develop the model used by Denmark, Norway and Sweden. As detailed, national service graduates in those countries are typically transferred to the reserves (unless they go on to active-duty service). The straight military service-to-reserves approach works in these countries because it has a long tradition. Because no scientific survey has analysed UK citizens' attitudes to such a model, it is hard to predict the response of eligible teenagers and the wider public to such a move. Given, however, that the UK has no recent experience with service to the state – whether military or civilian – it is likely that selective national service without further incentives would be less successful than the Scandinavian approach. The UK could instead combine Scandinavian elements with a GI Bill-style approach, for a package that would involve:

- One year of national service, primarily involving training (basic training followed by specialist training, for example at the Defence Cyber School).
- One year of service putting the training to use.
- Government-funded further education with a reservist commitment or transfer to active-duty service.

Situated within Fusion Doctrine, with participation by agencies such as GCHQ, the model would have a civilian as well as a military strand. All participants would thus leave national service supremely qualified for the labour market and the armed forces. Indeed, thanks to their training, they would add crucial value as reservists. Trainee transfer to the reserves would, of course, be a key component of the model.

The main objective of selective national service would be to supply the government with talent for a range of specific areas, allowing it to surge during contingencies and national crises. The surge capacity would also form part of the UK's deterrent against the growing spectrum of national security threats.

91. UK Parliament, The Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, 'Cyber Security Skills and the UK's Critical National Infrastructure', HL Paper 198, HC 1658, Second Report of Session 2017–19, 13 November 2018.

92. British Army, '77th Brigade: Influence and Outreach', <<https://www.army.mod.uk/who-we-are/formations-divisions-brigades/6th-united-kingdom-division/77-brigade/>>, accessed 4 October 2019.

In addition to cyber, specialisms suitable for national-service training and service include:

- Medical services.
- Police.
- Fire and rescue.
- Communications.
- Energy and fuel.
- Public health.
- Water and wastewater.

The smooth functioning of all these areas is vital for the security of the UK. They are all carried out (in some cases not exclusively) by the armed forces, civilian agencies or a combination of the two. National-service training within each area could be carried out as a military or a civilian strand.

The use of subsequent reserves would resemble First Aid Nurse Yeomanry (FANY), a nurse unit operating under the armed forces whose members have full-time outside careers. During contingencies, such as the 2017 London Bridge terrorist attack, FANY assisted the police and the armed forces.⁹³ Like FANY, the surge units proposed in this paper should be attached to regular/full-time units within the armed forces and/or to civilian agencies. Like FANY's members, national-service graduates assigned to reservist roles should receive regular training and have constant access to well-functioning equipment. Without such attention to details (including provision of good uniforms), a national service would – despite its selectivity and high-calibre trainee setup – risk acquiring a reputation as an undesirable destination for talented young citizens. Of course, without constant access to equipment, surge units would also not be able to carry out their duties. Those wishing to gain further expertise in their specialism should have access to government subsidies for their education.

Selective national service would also – in essence as a side benefit – further other objectives. It would, by bringing participants from the widest possible cross-section of society into contact with the armed forces and the wider government, narrow the UK's civil–military divide. It would also identify talent that the UK armed forces may wish to convert into regular personnel.

Furthermore, a selective national-service programme could help to remedy the UK armed forces' chronic under-representation of women and ethnic minorities. The 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review⁹⁴ stipulated that by 2020, 15% of the intake to the regular forces should be women. In 2018, the intake was 10%.⁹⁵ Although selective conscription would, per se,

93. First Aid Nursing Yeomanry, 'Our Mission', <<https://www.fany.org.uk/about-us>>, accessed 4 October 2019.

94. HM Government, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*, Cm 9161 (London: The Stationery Office, 2015).

95. Noel Dempsey, 'UK Defence Personnel Statistics', House of Commons Library, Briefing Paper Number CBP7930, 16 May 2019.

not change the female intake to the UK regular forces, it would have the potential of reaching considerable numbers of women who have not considered service in the armed forces. The Norwegian armed forces offer a useful case study: even though they opened all positions to women in 1988, they have struggled to surpass a female enrolment rate of 10%. Since the introduction of gender-neutral selective national service, however, women have comprised at least a quarter of successful candidates in every intake.

Popular Opinion

In all four countries analysed in this paper, the military service model enjoys widespread popular support: a crucial aspect if national service is to work. The 2018 edition of a survey on defence and international cooperation carried out for the Norwegian NGO Folk og Forsvar shows that 80% of Norwegians want to maintain conscription in its current form.⁹⁶ In Sweden, in a poll conducted just before conscription was reinstated, 70% expressed support for the move.⁹⁷ Finland's annual survey on the population's attitude to foreign policy, defence and security for 2018 shows that 74% of Finns support the current conscription system; a decrease of 7% from 2017 but still a remarkable figure. More than half (55%) support the idea of national service for both genders.⁹⁸ In a June 2019 poll, 68% of Finns supported the current model.⁹⁹

Crucially, those eligible to perform military service support their respective models as well. According to Finland's 2018 annual foreign policy, defence and security survey, 56% of Finns aged 15–24 support the system, although support has declined in recent years.¹⁰⁰ In the other countries, the issue of acceptance among potential conscripts highlights the advantages of competitive conscription. Norway's 2018 defence and international cooperation survey shows that 69% of conscription-aged Norwegians support the country's conscription model. Selective

96. Folk og Forsvar, 'Meningsmålinger om Forsvaret og internasjonalt samarbeid' ['Opinion Polls on the Armed Forces and International Cooperation'], August 2018, <<https://www.folkogforsvar.no/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Meningsm%C3%A5linger-om-Forsvaret-og-internasjonalt-samarbeid-august-2018.pdf>>, accessed 4 October 2019.

97. *Dagens Nyheter*, 'Starkt stöd att införa värnplikt för båda könen' ['Strong Support for Introduction of Conscription for Both Genders'], 4 January 2016.

98. Planeringskommissionen för försvarsinformation [Planning Commission for Defence Information], 'Finländarnas åsikter om utrikes- och säkerhetspolitiken, försvaret och säkerheten' ['Finns' Views on Foreign and Security Policy, the Armed Forces and Security'], November 2018, <https://www.defmin.fi/files/4414/PFI_2018_Finlandars_asikter_om_utrikes-_och_sakerhetspolitiken_forsvaret_och_sakerheten.pdf>, accessed 4 October 2019.

99. Josefin Flemmich, 'Ny mätning: Finländarna tackar fortfarande nej till kvinnlig värnplikt' ['The Poll: Finns Still Reject Female Conscription'], *Svenska YLE*, 26 June 2019.

100. Planeringskommissionen för försvarsinformation, 'Finländarnas åsikter om utrikes- och säkerhetspolitiken, försvaret och säkerheten' ['Finns' Views on Foreign and Security Policy, the Armed Forces and Security'], November 2018, <https://www.defmin.fi/files/4414/PFI_2018_Finlandars_asikter_om_utrikes-_och_sakerhetspolitiken_forsvaret_och_sakerheten.pdf>, accessed 4 October 2019.

conscription is attractive to different degrees, but as previously discussed, applicants for mandatory military service in Denmark, Norway and Sweden far exceed the number of available places, and the armed forces rarely have to call up individuals not eager to serve. Such cases are typically young men (and women) with specialist skills.

In the UK, the armed forces are well-liked but poorly understood. In a 2019 poll for the Royal British Legion, 80% of Britons said armed forces personnel make a valuable contribution to society – but 69% said they did not know what the armed forces do on a day-to-day basis. Just over four out of ten (44%) thought soldiers run fitness bootcamps for the general public and 16% believed they performed as movie extras, both erroneous assumptions.¹⁰¹ The lack of knowledge, especially the misperception about the armed forces' daily duties, leads to lesser support for national service than might otherwise have been expected, given the armed forces' high popularity figures.

Public opinion in the case of potential casualties should be considered. Outside major wars such as the world wars and Vietnam, Western countries' conscripts have not been deployed in combat, unlike reservists. Nevertheless, a study of public attitudes towards such potential casualties should clearly be conducted as part of an exploration of selective national service in the UK.

More significantly, national service – even of the kind where the mandatory element would barely be noticeable – would be a novel notion for the majority of British citizens. Indeed, given the importance of individual rights in British society and the fact that two generations of Britons have not been asked to contribute to national security, the concept of service to the country would likely encounter a certain degree of bafflement and opposition. The potential introduction of national service in the UK should therefore be preceded by a comprehensive information campaign by the government, perhaps highlighting the opportunities provided to individuals selected for the programme.

Costs and Logistics

There is clearly no need to replace well-functioning arrangements within the UK armed forces and other government agencies in the wider field of national security. However, as previously discussed, selective national service could be used for specific areas where current arrangements produce unsatisfactory results regarding skills, surge capacity and recruitment. In addition, the selective model offers an attractive cost–benefit calculus. The average overall cost for Danish conscripts – including training, provisioning, healthcare, daily allowance and other upkeep costs – is DKK 570 per day. By comparison, a professional soldier in the Danish Army earns an average of DKK 1,030 per day, with additional employer fees, equipment, training and other employer expenses resulting in a total expenditure of more than DKK 2,000 per day per soldier.¹⁰² The training of a Norwegian conscript can range between NOK 300,000 and NOK 1,500,000.¹⁰³ In

101. *The Military Times*, 'Survey Shows Few People Know What the Armed Forces Do', 30 April 2019.

102. Author email correspondence with the Danish armed forces' personnel department, 18 July 2019.

103. Author email correspondence with the Norwegian armed forces' public affairs office, 8 September 2019.

addition to each Swedish conscript's daily stipend, the armed forces have daily expenses of (on average) SEK 593 per conscript. In Finland, the average cost overall per conscript is €45 per day. The cost per average professional soldier is several times higher. The average overall daily cost of a reservist on refresher training is €157.¹⁰⁴ These figures are included not to suggest that conscripts should replace professional soldiers, but to indicate the relatively limited expenses involved.

As the UK armed forces are not bound by key aspects of labour law (including minimum wage), in deciding compensation for national-service participants the main consideration would be to set it at a level that would be deemed respectful to the participants. Because national service is not salaried work, compensation should, however, not be treated as the key aspect: access to superior training and subsequent prestige of having been selected for service are more important. The provision of government-subsidised further training would provide a further incentive for candidates.¹⁰⁵

An important aspect to consider is the appropriate number of national-service participants. For several years, Norway has trained more conscripts than are needed, an issue that is now being addressed. The availability of training officers should also be considered. The limited availability of training officers was one of the reasons that Sweden launched its new national service with very small numbers of conscripts. In addition, the question of who should train the participants should be considered. In the case of cyber this could, for example, be a mix of Defence Cyber School military experts and GCHQ.

Availability of housing, equipment and other infrastructure is an equally important consideration. Although the availability of comfortable accommodation may seem a minor matter, lack of attention to it risks shifting opinion about national service both among participants and the wider public. This would, by extension, affect the armed forces' effectiveness and thus the objective of national service.

104. Author email correspondence with the Finnish Defence Forces' conscription department, 17 July 2019.

105. For example, Swedish star chef Tommy Myllymäki began his career as a chef in the Swedish navy.

Conclusion

THE WORD 'CONSCRIPTION' has historical connotations of military duties imposed on near complete year-groups of men who often had a distinctly negative experience as they were not suited for the tasks they had to perform, and on whom this added a burden rather than being an asset to the armed forces. It still has an air of toxicity in the UK. As detailed in this paper, in the Scandinavian model of selective conscription obligation fades into the background as candidates compete for a limited number of places. Acceptance to the programme brings with it the prestige of having been selected over the rest of the year-group, and the armed forces have the complete cohort at its disposal for selection, which gives them access to a far wider talent pool than an all-volunteer system.

The UK could build on and further develop the Scandinavian approach. As proposed in this paper, selective national service for a limited number of citizens could be implemented for specific areas where the armed forces compete with civilian employers. An initial training year (with training provided by the armed forces as well as, in the case of cyber, agencies including GCHQ) would be followed by an implementation year as part of the programme either in a military or parallel civilian track and, if desired by the trainee, government-subsidised further education. There also needs to be an examination of how labour laws specific to the armed forces can be extended to civilian-track national service.

The selective national-service model would not compete with the all-volunteer armed forces' supremacy in national defence, but instead add to the forces' competence and attractiveness. It can thus be identified as a policy option that should be examined.

About the Author

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