

WHITHER CONSCRIPTION IN SINGAPORE

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General Studies

by

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14. ABSTRACT Singapore began universal conscription two years after independence. The government exempts first generation immigrants from National Service (NS). With the increasing number of New Citizens (NC), natives began to question the fairness of conscription policy. Citizens see them enjoying the benefits of citizenship without serving national obligations. While many studies are done on the purpose of conscription in early Singapore, most of them are tackling it from a security aspect. None has examined conscription from the socio-political stand point with the emerging demographic pattern in Singapore. This thesis provides a quantitative analysis on three possible scenarios that conscription in Singapore may take, whether (1) conscription continues, (2) conscription ceases, or (3) neo-conscription from a social perspective. It first presents a comparative analysis using social cohesion and civil-military relations as the evaluation criteria and then the three key principles of NS, (1) meeting critical needs, (2) universality, and (3) equity, as screening criteria to test the validity of the policy. The net analysis suggests that, status quo is no longer tenable. The thesis proposed broadening the definition of conscription to encompass the five aspects of Total Defense: Military Defense, Economic Defense, Psychological Defense, Social Defense, and Civil Defense.					
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ABSTRACT

WHITHER CONSCRIPTION IN SINGAPORE, by Major Low Wilson, 107 pages.

Singapore began universal conscription two years after independence. The government exempts first generation immigrants from National Service (NS). With the increasing number of New Citizens (NC), natives began to question the fairness of conscription policy. Citizens see them enjoying the benefits of citizenship without serving national obligations. While many studies are done on the purpose of conscription in early Singapore, most of them are tackling it from a security aspect. None has examined conscription from the socio-political stand point with the emerging demographic pattern in Singapore. This thesis provides a quantitative analysis on three possible scenarios that conscription in Singapore may take, whether (1) conscription continues, (2) conscription ceases, or (3) neo-conscription from a social perspective. It first presents a comparative analysis using social cohesion and civil-military relations as the evaluation criteria and then the three key principles of NS, (1) meeting critical needs, (2) universality, and (3) equity, as screening criteria to test the validity of the policy. The net analysis suggests that, status quo is no longer tenable. The thesis proposed broadening the definition of conscription to encompass the five aspects of Total Defense: Military Defense, Economic Defense, Psychological Defense, Social Defense, and Civil Defense.

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ACRONYMS

MINDEF	Ministry of Defense
MP	Members of Parliament
NC	New Citizens
NS	National Service
NSmen	National Servicemen
PAP	People's Action Party
PR	Permanent Residents
SAF	Singapore Armed Forces
US	United States

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On 15 June 2004, Rear-Admiral Teo Chee Hean, who was Minister for Defense in Singapore, announced the reduction of National Service (NS) from 36 months to 24 months.¹ This reduction of the length of NS was the first since conscription started in 1967. Even though Teo has repeatedly affirmed the importance of NS for Singapore, is this move a passage or a signal to the end of NS? Does this change herald the obsolescence of conscription in Singapore? Would Singapore follow the path of many other countries in the world that have already discontinued conscription? Such questions touch on the underlying purpose of conscription. More importantly, what does conscription do for the country?

Many countries believe that a conscript force can no longer satisfy its national objectives. Consequently, many countries in the world have either discontinued or reduced the period for conscription. The genesis of the modern conscription system can be traced back to the French Revolution, when Napoleon first implemented the *levee en masse* in 1792. The mobilization of its citizens enabled him to form the *Grande Armee*. Napoleon considered conscription as the key pillar for his early successes in major wars and conflicts: The Emperor wrote in 1804, ~~Without~~ "Without conscription, neither national power nor national independence is possible . . . our success and the strength of our position

¹Chee Hean Teo, ~~Ministerial~~ "Ministerial Statement on Full-Time National Service Duration," 15 June 2004, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/content/imindef/resources/speeches/2004/15jun04_speech.print.html?Status=1 (accessed 20 April 2011).

depend on our having a national army; we must take care to preserve this advantage.”²

Learning from the successes of Napoleon, many other European countries followed suit.

Conscription then became a prominent feature in modern societies.

However, in recent years, there appears to be a shift in this trend. A considerable number of countries have either discontinued conscription or reduced the duration of service. A number of other arguments against conscription stems from military, social, political, or economic perspectives. First, with the end of the Cold War, many believe that the probability of a “total” war is remote. Instead, the new warfare is asymmetrical in character and it is best tackled by a smaller and more capital intensive professional military. Secondly, is the belief that high technology can substitute for manpower. Third, that modern combat equipment would require longer training periods in order for soldiers to be proficient. Fourth, it is believed that political and domestic pressures often restrict the employment of conscript forces in modern day combat. Finally, are the concerns about the opportunity cost conscription has on the socioeconomic domain, that this money could be better spent to improve social welfare rather than on the military. The perennial “guns versus butter” issue and the list of arguments goes on. Many countries view large armies as no longer a necessity and the universal conscription system as unnecessary for manpower procurement.

Singapore started conscription in 1967, two years after its independence in 1965. It was implemented primarily for a military logic, which was to answer the need for a rapid build-up of its own armed forces in response to the withdrawal of the British Armed

²Marcel Baldet, *La Vie Quotidienne Dans Les Armées De Napoléon* (Paris: Hachette, 1964), 32.

Forces and the Malaysian Army. Under the Enlistment Act established on 1 August 1970, all male citizens and Permanent Residents (PR) above the age of 18 years ~~are~~ required to report for enlistment for national service.” These conscripts have to serve for either two or two-and-one-half years depending on their prior educational level and rank attained during the period of conscription. Thereafter, they are to serve an additional 40 days of Operationally Ready National Service per year till the age of 50 years (for officers) or 40 years (for other ranks).³

The Singapore government’s ability to mobilize the entire population against any potential aggressor is an important aspect of Singapore’s defense policy that is based on two tenets: deterrence and diplomacy. Since independence, Singapore’s defense posture evolved over time, but it still holds generally to the deterrence theme. The ~~poisonous~~ “poisonous shrimp” strategy described Singapore’s early defense strategic thinking that even in a small country with a relatively small armed force, it would inflict maximum pain on large predators.⁴

In the early 1980s, the image of a ~~porcupine~~ “porcupine” described Singapore’s defense strategy, which was positioned to warn off unfriendly footsteps as easily and naturally as a porcupine⁵. With the buildup of its military capabilities in the 1980s, Singapore

³Singapore Statutes Online, “Enlistment Act,” Chapter 93, 1970, Amended by 15 of 2010, http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non_version/html/homepage.html (accessed 25 April 2011).

⁴Bernard 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, James Chin, Arun Mahizhan, and Tan Tarn How (Singapore: National University Singapore Press, 2009), 179.

acquired the option to retaliate to protect its sovereignty. This was unlike the poisonous shrimp strategy whose alternatives were either suicide or surrender.⁵

In recent years, the government seems to have employed the military more for diplomacy purposes. Regional think-tanks have observed greater security cooperation amongst countries in the Association of Southeast Asia Nations and increases in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) involvement in humanitarian and disaster relief operations in the region. With the emphasis on defense diplomacy in mind, it may conjure up the image of a “dolphin,” which is a shift from the earlier “porcupine” depiction. The former is a “friendly and affable” representation that welcomes dialogue and cooperation with its allies.⁶

From a population of 1 million in 1950, Singapore’s resident population grew almost five fold to the current 4.9 million mark in 2010. Sociologists categorized the population trends and socioeconomic development into three distinct phases. Migration and birth accounted for net population growth in phase one, while low birth rate slowed the net population growth in phase two. In the third phase, the net population growth was due to immigration, as fertility rates declined despite the government’s pro-natalist policies.

With the turn of the century, a fourth trend has started to emerge. It is one where a high migration rate and low birth rate will become the primary reason for Singapore’s high population growth. Even with a pro-natalist policy in place, Singapore’s birth rate remains low compared to earlier years. With the government’s emphasis on a meritocracy

⁵Loo, “Maturing the Singapore Armed Forces,” 180.

⁶Ibid., 181.

system and pro foreign talent schemes, a growing percentage of foreigners view Singapore as an attractive place in which to settle. Many foreigners started migrating to Singapore. They would first attain the status of Permanent Resident before becoming New Citizens (NC) a few years later. Even though first generation applicants who achieve Permanent Resident status under the Professionals, Technical Personnel, and Skilled Worker Scheme or the Investor Scheme are exempt from NS. The male children who gain Permanent Resident status under their parents' sponsorship are liable for NS upon reaching the age of 16 ½ unless they decide to renounce their Singapore citizenship. This new social demography will have an impact on current conscription.

In 2004, Singapore reduced the conscription period from two-and-one-half to two years across the board. The two reasons cited were technology enhancements and a rise in the number of conscripts, as the population eligible for enlistment in Singapore increased. According to Teo, technology is an enabler that improves the productivity and efficiency of training. This reduces the time needed to train soldiers. Secondly, the 15 to 20 percent surge in NS intake in the next 10 years beginning from 2006 allows SAF to maintain its operational readiness even with the shortened NS duration.⁷ These two enablers allow SAF to transit to a leaner 3rd Generation SAF. As technology continues to progress on an upward trajectory in Singapore, will this bring about a potential cessation of conscription? If yes, what is the impact in the Singapore society?

⁷Teo, “Ministerial Statement on Full-Time National Service Duration.”

Research Question

This thesis will attempt to answer the following research question: What is the fate of conscription in Singapore from the social perspective? In order to sufficiently answer this question, the following three secondary questions have to be answered:

1. How was conscription used in Singapore in the past?
2. What are the relevant new social trends in Singapore?
3. What are the social implications for Singapore if conscription continues, is discontinued, or changes?

Assumptions

It is necessary to make a critical assumption in this study on the demographic trends in Singapore. Even though Singapore is a relatively young country, it underwent three phases of distinct population and socioeconomic demographic changes in the last 50 years. Based on the current government policies and the latest Singapore Department of Statistics census, a valid assumption can be made on the emerging demographic pattern in Singapore. For the purpose of this study, this thesis assumed that the population growth in Singapore is the result of net immigration instead of a natural increase due to births in the native population.

Definitions

It would be appropriate to clarify and define some of the terms in this paper. Conscription in Singapore is known as National Service; Conscripts are called National Servicemen (Fulltime); Regulars is used to refer to volunteers who join the military as their career. New Citizen refers to a person who obtained citizenship in Singapore

through the process of naturalization. Citizens and Natives are used to refer to Singaporeans who are born and bred in Singapore.

Scope and Delimitations

This thesis will study the history of Singapore in the 1960s, focusing on the purpose of conscription. It will then examine the reasons for the continuity in the conscription policy until today and provide options and recommendations for future conscription policies, in the light of the emerging social and demographic trends in Singapore. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve in-depth into all the aspects of the social domains. Instead, this thesis will present an overview of the potential impact that a change in the conscription policy could have on the society from the strategic perspectives in the future.

Significance

This thesis is significant because it entails the broader examination of how conscription affects not only the military domain but also the societal aspects of Singapore in the future. Because Singapore has enjoyed relatively stable economic and security situations in the last 20 years, younger Singaporeans may start to question the need for a large conscript force. With the maturing of democracy in Singapore, its citizens have also become more assertive of their individual rights. They may start to debate the notion of individual liberty and duty to society. In addition, the emerging new demographic trend in Singapore could also pose new challenges to the purpose of conscription. First generation NC do not have to serve NS and their offspring have to serve NS only if they wish to become citizens. Some Singaporeans feel that the policy is

unfair because this group would have enjoyed the social benefits without serving their national duties if they decided to leave Singapore after their children have grown up. The confluence of these reasons may kindle the debate on NS as a national policy in the future.

Summary

National Service has always been an emotional topic in Singapore because it has either directly or indirectly impacted the lives of its citizens. Even though support for NS is high, the conscription policy may be confronted with two societal challenges: First is the new composition of its population with the emerging demographic pattern which predicts a net population growth due to immigration. Next, with the increase in the number of PR and NC, Singaporeans may question the fairness of the conscription policy.

Chapter 2 is presented in five major sections. It will begin by highlighting the three dominant schools of thought on the relevance of conscription: conscription continues, conscription in decline, and neo-conscription. Part two will review the works of six prominent civil/military relations theorists: Samuel Huntington, Morris Janowitz, Rebecca Schiff, Peter Feaver, Michael Desch, and Eliot Cohen. The third part will provide the historical background of conscription in Singapore and its evolution. It will discuss how the impact of conscription policy in the society has also change over time. The emerging demographics patterns in Singapore are presented in part four, to provide a context to the scale of immigration concern in Singapore. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the literature available and its gap at the time of the review. Chapter 3 will explain the qualitative research methodology used in this thesis, which will be similar to

the steps used in the course of actions comparison in the military decision making process in the United States (US) Army. Based on the foundations built in previous chapters, chapter 4 will evaluate the three possible conscription policies independently using social cohesion and civil-military relations as the evaluation criteria. It will then compare the results against one another, before applying the screening criteria to test the validity of each option. Finally, chapter 5 will then conclude by presenting possible options and recommendations for future conscription policy in Singapore.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of scholarly works on the topic yields two dominant perspectives on the fate of conscription. One group of scholars, who views the system from a purely military perspective, predicts the system moving towards its demise where a large army is no longer applicable. On the other hand, another group that takes a broader view on the concept of conscription and thinks that the system continues to be relevant in the modern world. They see the system through the social lens that unites the people into a coherent whole. In addition, there exists an emerging thought on the pluralization of the concept of conscription, termed as neo-conscription. This group of theorists sees the continuation of the system because of its function of reform and renewal. They argue that the neo-conscription system will open up greater opportunities for conscription forces to participate in non-military domains.

This chapter is in five major parts. The first part examines three camps on conscription: conscription continues, conscription in decline, and neo-conscription. The second part examines six different civil-military relations models. The third section addresses conscription in the unique context of Singapore: evolution of conscription, engaging the public, and the relationships of job opportunities to conscription. Emerging demographic trends have a huge impact on conscription and its public perception, so demographics are addressed in another, separate section of the chapter. Finally, a summary section reviews the emergent themes of available literature and identifies gaps that remain at the conclusion of the literature review

Three Camps of Conscription

Conscription Declines

Articles that predict the decline of conscription often frame the system from a purely functional military perspective. Conscription critics highlight current modernization and military transformation as the main reasons for the system approaching obsolescence. Arguments against conscription fall into five different categories.

First is the belief that the probability of a “total” war is remote and new warfare would be asymmetrical in nature. Latham Andrew argues that warfare would no longer be waged by large conscript armies aimed at achieving massive destruction and attrition.⁸ This alteration in the character of war heralds a new trend in terms of the qualitative and quantitative military manpower required. Since the end of the Cold War, many European nations have moved from universal conscripted citizen soldiers towards streamlined professional forces. They feel that the former is obsolete and the latter is seen as the new norm.⁹ As Charles Moskos observes, the notion of universal conscription for national defense is slowly evolving into a “high tech” professional armed forces.¹⁰ This trend appears to be an ongoing development in the last few decades and is fast gaining momentum in recent years. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and

⁸Latham Andrew, “Warfare Transformed: A Braudelian Perspective on the Revolution in Military Affairs,” *European Journal of International Relations* 8, no. 2 (2002): 231-66.

⁹Lord Robertson, “NATO on the Road to Prague” (NATO Speech, 2002), <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s020410a.htm> (accessed 20 October 2010).

¹⁰Charles C. Moskos, John Allen Williams, and David R. Segal, *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces after the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 145.

Australia discontinued conscription many years ago; many other European countries also joined ranks, with Sweden being the most recent European country to follow suit.

Germany and Taiwan are also in the process of phasing out conscription.

Second is the belief that the advent of military technology, particularly airpower, is the panacea for all conflicts. After the surrender of the Japanese in World War II, Eisenhower advocated that the new strategy for future wars would be atomic bombs.¹¹ The dominance of airpower was once again demonstrated during the first Gulf War, in Operation Desert Storm, in 1991. Based on the outcome of the first Gulf War, Carlo Kopp argues that “land forces have become an ancillary to the air power” and the roles of large armies are very limited in the future.¹² In addition, the relatively low casualty rates and rapid victory in Operation Desert Storm made it appear to be a “bloodless war” compared to other major conflicts. With this success, many people started to see future wars possessing the same characteristics as Operation Desert Storm. Furthermore, as casualties in conflicts are never popular with the domestic population, it has made precision weapons, stealth bombers, and airpower an attractive alternative to the employment of large ground troops. The “shock and awe” doctrine used in Operation Iraqi Freedom, in 2003, was another example of an attempt to win the war in Iraq without the involvement of a large number of US ground forces.

¹¹Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1948), 456.

¹²Carlo Kopp, “Desert Storm-an Analytical Perspective,” *Airpower Australia* (August/September 1992), <http://www.ausairpower.net/Analysis-ODS-Perspective-92.html> (accessed 20 April 2011).

Third is the belief that the duration of NS is too short to effectively train soldiers to meet the high demands in combat. The new battlefields are becoming more complicated and require soldiers to be agile and adaptive. Charles Krulak coins the concept of the “three block war” to illustrate the level of complexity that soldiers will face in the new operating environment. He concludes that in order for troops to be able to operate effectively across the wide spectrum of operations, they must be “thoroughly schooled and trained” in their tasks.¹³ Furthermore, the introduction of sophisticated weapon systems requires additional training time for the soldiers. This level of training is often intensive and entails high cost. Hence the conscript system, with a definite short time period, is unsuitable because it yields a low return of investment. In the current context, large untrained forces will not be as useful as smaller professional trained forces. For example, critics have attributed the Argentineans loss of the Falkland War to poorly trained Argentinean conscript.¹⁴

Fourth is the belief that political and domestic pressures often restrict the deployment of conscript forces in today’s multinational conflicts. Andrew Bacevich points out that many top brass in the American military view citizen soldiers as a liability more than an asset.¹⁵ He asserts that with professional military, politicians and military leaders can be less sensitive to domestic sentiments when deploying soldiers. This

¹³Charles C. Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three-Block War,” *Leatherneck* 82, no. 1 (January 1999): 14.

¹⁴Alejandro L. Corbacho, “Reassessing the Fighting Performance of Conscript Soldiers During the Malvinas/Falklands War (1982)” (CEMA Working Papers, Serie Documentos de Trabajo, September 2004), 17.

¹⁵Andrew, 137.

domestic pressure often can be a determinant factor on the outcome of conflicts.

Moreover, today's operations often involve overseas peace operations and the idea of having conscripts sacrificing for the wars of others, is potentially political suicidal.

Michael Mann summarizes the level of detachment between conflicts and citizens as —spectator sport warfare” in an all volunteer forces in the US.¹⁶ He observes that war is now an event that is observed from afar through the media. In a speech by the US Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, he also remarks that with an all volunteer US military, wars have now become vague to the majority of the Americans. Unlike the previous wars, a majority of the citizens are no longer involved in the conflict. Even when the US military is involved in multiple wars, Americans remain indifferent and continue with their way of life. War is now something that the American public is not personally affected by.¹⁷ This may be a good thing initially as political leaders would face less domestic constraints in the deployment of forces. However, the disconnect between the civilians and military may upset the checks and balances embedded in a democracy. Civilian elites may become less sensitive to military casualties.¹⁸

Lastly is the belief of the high economic opportunity cost that conscription has on society. National Service needs massive manpower and economic resources to sustain the military system. This is particularly so in today's environment when the cost of

¹⁶Michael Mann, *States, War, and Capitalism: Studies in Political Sociology* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1988), 161.

¹⁷Robert Gates, —All-Volunteer Force” (Lecture at Duke University, 29 September 2010), <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1508> (accessed 20 April 2011).

¹⁸Joseph P. Vasquez, —Shouldering the Soldiering: Democracy, Conscription, and Military Casualties,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 6 (2005): 849.

sophisticated equipment is escalating exponentially. From an economic perspective, defense expenditures do not yield any tangible returns. This money could be better spent in other areas to improve a society, such as welfare, economy, or education, where immediate impact can be felt. Moreover, from a manpower perspective, a large male population could be working and contributing productively to the economy instead of spending “unproductive” time in the military. Taken together, countries tend to fall back on professional forces.

Conscription Continues

On the other hand, scholars that see the continuation of conscription tend to view the system from a broader social perspective. They argue that the purpose of conscription is not only for military purposes but also provides essential virtues in a society.¹⁹ In addition to the numbers that conscription provides for military defense, it also inadvertently contributes to maintain social harmony and nationalism. Conscription is also a key element in the civil/military relationship. In this case, citizen soldiers might avoid the potential of any praetorian threats.

Deborah Avant presents that the Enlightenment is the catalyst that weaves the relationship between citizens and state.²⁰ This novel relationship creates the idea of sovereignty belonging to the nation instead of the state. It results in the further development of the notion of social contract. This is where a person is only a citizen

¹⁹Jean-Philippe Lecomte, “The Rise and Death of Conscription: The Case of France,” in *The Changing Face of European Conscription*, ed. Pertti Joenniemi (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 76.

²⁰Deborah Avant, “From Mercenary to Citizen Armies: Explaining Change in the Practice of War,” *International Organization* 54, no. 1 (2000): 42.

through participation in soldiering.²¹ Thus, the people have an obligation in the defense of the nation. In the same vein, the impact of conscription therefore lies beyond the military sphere. To stretch the argument even further, Uffe Osetergaard points out the real purpose of conscription in some countries is to bind the people into a coherent whole, and that the nation and the military side of conscription is merely a byproduct.²²

Jean-Philippe Lecomte stresses on the relevance and importance of a military system that anchors a democratic society. He sees it as the core carrier of the values of the French Republic and as a national institution that imbues these virtues in the people. For example, in the case of France, he observed that conscription and military service had played a pivotal role in strengthening national cohesion by bringing conscripts from different backgrounds and social status together.²³

Another reason for the continuation of a conscription policy in some countries was the perceived high cost of professionalization of the armed forces. Lecomte observed this phenomenon in France, which had rejected the idea of an all volunteer force until the mid 1990s.²⁴ In the case of the US, the escalating defense expenditure also seemed to suggest the high cost associated with an all volunteer force.²⁵

²¹Eliot A. Cohen, *Citizens and Soldiers: The Dilemmas of Military Service* Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 117-51.

²²Pertti Joenniemi, ed., *The Changing Face of European Conscription* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 6.

²³Lecomte, 69.

²⁴Ibid., 77.

²⁵Gates.

Redefining Conscription

Finally, the third group of academics envision the reform and renewal of the conscription system. They do not consider the fate of conscription in a bifurcated manner: whether the system will remain status quo or disappear. They deviate from the historical military and social definition of the system and redefine the post modern meaning of NS. Pertti Joenniemi portrays neo-conscription against the pluralization in the context of a broader restructuring and reorientation of the military effort.”²⁶ Joenniemi thinks that the system will neither disappear due to military factors nor continue because of societal factors. Instead, he argues that the concept of neo-conscription will broaden the definition of the system which may take the form of a “civilianized military.” This is where the state drafts citizens to perform non military functions for the nation.

Mary Kaldor argues that globalization expanded the concept of a society. The system of global governance has given rise to the “global civil society,” comprising states and international institutions. Even though the idea of a civil society is evolving over time, what is constant is that it remains as a rule governed society based on the agreement of an individual: the social contract between the state and an individual.²⁷ According to Kaldor, the notion of the “global civil society” would present significant implications on the resolution of international conflicts. She opines, for multinational institutions to make a concerted effort and enforce international law to curb these conflicts. Her five point program proposal to achieve this includes the employment of various types of military

²⁶Joenniemi, 10.

²⁷Mary Kaldor, “The Idea of Global Civil Society,” *International Affairs* 79, no. 3 (2003): 584.

and civilian forces. Following her argument, this creates an opportunity for “civilianized military,” which can be fulfilled by the plurality offered by neo-conscription.

On the other hand, Louis Goodman also cautions against the use of military resource for non military roles.²⁸ He observes that as military personnel are usually better trained and equipped with critical skills that are lacking in the civilian sector, the government often tasks them to augment the private sector in areas such as agrarian training, road building etc.²⁹ In states that are too poor to raise the military, the government may even allow the military to engage in commercial activities to fund its own expenditure. This may be beneficial to the state initially but could potentially detract the military from its core mission and crowd out private companies in the long term.

Civil-Military Relations Theories

As the thesis seeks to explore the relationship between conscription and society, this section will examine the six different theories of civil/military relations of Samuel Huntington, Morris Janowitz, Rebecca Schiff, Peter Feaver, Michael Desch, and Eliot Cohen. The works of Huntington and Janowitz remain influential as the foundation for the study of civil/military relations despite their existence for almost 50 years.

Huntington and Janowitz are two prominent scholars who recognize a gap between civilians and the military. In order for a democratic society to function well, the former advocates objective control and the need to further separate civilians and military, while

²⁸Louis W. Goodman, “Military Roles Past and Present,” in *Civil-Military Relations and Democracy*, ed. Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 32.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 31.

the latter argues for the convergence of these two entities. Looking at current trends in the world, a number of new models have also emerged that seek to modify their models to suit the current context. Schiff challenges the basic assumption for the current separation model and argues that it may not be applicable outside America. Instead, she proposes the concordance theory that aims to achieve a collaborative approach between the political elites, the military, and the citizenry. Recently, Feaver has also put forth the agency model to study the civil/military relations of mature democracies. Unlike earlier models, his framework provides a tangible tool to control civil/military relations. Desch observes that the civil/military relations can be modeled based on internal and external threats. He argues that optimal civil/military relations would exist in a high external and low internal threats environment. On the other hand, Cohen actually advocates for ~~unequal~~ dialogue,” which occasionally could be ~~intrusive~~,” to strengthen the civil/military relations.

Huntington advocates the objective civilian control of the military as the prerequisite for stable liberal democratic societies. According to liberal theory, the first priority of the democratic state is to protect the rights and liberties of individual citizen. An effective and credible military establishment is necessary to achieve this. The military must have the latitude to build its capability to sufficiently deter external threats and protect the sovereignty of the nation. On the other hand, it must not be left unchecked, otherwise it would start to pursue its own interests and pose internal threats. Huntington’s solution is to distinguish between the military and civilian authorities. Following his proposition for objective civilian control, while the civilian authority would provide broad military policies and goals, they would leave the execution portion to the military.

He argues that in order for this to work, a professional, politically neutral, and autonomous officer corps is necessary. Huntington summarizes professionalism and objective civilian control as follows:

This involves: 1) a high level of military professionalism and recognition by military officers of the limits of their professional competence; 2) the effective subordination of the military to the civilian political leaders who make the basic decisions on foreign and military policy; 3) the recognition and acceptance by that leadership of an area of professional competence and autonomy for the military; and 4) as a result, the minimization of military intervention in politics and of political intervention in the military.³⁰

Janowitz agrees that the military and civilian institutions are inherently different and are often separated. However, instead of segregating them further, his convergence theory proposes the integration between these two entities or the subjective control of the military.³¹ He argues that the military should be more politically aware and absorb the societal values that they are protecting. From the perspective of civic republican theory, this assimilation encourages citizens to participate in the activities of public life. Janowitz proposes using conscription to bolster civic involvement. He believes that the notion of the citizen soldier will diminish the gap between the two worlds.

In an article from *Armed Forces and Society*, 1995, Schiff proposes the theory of concordance as an alternative to the dominant separation theory. She argues that the traditional model is historically and culturally bound to American and this US centricity is not applicable outside America. According to Schiff, her theory of concordance ~~does~~ not require a particular form of government, set of institutions, or decision-making

³⁰Samuel P. Huntington, "Reforming Civil-Military Relations," *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 4 (1995): 9-10.

³¹Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (London: Free Press, 1964).

process.”³² Instead, it takes into consideration the unique historical and cultural conditions in each case. She offers that domestic military intervention is less likely when a partnership exists amongst three key societal institutions, namely the military, the political leadership, and the citizenry on four indicators: the social composition of the officer corps, the political decision making process, the recruitment method, and the military style. As the model is both descriptive and prescriptive in nature, these indicators will determine whether the civil/military relations take the form of separation, integration, or another alternative.

Feaver advocates a more contemporary approach to civil/military relations that premise on the convergence of the interest of the two groups. His agency model for mature democracies departs from the traditional ones. In essence, he sees civil/military relations as strategic interactions between the civilian masters (principals) and their military servants (agents).³³ Feaver terms the military’s submission or obedience to the civilian authorities as “working,” and refusal to obey as “shirking.” Unlike the earlier scholars, his work that draws on the principal agent framework, takes into consideration material determinants that can be measured or assessed. Essentially, it relies on the confluence of the groups’ interest. For example, the military are usually concerned with military related policies such as budgets. Following the dominant perspective on the principal agent theory, Feaver contends that either the implementation monitoring system

³²Rebecca Schiff, “Civil-Military Relations Reconsidered: A Theory of Concordance,” *Armed Forces and Society* 22, no. 1 (1995): 7.

³³Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 55.

or the adjustment of military's preference to coincide with that of the civilian masters will ensure the military is working.

Desch develops a structural model to predict the variation in civilian control in a country. He defines civilian control, as whether civilian policy takes preference over military preferences.³⁴ Desch suggests that the level of civilian control corresponds to the nature and intensity of threats facing the state. First, the origin of threats, whether internal or external, will determine the orientation of the military, whether inwards or outwards respectively. The former will threaten the civilian control in the country while the latter is oriented against an external enemy. Second, the greater the threat level, the stronger the military organizations will be, as military organization will unify to counter against the threats. Hence, Desch claims that the worst case scenario with poor civil/military relations is when there is low external and high internal threat.

Cohen suggests that the civil/military relations are different in war and he advocates the need for an "unequal dialogue" between the elite civilian and the military during wartime.³⁵ In contrast to the normal theory where the military would have complete autonomy in operations, Cohen argues for the need of civilian supreme command scrutiny on the military profession for two reasons. First, unlike the doctors or lawyers whose ultimate goal is straightforward, the military's purpose is often amorphous

³⁴Michael C. Desch, "Soldiers, States, and Structures: The End of the Cold War and the Weakening of U.S. Civilian Control," *Armed Forces and Society* 24 (1998): 391.

³⁵Eliot A. Cohen, "The Unequal Dialogue: The Theory and Reality of Civil-Military Relations and the Use of Force," in *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security*, ed. Peter Feaver and Richard H. Kohn (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 433.

with political overtone.³⁶ Hence, the political master must ultimately be responsible for the outcomes of the decisions. They can also serve to arbitrate the potential disagreements amongst the military elites. Next, many military elites may not have the necessary warfighting experience when they are put in command. Therefore, the civilian elites have the responsibility to appoint the appropriate military commanders in different situations and scrutinize them, to balance the subordinate lack of military practice.³⁷ Cohen believes that good quality civil/military relations are when “unequal dialogue” exists between the civilian elites and military.³⁸ The probing has to be blunt and candid, which is contingent on the level of trust and candor between the two groups.

Amongst the civil/military relations models discussed, Huntington favors the concept of military professionalism. He believes that the autonomy of the military and a constriction of the civilian role in military affairs are important for mission success. On the other hand, Feaver and Cohen suggest that the success of war is very much dependent on civilian oversight and the discourse between the two groups. The SAF civil/military relations model leans towards the second model. When Singapore’s first Prime Minister, Lee, first established conscription, he designed the system to ensure civilian elites dominant oversight over the military.³⁹ At the same time, the military elites also have the

³⁶Cohen, “The Unequal Dialogue,” 448.

³⁷Ibid., 453.

³⁸Ibid., 457.

³⁹Kuan Yew Lee, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story, 1965-2000: Singapore and the Asian Economic Boom* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), 19.

opportunity to participate in policy matters as key members within the Armed Forces Council chaired by a civilian minister.⁴⁰

Evolution of Conscription in Singapore

The following section examines the history of Singapore and how it led to the genesis of conscription. The history of Singapore can be generalized into five distinct periods where Singapore underwent the British governance, the Japanese occupation, Internal Self Governance, and the Malaysians control, before achieving independence in 1965. Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles founded Singapore in 1819. Following that, Raffle's company the British East India Company had administered Singapore as a British trading port in South East Asia as part of the Straits Settlement. As Singapore grew, the deficiencies of the East India Company administration became apparent. Hence the British government took over the settlement from East India Company and governed it as a Crown Colony directly under the Colonial Government with the charge of a local Governor. At that time, the British military were responsible for the defense of the state.

Singapore remained as a colony until 1942 where it fell to the hands of the Japanese in World War II. Under the Japanese occupation, the Japanese renamed Singapore, *Syonan*, which means Island of the Light of the South, in Japanese. After the surrender of the Japanese in 1945, the British returned to rule Singapore as a colonial state.

⁴⁰Singapore Statutes Online, "Singapore Armed Forces Act," Chapter 295, Act 7 of 1972, Amended by 15 of 2010, http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non_version/html/homepage.html (accessed 25 April 2011).

Singapore became a Crown Colony with a civil administration headed by a Governor. At that time, a majority of the population had lost confidence in the British's ability to defend the country and a wave of nationalist and anti-colonist sentiment swept across the nation. Armed communist groups broke out in Singapore and the people's call for Merdeka, or Independence, became stronger. The British had to implement harsh measures and declare a state of emergency, known as the Malayan Emergency, to regain public order. The inception of NS was part of the British response to the Malayan Emergency.⁴¹ In 1952, the Legislative Council first passed the National Service Bill, requiring all male residents who were British subjects and Federal citizens between the age of 17 to 55, to register for part time service in the armed forces, police force, and civil defense force. In order to placate the population, the Colonial Secretary, W. L. Blythe assured that the Bill was a "precautionary measure" that gave the colony the flexibility to surge defense forces when required and that conscription was not imminent.⁴² Despite the reassurance, the first selective registration process of 25,000 youth took place two years later.

National Service was socially unpopular.⁴³ Even though 98 percent of the youth had registered, social opposition against conscription was prevalent. The majority of the resistance had come from Chinese Middle School and High School students, who cited

⁴¹ Albert Lau, "National Service," *Pointer, Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces* (1992): 2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 6.

disruption to their studies and harm to their health as basis against NS.⁴⁴ Another reason for the anti-NS sentiment was the perception that the policy was one of the British methods to maintain their colonial rule in Singapore.⁴⁵ The public showed support and sympathy for the students who demanded total exemption from NS. However, as the situation went into a deadlock, the students subsequently gave in and changed their position, to demand for the postponement of registration instead.⁴⁶

Despite the persistent protest, the government did not yield. The protests eventually broke up with the arrest of the students. The NS policy continued despite its unpopularity. One of the reasons for the colonial government's strong arm tactics was their suspicious of the Malayan Communist Party involvement in the student protest.⁴⁷ In the same period, communist threats in Singapore were prevalent. The government had suspected that the Malayan Communist Party took the opportunity and hijacked the controversial NS Bill to incite subversion, in order to spread their one Malayan ideology.⁴⁸

As Singapore moved towards self governance, the local government shifted its focus to develop an all volunteer force. The British forces in Singapore helped to

⁴⁴Lau, 6.

⁴⁵Ibid., 5.

⁴⁶Ibid., 7.

⁴⁷Ibid., 10.

⁴⁸Ibid.

establish the First Singapore Infantry Regiment in 1957.⁴⁹ When the People's Action Party (PAP) took control of the government in 1959, the party fought for a merger with newly formed Malaysia. The PAP considered an independent, small Singapore, without the support of a hinterland to be economically, politically and militarily unviable.⁵⁰ When the merger took place in 1963, defense and internal security became the responsibility of the Malaysia Federal Government. National Service was no longer a priority. In fact, the party suspended NS from 1961 to 1963.

The Malaysia Federal Government revived conscription in 1964 during the Malaysia-Indonesia Confrontation, or *Kronfrontasi*, to boost the military forces. Under the Sukarno regime in Indonesia, President Sukarno had opposed the formation of Malaysia, particularly the inclusion of Borneo in Malaysia. On 27 July 1963, he planned to destabilize the economy and demoralize the population, to “erush Malaysia” or “~~g~~ayang Malaysia.” Singapore also bore the brunt of the conflict when Indonesian commandos bombed the MacDonald House along Orchard Road in Singapore in 1965. During the same period, the Federal Government's affirmative actions in favor of Malays had stoked racial tension between the Chinese and Malays. As Singapore had a larger Chinese population, compared to the Malays at that time, the Indonesians took advantage of the situation. They deliberately conducted sedition activities aimed to provoke the Malays in Singapore against the Chinese, to widen the rift between these two groups. At

⁴⁹Choi Kee Choy, “1957-Our First Battalion,” *Military Heritage* 4, no. 3 (2000), http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/about_us/history/birth_of_saf/v02n11_history.html (accessed 22 April 2011).

⁵⁰Sonny Yap, Richard Lim, and Leong Weng Kam, *Men in White; the Untold Story of Singapore's Ruling Political Party* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holding Limited, 2009), 231.

the political front, divergent views between the State and Federal Governments emerged and the relationship between them deteriorated. Two years into the merger, Singapore eventually separated from Malaysia and gained independence on 9 August 1965.

With looming threats of Indonesian *Kronfrontasi* and the Malaysian's plan to subvert Singapore's sovereignty, defense was one of the top priorities for the independent government.⁵¹ The first prime minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew declared that the "first thing to think of is physical survival."⁵² Hence, the newly appointed Defense Minister Goh Keng Swee, formed the People's Defense Force, which was a volunteer territorial army modeled after the two existing Singapore Infantry Regiments. However, the initial numbers could not be filled due to strong social aversion against military service, particularly from the Chinese population.⁵³

The government concluded that the only viable and feasible solution was to establish a citizen army of conscript.⁵⁴ Goh announced the National Service (Amendment) Bill in 1967. The Bill required all 18 year old male citizens to be enlisted for part time service in People's Defense Force, Vigilante Corps, or Special Constabulary for 12 years. Furthermore, 10 percent of the educated population had to serve fulltime as officers in the army. In addition to defense, the secondary effect for NS was nation building. According to Goh, "Nothing creates loyalty and national consciousness more speedily and more thoroughly than participation in defense and membership of the armed

⁵¹Lee, 19.

⁵²Lau., 15.

⁵³Ibid., 17.

⁵⁴Ibid., 16.

forces.”⁵⁵ This was also particularly important in a multi-ethnic community. Lee also felt that NS would bring political and social benefits. He wanted NS to provide a common experience for the people and integrate them into a more united community.⁵⁶

Unlike previous unpopular attempts for the implementation of NS, a majority of the population saw the importance of defense and public support this time improved.⁵⁷ Their experience in World War II, *Konfrontasi* and Communist Insurgency may have changed their negative perception on NS. The British announcement of their early pullout from Singapore had also reinforced the state’s urgency to build up a sizable army quickly. In order to make a fulltime career in the SAF attractive, the government had also guaranteed fulltime military personnel jobs in the government, statutory boards, or the private sector when they leave the service to go into reserves.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, there were still sporadic anti-NS protests the largest being about 300 people.

Two of the greatest complaints of the conscription policy were the lack of transparency and equity in the system. Citizens wanted to know how the government selected individuals for either fulltime or part time NS. They also felt that the Officers and Non Commissioned Officers should serve the same NS duration, instead of having the former serve longer.⁵⁹ The strongest voices had come from university students and graduates who were often selected to serve fulltime NS, as officers because of their

⁵⁵Singapore, *Legislative Assembly Debates*, 25 (1967).

⁵⁶Lee, 19.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹*The Straits Times*, 7 February 1970.

intellect. They felt discriminated against and argued that the time spent in NS would invariably reduce their competitiveness in the market. Hence, many graduates deliberately chose to fail their section leader course to avoid being selected as an officer.

In order to reduce uncertainties amongst the population, Goh made public the new enlistment policies in 1970 to ensure greater impartiality and transparency across the system. The government standardized NS liability across the board to two and one half years for both Officers and Non Commissioned Officers and changed NS from part time to fulltime service for all. In order to ensure equity, the policy also tightened exemption criteria to prevent “ch dodgers” and conscientious objectors. Parents were also concerned with the risks that were involved with NS because soldiering was still a relatively new concept. Hence, as part of the government’s effort to raise public awareness, the Ministry of Defense (MINDEF) organized several activities and campaigns to engage the public. These included seminars and visits to Army Camps for parents to experience the conditions their sons would be in. Even though, numerous people have gone through the NS System over the years, the public engagement effort continues even today.

Public Engagement Continues to Strengthen Support for NS

In a recent public statement by Teo, he said that surveys conducted of National Servicemen (NSmen) showed that commitment to defense amongst the NSmen continues to be strong.⁶⁰ This is the result of the MINDEF’s expansive engagement effort towards

⁶⁰Chee Hean Teo, “Ministerial Statement on National Service Defaulters,” 16 January 2006, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2006/jan/16jan06_nr.html (accessed 22 April 2011).

the different stake holders, which include the servicemen, the family of servicemen, the employers of servicemen, and society. The first touch point for potential enlistees starts as early as middle school in the form of National Education Programs. Students take part in defense related competitions organized by the MINDEF and the Ministry of Education, such as the National Education Animation contest, (or N.E.mation) and the National Education Gaming Competition.⁶¹ The MINDEF also leveraged on various social Web Based platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Utube to reach out to the new digital generation.⁶² All these are part of the effort targeted at pre-enlistee boys, to allow them to learn about defense and NS. The latest initiative was the production of 18 episodes of reality TV videos that captured the life of a section of recruits in Basic Military Training from enlistment day to the passing out parade. Along with allowing the pre-enlistees to know more about what to expect in Basic Military Training, the videos also were aimed at allaying parent's concern of NS.⁶³

The operationally ready NSmen, who form the bulk of the SAF's strength, has always been a priority for the MINDEF. Prime Minister Lee, in his 2010 National Day Rally speech reiterated that —NS is a heavy demand on male residents. And I should say

⁶¹Department, National Education, —Nemation 5,” <http://www.nemation.sg/pages/view.aspx?id=2> (accessed 22 April 2011).

⁶²Chan Samuel, —SAF in Cyberspace: The Image of Defense and the Internet,” *RSIS Commentaries*, August 2010, <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/commentaries.asp?selYear=2010&selTheme=9> (accessed 25 April 2011), 2.

⁶³Ministry of Defense Singapore, —Every Singaporean Son,” <http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/resources/videos/docus/evrySporeanSon.html> (accessed 22 April 2011).

on their spouses and families too.”⁶⁴ In 1990, the MINDEF formed the Recognizing the Contribution of Operational Ready NSmen to Total Defense Committee, to recognize the contribution of Singaporeans, especially NSmen, to total defense; and to enhance the contribution of the NSmen, their families, and employers to total defense.⁶⁵ Past recommendations that had been implemented include income tax relief for NSmen, expanded facilities for Singapore Armed Forces Reservist Association clubhouses and the introduction of long service awards for NSmen.⁶⁶ The host of benefits is part of the tangible welfare to recognize the efforts of NSmen, who typically have to juggle between family, work, and NS duty obligations.

The Ministry of Defense also recognized employers and civil resource owners who show strong support for NS and National Defense by honoring them with the Total Defense Award.⁶⁷ This annual award is given to organizations that have either shown exemplary support for their NSmen to carry out their NS training or have actively participated in civil resource requisition exercises. All these are part of the MINDEF’s engagement efforts to shore up the support for the NS across different segments of the

⁶⁴Lee Hsien Loong, “National Day Rally 2010,” *Asiaone.com*, <http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20100830-234696/2.html> (accessed 22 April 2011).

⁶⁵Ministry of Defense Singapore, “Recognizing the Contribution of Operationally Ready National Servicemen to Total Defense,” http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/mindef_websites/topics/record/record5/about_record.html (accessed 24 April 2011).

⁶⁶Ministry of Defense Singapore, “Past Record Recommendations,” http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/mindef_websites/topics/record/record5/recommendations.html (accessed 24 April 2011).

⁶⁷Ministry of Defense Singapore, “The Employers’ Website, Together for Total Defense,” http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/mindef_websites/topics/record/record5/recommendations.html (accessed 24 April 2011).

nation and to demystify the NS black box. According to Hussin Mutalib, the role of SAF has also taken a greater role of instilling Singaporean nationalism at home.⁶⁸

However, in 2005, the MINDEF's engagement effort hit a speed bump when the case of Melvyn Tan appeared in the public spotlight. Tan was a 49 year old NS defaulter who had decided to come back to Singapore 28 years later. The court found the accomplished pianist guilty and fined him \$3,000. Many Singaporeans were unhappy about the leniency of the punishment, especially those who had served in NS. There were also others who thought that the scope of NS could be expanded to include alternate services in social sectors. With the increased public interest in NS policy, Teo reiterated the three key principles underpinning the policy, meeting critical national need, universality, and equity, in one of his parliamentary speeches in 2006.⁶⁹ In this case, critical national need is defined as security and survival. Hence NS is implemented in the SAF, Singapore Police Force and Singapore Civil Defense Force. The second fundamental principal of universal conscription ensures fairness of the system. Finally, equity ensures that the system treats everyone equally, regardless of status and social background.

Total Defense

In 1984, the government adapted the concept of total defense, to draw on the strength of different segments of the community to augment the military in defense. Total Defense is comprised of five aspects: Military Defense, Civil Defense, Economic

⁶⁸Hussin Mutalib, "The Socio-Economic Dimension in Singapore's Quest for Security and Stability," *Pacific Affairs* 75, no. 1 (2002): 42.

⁶⁹Teo, "Ministerial Statement on National Service Defaulters."

Defense, Social Defense, and Psychological Defense that represent the key sectors of society.⁷⁰ It shows the importance of these five areas in the defense of Singapore in the new environment. Civil Defense is about equipping citizens with the necessary skills to respond during civil emergencies and crises. Economic Defense puts in place robust economic systems to ensure the continued functioning of the economy during crises or wars. Social Defense emphasizes the need to maintain racial harmony in a multi-ethnic and multi-religion Singapore. Psychological Defense rallies the citizens to remain committed and resilience against any challenges. This model integrates relevant government agencies, private sector organizations, and all Singaporeans in response to different threats and challenges that the country may face.

Civil-Military Relations in Singapore

According to Derek da Cunha, the civil/military relations model in Singapore is a unique one which has strong civilian political leadership oversight over the armed forces.⁷¹ He argues the relationship was because of the “civilianized” nature of the officer corps. Derek also explains that this phenomenon is further reinforced by two reasons. First is the fact that the SAF is a conscript system and soldiers are often first regarded as “citizens” before “soldiers.” Second is that the scholar officers are not only a SAF resource but also considered as the national talent pool.⁷² In fact, Lee designed the unique

⁷⁰Singapore Government, “Total Defense,” http://www.totaldefence.sg/imindef/mindef_websites/topics/totaldefence/home.html (accessed 25 April 2011).

⁷¹Derek Da Cunha, “Sociological Aspects of the Singapore Armed Forces,” *Armed Forces and Society* 25, no. 3 (1999): 469.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 469.

civil/military relations in 1966, when he mentioned that “Most important of all, we had to ensure that the SAF remained subordinate to the leadership.”⁷³

The SAF relies on the education system to recruit and select its top caliber officers into the professional service. Even before NS, the recruitment department would invite outstanding high school students from Singapore’s most elite high schools to participate in seminars to allow them to know more about a career in the military profession and scholarship benefits. The MINDEF Scholarship Center administers the two most prestigious tiers of scholarships, known as the SAF Overseas Scholarship and the SAF Merit Scholarship, where the recipient can be expected to be groomed to hold the highest levels of command and management in the SAF.⁷⁴ Based on the applicant’s academic results in the Singapore wide General Certificate of Education “A” level examination, the MINDEF would award a provisional scholarship. The actual award will be given based on their military performance after enlistment. The SAF sent the scholarship holders to top universities in the world such as Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of California, Berkeley, University of Oxford and University of Cambridge, to pursue their tertiary education.

⁷³Lee, 19.

⁷⁴Ministry of Defense Singapore, “Saf Overseas Scholarship,” <http://www.mindef.gov.sg/content/imindef/careers/scholarships/scholarships/SAFOS.html> (accessed 27 April 2011).

Table 1. Former military officers serving in the Cabinet					
2001 (%)	2003 (%)	2004 (%)	2006 (%)	2008 (%)	2009 (%)
4 (23.5)	4 (22.2)	4 (21.1)	4 (22.2)	4 (20)	6 (28.6)

Source: Netina Tan, *Institutionalized Hegemonic Party: The Resilience of the People's Action Party (PAP) in Singapore* (Canada: University of McGill, 2010), 13.

Lee also made public a SAF “scholar” program that allowed scholar officers to experience a two year stint in the administrative sector to broaden their management skills and at the same time provide them with an option of twin careers.⁷⁵ Derek argues that because of this dual career program that allows high caliber SAF scholar officers to choose between joining the administrative arm of the Civil Service or the SAF, many SAF scholar officers not only have gone to the administrative service but also entered into the political arena. For example in table 1, former military officers typically made up 20 percent of the cabinet members. Some of the more notable SAF scholars that are in the current cabinets include Prime Minister Lee Hsien Long, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defense Teo Chee Hean, Minister for Foreign Affairs George Yeo, Minister for Trade and Industry Lim Hng Kiang, Minister in Prime Minister’s Office Lim Swee Say, and Minister for Information, Communications and Arts Lui Tuck Yew. The retirement of the two top generals in the Army to participate in the upcoming general election in Singapore with former Prime Ministers Lee and Goh as part of their

⁷⁵Paul Jansen, “Getting the Best Brains into the Saf,” *The Straits Times*, 7 September 1981.

constituency, is testament to the existence of this policy even today.⁷⁶ Hence this unique system continues to allow the civilian political leadership to have a strong hold on the military.

Table 2. Former military officers serving as Members of Parliament (MP)					
11 th Parliament 2006-2011 (%)	10 th Parliament 2002-2006 (%)	9 th Parliament 1997-2001 (%)	8 th Parliament 1991-1996 (%)	7 th Parliament 1988-1991 (%)	1968-1984 (%)
6 (7.2)	6 (7.1)	6 (7.2)	5 (6.2)	3 (3.7)	2 (2.1)

Source: Netina Tan, *Institutionalized Hegemonic Party: The Resilience of the People's Action Party (PAP) in Singapore* (Canada: University of McGill, 2010), 9.

Additionally, Michael Horowitz has also established a crucial linkage between military experience of civilian elites and policies.⁷⁷ Currently, Singapore has a large number of former SAF scholars in the cabinet and Members of Parliament (MP) with NS experience. In fact, table 2 shows that approximately seven percent of the MP are former regular military officers. This status is beneficial to both the civilian and military elites. It allows the civilian authority to keep the military in check and eliminate any praetorian threats. Even though there is a higher level of scrutiny and policy debate in the parliament, the government trusts the military services with a high annual defense budget

⁷⁶Wan Gek Teo, "Army General to Learn Ropes from Sm Goh," *The Straits Times*, 30 March 2011.

⁷⁷Michael Horowitz and Allan Stam, *How Prior Military Experience Influences the Future Militarized Behavior of Leaders* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2010), 4.

to fund its transformation effort since 1966.⁷⁸ This level of confidence can be attributed to the conscription policy. Since a majority of the male dominated members of the parliament and cabinet either had NS experience or were former SAF scholars, they understood and valued the importance of defense. Hence any changes in either conscription policy or composition of the government may tilt the delicate equilibrium of the civil/military relations.

Emerging Demographic Pattern

Koh Eng Chuan observes an emerging phase of demographic development that brings new challenges for Singapore.⁷⁹ As seen in table 3 below, since 1940, Singapore's population continues to rise but at different rates characterized by various socioeconomic factors. The first phase took place between 1940 and 1960, where the net population growth was the result of high migration and birth rates. In the second phase, the birth rates was the main contributor to population growth. In the third phase, between 1990 and 2000, the high migration and birth rates contributed to the population increase.

⁷⁸Tim Huxley, *Defending the Lion City: The Armed Forces of Singapore* (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 2000), 28.

⁷⁹Eng Chuan Koh, "Phases of Singapore's Demographic Development Post-World War II," *Ethos* no. 7 (2010), http://www.cscollge.gov.sg/cgl/pub_ethos_1011.htm (accessed 27 April 2011).

Table 3. Emerging Demographic Trend in Singapore				
	PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3	PHASE 4
	1940-1960	1970-1980	1990-2000	Current
Fertility	High	Declining	Low	Very Low
Mortality	High	Declining	Low	Very Low
Migration	High	Low	High	High
Population Growth	From births and migration	From births	From births and migration	From migration

Source: Koh Eng Chuan, *Phases of Singapore's Demographic Development Post-World War II* (Singapore: Centre for Governance and Leadership, 2010), 1.

In table 3, Koh suggests that in the current fourth phase, net immigration would soon take over the natural increase as the main source of population growth.⁸⁰ These trends correspond to Ron Lesthaeghe's model, who proposes that the industrialization of a country will inevitably create an environment favoring low birth rates and death rates known as the Second Demographic Transition.⁸¹ Koh states that Singapore has entered its Second Demographic Transition. The economic progress, employment opportunities and lifestyle changes have reduced Singaporean's priority on marriage and child rearing. Even with the pro-natalist measures and baby bonuses that the government has put in place in the last 10 years, Singapore's Total Fertility Rate continues to plummet to an all-time low of 1.16 in 2010.⁸² Based on recent surveys on the attitude of young people in Singapore on marriage, 18 percent do not see the necessity to get married. Hence, the

⁸⁰Koh, 2.

⁸¹Lesthaeghe Ronny, "The Second Demographic Transition in Western Countries: An Interpretation," in *Gender and Family Change in Industrialized Countries*, ed. Karen O. Mason and A-M Jensen (UK: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1995), 17-62.

⁸²Singapore Department of Statistics, "Key Annual Indicators," <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/stats/keyind.html> (accessed 20 April 2011).

nation's Total Fertility Rate is expected to continue to fall.⁸³ The government reports that in order to sustain its economic development, Singapore would have to depend on new immigrants to supplement its work force.⁸⁴

Pro-Immigration Policies

The Singapore government separates immigrant workers into two different categories, namely foreign workers and foreign talents. The former are typically unskilled or semi-skilled workers who contribute to the construction and manufacturing sectors. As part of the effort to increase productivity and reduce dependency on massive ~~cheap~~ labor," the government puts in place stringent policies and levies to control the influx of foreign workers. On the other hand, the government sees foreign talents, who are professional and managerial workers, as an important component augmenting the growing workforce. Hence Singapore liberalizes its pro-foreign talent immigration policies and puts in incentives to attract this group of immigrants to settle in Singapore.⁸⁵ This pro-foreign talent policy appears to be working well. According to recent Gallup Potential Net Migration Index surveys, Singapore tops the list of countries that could see

⁸³Straitstimes.com, "Oh to Be Young and Happy," <http://www.straitstimes.com/STI/STIMEDIA/pdf/20110125/260111p1.pdf> (accessed 25 April 2011).

⁸⁴*AsiaOne News*, "Singapore Should Welcome New Immigrants: MM Lee," 20 January 2011.

⁸⁵CAN, "We Must Appreciate Foreigners and Welcome Them, Says President Nathan," <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1124569/1/.html> (accessed 24 April 2011).

the highest net adult population growth from international migration.⁸⁶ In addition, another Gallup survey on Potential Net Brain Gain results showed that even though all developed countries registered negative Potential Net Brain Gain scores, Singapore was the only exception with a 317 percent Potential Net Brain Gain.⁸⁷

Table 4. Population Size and Growth								
		Singapore Residents Number (,000)			Average Annual Growth (Per Cent)			
Year	Total Population (TP)	Singapore Citizens (SC)	Singapore Permanent Citizens (PR)	Non Residents (NR)	TP	SC	PR	NR
1990	3,047.1	2,735.9	112.1	311.3	2.3	1.7	2.3	9.0
2000	4,027.9	3,273.4	287.5	754.5	2.8	1.3	9.9	9.3
2005	4,265.8	3,467.8	386.8	797.9	2.4	0.8	8.6	5.9
2006	4,401.4	3,525.9	418.0	875.5	3.2	0.9	8.1	9.7
2007	4,588.6	3,583.1	449.2	1,005.5	4.3	0.8	7.5	14.9
2008	4,839.4	3,642.7	478.2	1,196.7	5.5	1.0	6.5	19.0
2009	4,987.6	3,733.9	533.2	1,253.7	3.1	1.1	11.5	4.8
2010	5,076.7	3,771.7	541.0	1,305.0	1.8	0.9	1.5	4.1

Source: Chief Statistician, *Population Trends 2010* (Singapore: Department of Statistics Singapore, 2010), 1.

Since the 1990s, there has been a steady increase in the number of foreigners taking up citizenship in Singapore. As seen in table 4, the average annual growth of PR and non residents continues to be greater than that of Singapore citizens and peaked between 2007 and 2009 before falling in 2010. This could be a result of the government's

⁸⁶Neli Esipova and Julie Ray, "Migration Could Triple Populations in Some Wealthy Nations," 2010, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/142364/migration-triple-populations-wealthy-nations.aspx#1> (accessed 25 April 2011).

⁸⁷Neli Esipova, Anita Pugliese, and Julie Ray, "Developed Nations Attract Young Vs. Educated Migrants," 2010, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/142364/migration-triple-populations-wealthy-nations.aspx#1> (accessed 25 April 2011).

response to citizen's concern on increasing PR and non residents in Singapore which led to the government's tightening of the screening process for these two groups. However, this tightened screening process might also be a temporal knee-jerk reaction to appease the citizens, in preparation for the general election in 2011.

In order for a foreigner to become a Singapore citizen, they would first attain the status of a Permanent Resident before becoming a New Citizen, a few years later. Even though the main applicants who achieve PR status under the first generation Professionals, Technical Personnel and Skilled Worker Scheme or the Investor Scheme are exempt from NS, the male children who gained PR status under their parents' sponsorship are liable for NS upon reaching 16 ½ years old unless they decide to renounce their Singapore citizenship.

Jobs for Foreigners, National Service for Singaporeans

Table 5. Ethnic Composition in Singapore					
Ethnic	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Chinese	77.0	78.3	77.7	74.1	74.1
Malays	14.8	14.4	14.0	13.9	13.4
Indians	7.0	6.3	7.1	7.9	9.2
Others	1.2	1.0	1.1	1.4	3.3

Source: Chief Statistician, *Population Trends 2010* (Singapore: Department of Statistics Singapore, 2010), 3.

With the increasing number of immigrants and non-residents entering Singapore, locals are starting to feel threatened. Not only do the heartlanders fear the loss of jobs and wages to the influx of immigrants, but they also see PR and NC enjoying the benefits of citizens without serving NS obligations.⁸⁸ The Institute of Policy Studies latest National Orientations of Singaporeans Survey showed that 60 percent of the people interviewed felt that the government's pro-immigration policies weakened unity in the country.⁸⁹ This observation seems to have permeated amongst the younger Singaporeans. The National Youth Council survey also shows that the percentage of young people who welcome foreigners dropped to 66 percent.⁹⁰ With the increase in the number of immigrants, the integration of immigrants becomes government's top priority.⁹¹ There are no official statistics to show the origins of new immigrants. However, based on the changes in the ethnic composition trend in table 5, the increase is largely under the Indians and Others ethnic categories, with slight change in the remaining ethnic groups. The "Others" ethnic group comprises all persons other than Chinese, Malays and Indians. They include Eurasians, Caucasians, Arabs, Japanese, etc.⁹²

⁸⁸Hsien Loong Lee, English Text of National Day Rally 2006 Speech in Mandarin, 2006.

⁸⁹Mariko Oi, "Singapore's Tough Balancing Act on Immigration," *BBC News*, 26 August 2010.

⁹⁰Daryl Chin, "9 in 10 Comfortable with Other Races," *The Straits Times*, 26 January 2011.

⁹¹Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, "National Integration Council to Foster Social Integration, 2009," Media Release 15/2009.

⁹²Singapore Department of Statistics, "Glossary: Census 2000 Concepts and Definition," <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/statsres/glossary/population.html> (accessed 20 April 2011).

What is the Magic Number?

Table 6. Size of Armed Forces in Singapore						
Year	68/69	70/71	79/80	89/90	99/00	09/10
Population	2,050,000	2,050,000	2,380,000	2,658,000	3,200,000	4,987,000
Armed Forces Size (active)	4700	14,800	36,000	55,000	73,000	72,500
Reserves	5000	6000	45,000	210,000	270,000	312,500
Percentage of population with military experience	0.47	1.00	3.40	9.97	10.72	7.7

Source: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1968-1969* (London: Adlard & Son, 1969), 49; The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1968-1969* (London: Adlard & Son, 1971), 68; The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1979-1980* (London: Adlard & Son, 1980), 72; The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1989-1990* (London: Brassey, 1990), 173; The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1999-2000* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 203; The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2009-2010* (London: Routledge, 2010), 203; Chief Statistician, *Population Trends 2010* (Singapore: Department of Statistics Singapore, 2010), 407.

As seen in table 6, an increase of more than 200 percent of the size of the active armed forces occurred between 1969 and 1971. The aggressive implementation of the conscription policy in 1967 to replace the British troops that were departing in 1971 may have resulted in this expansion. In the subsequent 30 year period between 1970 and 2000, the number continued to rise, albeit at a slower rate. Until 2010, where a slight 0.6 percent drop occurred. Comparing the size of the active armed forces over the 40-year horizon, the size of active soldiers seemed to have reached a saturation point of 72,500 personnel in the last 20 years. One may wonder if that is the “ideal” number required to achieve the first objective of conscription, which is to ensure the security of Singapore.

Also, the percentage of population with military experience is hovering between seven to ten percent. Would this also be the “ideal” percentage required to maintain social cohesion?

Since the implementation of the conscription policy, the armed forces size and percentage of population with military experience had increased in tandem with the population growth. These have impacts on Singapore’s defense strategic thinking. For instance, the small active and reserve military component in the late 1960s constrained the SAF to adopt the “poisonous shrimp” defense posture. In 1989 and 1990, following the large buildup of the size of the organized reserve component, as a result of 20 years of conscription, the defense strategic thinking shifted to the “porcupine” theme; which coincided with the inauguration of the first combined arms division in the Singapore Army.⁹³ However, the numbers appeared to plateau between 1999 and 2000 and 2009 and 2010.

In 2007, the government had used 6.7 million as a planning parameter as an ideal population for Singapore. However, in July 2010, Ann Sim, Director of National Population secretariat, clarified that the government does not have a target population for Singapore. Instead, the goal is to have a sustainable population profile that supports the nation’s economic, social, and security objectives.⁹⁴ Similarly, the MINDEF has also

⁹³Derek Liew, “1991-Foremost and Utmost (3rd Division: The First Combined Arms Division),” *History Snippets* 9, no. 3 (March 2005), http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/about_us/history/maturing_saf/v09n03_history.html (accessed 25 April 2011).

⁹⁴Ann Sim, “6.5 Mllon Is a Parameter, Not a Target,” *The Straits Times*, 22 September 2010.

never made public the ideal size of the military that it requires, to support the defense policy.

According to population trend, the population is expected to continue to grow. With the increase in numbers, the military may no longer be able to absorb the additional active force into its system. Even with the assumption that the defense budget continues at six percent of the gross domestic product, the physical space constraint in Singapore could pose a problem. Depending on the MINDEF's objective of whether to have approximately nine percent of the population to have military experience or to maintain an absolute size of 72,000 soldiers, an alternative service system could be implemented to channel the excess numbers to other parts of the society.

Where is the Gap?

In the literature review, many prominent works exist on the fate of conscription. Many western countries have either discontinued conscription or reduced the duration of NS as it no longer fulfills their national objectives. Most of the studies of the subject were from the western perspectives and in many cases; they have a rather homogenous population. While many researches have been done on the purpose and importance of conscription in Singapore in the earlier years, most of them are answering to the security needs against regional threats. Some authors have also attempted to predict the fate of conscription from an economic cost perspective. In the case of Singapore, Pak Shun Ng concludes that the conscription system is less expensive than an all volunteer system.⁹⁵

⁹⁵Pak Shun Ng, "Why Not a Volunteer Army? Reexamining the Impact of Military Conscription on Economic Growth for Singapore," *The Singapore Economic Review* 50, no. 1 (2005): 63.

However, none addresses it from the social political stand point, especially with the emerging demographic pattern that Singapore is currently facing.

Moving forward, with the ethnic composition of the resident changes and the population in Singapore becoming more diverse with increase NC and PR, would the NS issue widen or harmonize the society? Social cohesion has diverse definitions. Its meaning is multi-faceted and potentially wide ranging. According to a local government report in the United Kingdom. Social cohesion has three components that include (1) social relationship, (2) social inclusion, and (3) social equality.⁹⁶ First, social relationship is the acceptance of the difference between and within communities. Positive social relationship translates to more public spirited individuals and groups where people are more willing to commit themselves to community activities between and within communities. On the other hand, poor relationship means that the population is indifferent and intolerant in the community.

Second, social inclusion is the involvement and representation of minority groups in economic, political, social, and national institutions such as defense. Everyone feels that they have a stake and a sense of belonging to the country regardless of their race, language, or religion. The negative side is a disenfranchised minority race or group or enclaves. Lastly, social equality is the equal access to opportunities or material needs. An individual's success depends on his own merits and not his race or background. Even though a meritocracy system is in place, there would also be measures to assist the recurrent disadvantaged group out of the vicious cycle.

⁹⁶Ivan Turok, Ade Kearns, Dave Fitch, John Flint, Carol McKenzie, and Joanne Abbotts, *Social Cohesion* (UK: Communities and Local Government Publications, 2006), 23-25.

National Service is often an emotional topic of discussion because of its impact on the society. Singapore's emerging demographic trend added a different texture and new dimension to the argument. The social chasm between locals and new immigrants on the NS obligation presents an interesting theme to investigate whether NS will survive?

Chapter 2 had identified three possible scenarios on conscription policy. Based on the different schools of thought and observations, conscription policy could be discontinued, continue as it is or redefined to better reflect the current societal needs. Second, the chapter also outlined six civil/military relations to provide a base to portray the unique Singapore model. Third, in order to present a coherent framework on conscription policy through a social perspective, chapter 2 had described the historical background of conscription in Singapore and its associated social impacts. Literature review outlined a generally upward trend in the public's support for NS over the years that might have been influenced by the MINDEF's increased active public engagement efforts. The fourth section further zoomed in on the emerging demographics patterns and current social trends in Singapore, explaining the associated immigration policies that may have cause the trend. Literature review showed that there were insufficient public opinion and other surveys to fully answer the thesis question. Hence, a majority of the response to changes in the conscription policy discussed in the subsequent chapters must be inferred from theories of civil/military relations and social cohesion observed elsewhere.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Recapping on the motivation for this thesis, chapter 1 framed the primary question as follows: “What is the fate of conscription in Singapore from the social perspective?” The question is further unpacked into three secondary questions in order for the primary question to be sufficiently answered:

1. How was conscription used in Singapore in the past?
2. What are the relevant new social trends in Singapore?
3. What are the social implications for Singapore if conscription continues, is discontinued, or changes?

Chapter 2 examined the different arguments on the fate of conscription in the world at large that could be broadly categorized into three different camps: conscription continues, conscription in decline, and neo-conscription. It provided a historical background on the conscription policy and associated social impacts in Singapore. The chapter also laid out the emerging demographic trends that may affect the policy. With this knowledge, chapter 3 outlined the plan of action for data presentation and analysis that gets into the core of whether or not the initial objectives for the conscription policy in Singapore still remain relevant in the face of changing demographic patterns or if they should be revised to better reflect the current requirements. This chapter will first provide an overview of the research methodology, followed by a detailed description of each component.

With this framework established, chapter 4 will first analyze independently the three possible courses of actions, (1) conscription continues, (2) conscription is

discontinued, and (3) neo-conscription, against the two evaluation criteria, social cohesion and civil/military relations. The goal is to sieve out the strengths and weaknesses of each scenario from a social cohesion and civil/military relations perspective. Thereafter, the thesis will compare the scenarios against one another. Finally, the chapter will test each option for validity with three screening criteria: meeting critical national needs, universality and equity.

Research Methodology

The issue will be examined using a qualitative research methodology. The data presented will involve more words than numbers and is more subjective than objective in nature. Chapter 4 is divided into five parts. It will first assemble the overall case study structure by defining the lexica of three different scenarios for examination in this study, namely (1) conscription continues, (2) discontinued conscription, and (3) neo-conscription. Analysis will begin in the second part by evaluating the three scenarios independently against two evaluation criteria: social cohesion and civil/military relations. The third section will compare the advantages and disadvantages of the scenarios alongside one another. The next segment involves the application of the three screening criteria of the NS policy in Singapore, namely, meeting critical national needs, universality, and equity, to test the validity of the option. The final section will include a summary of the analysis that will set the stage for the conclusion.

Evaluation Criteria

As this thesis is examining conscription from the social perspective, it identifies two social indicators, social cohesion and civil/military relations, as the evaluation

criteria to describe the overall social environment for each scenario. For the purpose of the study, the term social cohesion will adopt the same definition used by a local government in the United Kingdom that comprises three components (1) social relationship, (2) social inclusion, and (3) social equality.⁹⁷

The thesis defines civil/military relations as the relationship between the civilian elites or the government and the military organization. It examines civil/military relations from two perspectives. First, the level of military experience in the government, which not only has an impact on the “unequal dialogue” between the two entities but also affects the extent of parliamentary debate on military policy.⁹⁸ Second, the changes in civil/military relations may also influence the degree of military autonomy *vis-à-vis* civilian oversight.

Screening Criteria

This thesis will screen each scenario using the three key principles underpinning NS policy in Singapore.⁹⁹ First, critical national need is defined as matters that concern the security and survival of Singapore. As NS involves massive resources, it should only be implemented to fulfill critical national need. Second, universal conscription ensures fairness of the system. In this case, it refers to the drafting of all male Singapore citizens. Lastly, equity ensures that the system treats everyone equal regardless of their status and

⁹⁷Turok et al., 23-25.

⁹⁸Horowitz and Stam, 4.

⁹⁹Teo, “Ministerial Statement on National Service Defaulters.”

social background. Conscripts should be assigned NS roles and responsibilities based on their merits.

Analyze Scenarios

For the analyze stage, chapter 4 will first present an independent analysis of each scenario followed by a comparison analysis using the evaluation criteria. Thereafter, the three key principles that underpin the conscription policy in Singapore will be used to screen each option. The information required to evaluate the criteria will be deduced from literature reviews in earlier chapters. Even though the MINDEF Applied Behavioral Sciences Department conducts a yearly climate survey and the associated impact that NS has in Singapore, the private and confidential nature of these quantitative studies means that these are unavailable in the public domain. Hence, most of the conclusions would often be drawn from government released speeches and qualitative research. For the first scenario where conscription remains, the effects on the evaluation criteria for status quo will largely be taken from historical data and limited quantitative surveys on the impact of NS in Singapore. Elizabeth Nair's psychological analysis in 1995, which is a quantitative study conducted on a small sample of 20 commanders in the Army, that is available to the public, will be used in this thesis.¹⁰⁰ Another recent quantitative report published in 2007 by the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies on inter-racial and inter-religion issues will also be used.¹⁰¹ The latter is a nationwide random sample of

¹⁰⁰Elizabeth Nair, "Conscription and Nation-Building in Singapore: A Psychological Analysis," *Journal of Human Values* 1 (1995): 93-102.

¹⁰¹Yolanda Chin and Norman Vasu, *The Ties That Bind and Blind* (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2007).

1824 Singaporeans. The report has also weighted the profile of the sample to match the demographic composition of the country based on age, race, and gender according to the Census 2000 report. Despite the limitations, these surveys provide, what are so far, the best available data for comparison.

In the second scenario where conscription is discontinued, the data will be extrapolated by examining countries that have discontinued conscription. As the US and Singapore share similar pro-immigrant policies with a diverse population, parallels on the consequence of discontinued conscription in Singapore could be drawn from qualitative studies in the US society. Even though this may not be the most accurate method, it provides the best option because of the limited quantitative research papers on social impact of discontinued conscription in Singapore.

As the final scenario, neo-conscription is a relatively new concept compared to previous scenarios. Most of the interpretation in the analyses would rest on the assumption that the effects in the first and second scenarios are applicable in the hybrid scenario. Taiwan is currently the first and only Asia country that offers an alternative NS option as part of its conscription policy known as “替代役” or alternative service.¹⁰² The Republic of China’s (Taiwan) MINDEF implemented a policy in 2000, which allows draftees an option to serve in either community, public, or the military sectors depending on the demand of the nation and qualification of the conscript. Some of the interpretation of the evaluation criteria would be drawn from the case in Taiwan, however as Taiwan is largely a homogenous population, the consequence of such policy on the society might

¹⁰²The Republic of China, *Yearbook 2010*, <http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/5-gp/yearbook/contents.htm> (accessed 25 April 2011), 98.

not be apparent compared to Singapore. Despite its limitation, this provides the best available data for comparative study.

Summary

Using the methodology outlined in chapter 3, the following chapter will analyze three possible paths on the fate of conscription in Singapore; whether (1) conscription continues, (2) discontinued conscription, or (3) neo-conscription. Having considered each of the scenarios in turn, the analysis will then summarize the results of the findings and propose an option for the conscription policy in Singapore, in the light of the new demographic pattern. Should Singapore continue with its current conscription policy, discontinue conscription like the US or redefine the way conscription is implemented, similar to the case of Taiwan?

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

This chapter adopts a sequential approach to answer the primary research question, “What is the fate of conscription in Singapore from the social perspective?” It first frames the subject by outlining three possible trajectories of conscription policies in Singapore, namely, (1) conscription continues, (2) conscription is discontinued, and (3) neo-conscription. Secondly, it analyses the scenarios independently using the evaluation criteria, social cohesion and civil/military relations, that represent the key social aspects in Singapore. Third, using the emerging demographic trend in Singapore as the setting, the chapter will present a comparative analysis of three scenarios, based on the possible conscription trajectories. Next, the chapter tests the validity of each scenario using the three screening criteria, meeting critical national need, universality, and equity. Finally, at the end of the analysis, it will summarize and recommend an option that future conscription policy in Singapore may move towards.

Framing the Scenarios

For the first scenario, the conscription policy in Singapore remains status quo. Singapore continues to draft all male citizens and the second generation of male NC. National Service continues to be 24 months of fulltime service followed by 10 years of in camp training thereafter.

In the second scenario, Singapore discontinues conscription and transits to a regular professional military. All citizens, including NC, are eligible but not obliged to volunteer for the professional force. Based on table 6 in chapter 2, the analysis assumes

that the SAF requires and can sustain 70,000 professional soldiers for the defense of Singapore.

For the last scenario, the thesis defines neo-conscription as the pluralization of conscription in Singapore. The two main differences between the first and last scenario are (1) first generation NC will be conscripted alongside with citizens and (2) NS is no longer restricted within the military realm. The broadening of conscription opens up a new vista for citizens, including first generation NC, to be conscripted to perform either military or civilian defense related functions for the nation. The NS roles are categorized under the five pillars of Total Defense: military defense, social defense, economic defense, psychological defense, and civil defense. In fact, the current NS System already has a small number of conscripts serving in the civil defense sector such as the Singapore Police Force and the Singapore Civil Defense Force. Neo-conscription in Singapore will be similar to the alternative service in Taiwan.

Neo-conscription is a relatively new concept. Taiwan is the first country in Asia to implement a similar system, known as “替代役” or alternate service in 2000.¹⁰³ Even though western countries such as Austria and Germany had once legislated alternate systems, the purpose was to provide an alternative option for political, social, or religious conscientious objectors to serve rather than to be imprisoned. For Taiwan, being a religious conscientious objector is a secondary consideration; the central reason for the alternate service is to divert the excess supply of conscripts into undermanned social welfare requirements.

¹⁰³The Republic of China, *Yearbook 2010*.

In order to maintain fairness and equality, Taiwan uses a two stage lottery system to allocate manpower between the military and the alternative service.¹⁰⁴ Conscripts who wish to serve in alternative service appointments must first enter an initial lottery to gain a slot. Winners then participate in a second lottery to select their preference to serve either in the general field or research and development field. The general assignment includes positions like security guards, firefighters, social workers, medical personnel, agricultural advisors, teachers, surveyors, and overseas humanitarian project workers.¹⁰⁵ Those who opt for research and development positions need to have a minimum bachelor's degree and be prepared to serve for at least three years.¹⁰⁶ As applications for alternative service usually exceed the places available, the lottery system ensures equality by allocating personnel randomly.¹⁰⁷ Since conscripts who are in alternative service are usually in direct contact with the public, the Taiwanese people feel that the alternative systems are beneficial to the society as a whole.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴Taiwan, Ministry of the Interior, "An Outline of Interior Affairs-Conscription," <http://www.moi.gov.tw/outline/en/en-06.html> (accessed 25 April 2011).

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶The Republic of China, 98.

¹⁰⁷Taiwan, Ministry of the Interior, "An Outline of Interior Affairs-Conscription."

¹⁰⁸Taiwan Today, "Alternative Service Draftees Help Teach English," *Liberty Times*, 10 December 2010, <http://www.taiwantoday.tw/ct.asp?xitem=135483&ctnode=421&mp=9> (accessed 24 April 2011).

Analysis

Social Cohesion–Conscription Continues

When NS first started in 1967, the MINDEF's primary purpose was to build and train operationally ready and credible armed forces. The second intention was to hasten the process of nation building. These two rationales continue to prevail today. With universal conscription, the military usually represents a microcosm of the society. Judging from the peace and social harmony in Singapore since independence, NS has fulfilled both its purposes well. Nair's survey found that 53 percent of interviewees felt that racial harmony would be affected if conscription did not exist, hence, conscription could indeed have played an important role to promote social cohesion.¹⁰⁹ In addition to the number of people that conscription provides defense for, NS also offers the common experience for all male citizens. This experience could translate to the ties that bind people from different race, religion, dialect groups, education, and social status together in Singapore.

Based on the demographic trends and the government's pro-immigration policy, Singapore is expecting to experience a population increase due to immigration.¹¹⁰ As the current immigration policy does not require the first generation of NC to serve NS, it may pose a challenge to social cohesion. Universal conscription may not be "universal" anymore. The government's two oft-cited reasons for not conscripting NC are because of

¹⁰⁹Nair, 94.

¹¹⁰Koh.

their age and their instant contribution to the economy of the nation.¹¹¹ The same NS policy that has served the country well to harmonize the different ethnic and religious groups in Singapore could potentially affect the social relationship between citizens and NC.

Evidence of an artificial divide and unhappiness between the two groups is mounting. During a ministerial forum at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore in 2010, one NS reserve officer, Lim Zi Rui, told former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong that while he was proud of being a Singaporean, the government's pro-foreign immigration policies had caused a "dilution of the Singapore spirit in the youth." He added that with the large influx of foreigners and NC, he and many of his peers have less sense of belonging to Singapore; he had lost sight of what he was defending.¹¹²

In fact, through the MINDEF and SAF massive engagement effort, many Singaporeans actually understood the importance of national defense. They did not dispute the need for NS.¹¹³ However, they felt that able bodied NC or even PR should also shoulder the responsibilities of defense.¹¹⁴ A majority of the critics are also unhappy

¹¹¹Hsien Loong Lee, "Transcript of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's Speech at the Ntu Student's Union Ministerial Forum," September 2009, http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/speechesinterviews/primeminister/2009/September/transcript_of_primeministerleehsienloongsspeechatthentustudentsu.html (accessed 25 April 2011).

¹¹²Rachel Lin, "A Disempowered Generation," *The Straits Times*, 30 October 2010.

¹¹³Teo, "Ministerial Statement on National Service Defaulters."

¹¹⁴Eng Hen Ng, "Speech by Dr Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Education and Second Minister for Defense, at Committee of Supply Debate 2010," http://www.news.gov.sg/public/sgpc/en/media_releases/agencies/mindef/speech/S-20100305-2.print.html?AuthKey= (accessed 25 April 2011).

that the NC are competing with them at the job market.¹¹⁵ Even though the MINDEF has shortened NS from 30 months to 24 months and curtailed organized reservist training requirements from 12 to 10 years in 2004, the durations are still relatively lengthy compared to many other countries with a conscription system.

Natives lament that the 24 months of NS is eroding their competitiveness in the economic market compared to the NC. Some employers might even prefer employees without NS reserve obligations, which requires them to be back for annual in camp training. The MINDEF recognizes this challenge and attempts to mitigate it by honoring and recognizing employers who show strong support for NS with the Total Defense Award.¹¹⁶ This annual award is given to organizations that have either shown exemplary support for their NSmen to carry out their NS training or contributed to the military critical resources during military mobilization exercises.

What is alarming is 60 percent of the interviewees felt that the governments pro-immigration policies had weakened unity in the country.¹¹⁷ Even though the government has recognized the gravity of the issue by slowing the intake of migrants, accentuating the privileges of citizenship, and establishing the new National Integration Council, these measures have yet to produce any results. Hence, social inequality and exclusion might arise if the current conscription policy remains status quo.

¹¹⁵REACH, “Reach Policy Study Workgroup on Integration Issues Proposes Measures Towards a Better Integrated Society,” <http://www.reach.gov.sg/portals/0/MediaRelease/REACH%20Media%20Release%20on%20PSW%20Recommendations%20-%20web.pdf> (accessed 24 April 2011).

¹¹⁶Ministry of Defense Singapore. “The Employers’ Website, Together for Total Defense.”

¹¹⁷Oi.

Last year, as part of the government's effort to ease the influx of NC and PR, to avoid another double digit percentage growth rate as seen in 2009, which caused displeasure amongst Singaporeans, the government reduced the number of Permanent Resident passes and citizenships approved.¹¹⁸ The government put in place stringent evaluation criteria and increased emphasis on the educational background and professional skills of applicants for the Professionals, Technical Personnel and Skilled Workers Scheme or the Investor Scheme. Based on this screening criterion, the NC and PR that enter Singapore would usually belong to either the middle or high income earner groups.

The revision in the screening criteria is timely but could actually exacerbate the differences between the two groups in the long term. If the NS policy remains status quo, citizens may view that NC/PR are "paying" to dodge national obligations. Even though the government has recently taken actions to ensure that the citizen's benefits are always greater than the PR, the government is also clear that Singaporeans should not discriminate between citizens and NC.¹¹⁹ According to the government, NC unlike PR have fulfilled the "necessary requirements" to be citizens; they should not be viewed differently from natives just because they did not serve NS. The NS issue continues to drive a wedge between NC and natives. It begs the question of equity of the current conscription system and the social equality of citizens.

¹¹⁸Kenny Chee, "Sharp Drop in Singapore Pr Passes Issued Last Year," *Asiaone News*, 18 January 2011.

¹¹⁹Chee Hean Teo, "DPM's Speech on Population at the Committee of Suppl," 2010, http://www.news.gov.sg/public/sgpc/en/media_releases/agencies/pmo/speech/S-20100304-2/AttachmentPar/0/file/DPM%27s%20speech%20on%20 population%20at%20COS%2020100304.pdf (accessed 25 April 2011).

Social Cohesion–Discontinue Conscription

In Singapore, even though citizens are physically living closer to one another in high rise apartments, they rarely come together for community activities.¹²⁰ Even when Singaporeans do socialize, they tend to do so with those of similar background and social status.¹²¹ Consequently, the government has to implement artificial constructs to create common space in schools and communities to bring different people together to promote racial harmony.¹²² Without conscription, the level of interaction amongst the diverse population would be reduced. Not only would the relationship between citizens, NC, and PR be affected in the long run, the social cohesion amongst the multi-racial natives might also be jeopardized. Hence, the overall social relations in Singapore may weaken despite physical proximity.

On the one hand, NC and PR tend to congregate in a familiar environment and live near their compatriots.¹²³ On the other hand, natives are less likely to take the initiative to integrate with the NC and PR.¹²⁴ When these two factors are in play against

¹²⁰Grace Fu, “Speech by Ms Grace Fu, Senior Minister of State for National Development and Education at the Promotion of Better Social Behaviour in Hdb Estates: Launch of Good Neighbour Award & Hdb Guidebook,” 2009, http://internet-stg.mnd.gov.sg/newsroom/speeches/speeches_2009_SMS_26042009.htm (accessed 26 April 2011).

¹²¹Chin and Vasu. *The Ties That Bind and Blind*.

¹²²United Nations, Statement by Saravenan Tanapal, Delegate to the 65th Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Agenda Item 66, on Elimination of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Tolerance, Third Committee, 3 November 2010.

¹²³Kenny Chee, “Mm: Hdb Quota for Prs Possible,” *Asiaone Business*, 28 January 2010.

¹²⁴Chin and Vasu. *The Ties That Bind and Blind*.

each other, the unfamiliarity of the two groups may cause social exclusion. Nevertheless, as part of the effort to promote social integration, the Housing Board of Development, which is the ministry responsible for public housing, has recently revised its Ethnic Integration Policy to include PR.¹²⁵ The policy stipulates ethnic representative quotas in public housing. Even though the policy may serve to prevent the physical formation of enclaves, it does not promote social cohesion. A recent study by Grace Fu, Senior Minister of State revealed that “many HDB residents today do not know their neighbors as well as Singaporeans in the past, because they have less time for social interaction.”¹²⁶ This possible formation of ethnic enclaves amongst the NC may cause social relationship deterioration of the population.

Without conscription, Singapore would need to rely on an all volunteer force for defense, as the US did. Observation of the latter shows that the Armed Forces no longer represent a microcosm of American society. When the US first instituted an all volunteer military, one of the greatest concerns was that the poorest and worst educated individuals would be the only ones that came forward to serve.¹²⁷ Fortunately this dire prediction did not happen.¹²⁸ However, the working and middle class Americans from the Southern and Mountain West Regions still make up a large proportion of the military manpower

¹²⁵Singapore Government, Housing and Development Board, “Ethnic Integration Policy and Spr Quota, http://www.hdb.gov.sg/fi10/fi10322p.nsf/w/SellFlatEthnicIntegrationPolicy_EIP?OpenDocument (accessed 25 April 2011).

¹²⁶Fu.

¹²⁷Gates.

¹²⁸Shanea J. Watkins and James Sherk, *Who Serves in the U.S. Military? Demographic Characteristics of Enlisted Troops and Officers* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2008), 3.

today.¹²⁹ Disparities in racial composition of certain specialties and ranks, particularly at the most senior officer level also exists within the military.¹³⁰ Hence, a volunteer military is rarely representative of the entire nation. Social exclusion may occur when certain minority groups exist in greater proportions, compared to others within the military.

Similar to the US, Singapore is not a homogenous society. It has three major ethnic categories.¹³¹ Chinese is the dominant ethnic group that represents 74.1 percent of the resident population. Malay and Indian are at 13.4 percent and 9.2 percent respectively. Other persons who do not fall into the major three groups make up the remaining 3.3 percent known as Others. Today, cultural aversion to joining the military amongst the Chinese community remains strong. Hence, for an all volunteer force, military recruiters would have to target the other three minority groups. An overrepresentation of minority groups in the military may occur, which may lead to social exclusion.

Following similar arguments, social inequality may also occur for two reasons. One, professional NC or PR would often seek employment in other sectors and are unlikely to volunteer for military service. Unless the immigration policy changes, for example, to encourage NC or PR to join the military, the government may have to consider giving additional credits to a Permanent Resident citizenship applicant, if he volunteers to serve in the military. Two, social inequalities may also happen due to the

¹²⁹Ibid., 7.

¹³⁰Gates.

¹³¹Singapore Department of Statistics, *Population Trends 2010 Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore Department of Statistics, 2010), 3.

disparities in racial composition in the military ranks. If the assumption is that those without college degrees or diplomas are more likely to hold lower ranks, the Malay population may end up forming the bulk of soldiers. Conversely, the Indians with the highest number of degree and diploma holders would end up at the senior officer level.¹³² When the military is no longer an accurate representation of the society, social exclusion and inequality may happen.

Hence, without conscription, the relationship between citizens, NC and PR may improve in the short term; however, it could deteriorate in the long run if no alternate integration program replaces NS. Temporary improvement, at the micro level, may occur with the removal of the perceived “unfairness” of military obligation. This could close the gap between citizens, NC, and PR. However, from a macro perspective, the termination of NS could potentially turn racial and ethnic cleavages into fault lines. In recent years, even though the government may have introduced a host of policies to promote social harmony, none would have the same impact as NS.

Social Cohesion–Neo-Conscription

Since both natives and NC would be part of NS, the burden of national security could be shared between the two groups. Neo-conscription would oblige citizens and NC to come together to make a “meaningful contribution” to the society. Having everyone serving a NS stint in one of the five areas of Total Defense would provide a common experience for all. This experience may create opportunities for increase interaction between the two groups. Importantly, natives may no longer perceive NC differently for

¹³²Singapore Department of Statistics, *Population Trends 2010 Singapore*, 3.

not fulfilling their national obligations. Hence, social cohesion may expect an overall improvement in Singapore.

However, judging from the five areas of Total Defense, Singaporeans tend to view military defense and civil defense as the ~~to~~oughest.” Hence, given a choice, the other three areas, namely social, psychological and economic defense, may become more popular options. Similar to the case in Taiwan, serving in alternative areas is usually more popular compared to military service and the demand to serve in a non-military function is often greater than the positions available.¹³³ In Singapore’s case, conscripts serving in the military and civil defense may feel discriminated against and question the ~~fairness~~” of the system. They may also think that those serving in the other three areas are evading the ~~real~~ tough NS,” i.e., military and civil defense.

Also, Taiwanese draftees need at least a bachelor’s degree before they are eligible for alternative services in the research and development sector. Similarly, conscripts in Singapore who are applying to serve in the economic and psychological sector may also need to possess prerequisite qualifications. New citizens, who are usually professionals, might fulfill the bulk of the positions in these areas. A sense of social inequality may result if a certain group is constantly seen as serving in these ~~easier~~” functions. In order to avoid similar equity issues that the MINDEF faced when it first implemented part time and fulltime NS in the late 1960s, the MINDEF has to be transparent with the selection process and adjust the term of service to balance the perspectives of Singaporeans.

Additionally, the MINDEF should have the prerogative to apportion conscripts into the five areas of Total Defense. By doing so, the MINDEF could adjust the

¹³³ ~~Alternative Service Needed,~~” *The Taipei Times*, 2 August 2008.

manpower composition in each sector to ensure a closer reflection of the macrocosm of the society. This would maintain a multi-racial, mixed citizens, and NC environment in all five sectors. This is important because citizens from various backgrounds and communities can then have a collective experience interacting and working with one another in NS, making Singapore a more inclusive society.

The chief concern of Goodman against military involvement in alternate non-military areas is the military's neglect of its core mission.¹³⁴ In this case, the other aspects of total defense may insidiously detract the SAF from its primary purpose of conscription, which is to provide for the defense of Singapore. He also raises the alarm that such a system may inadvertently divert and diffuse critical defense resources to other social services, which would further weaken the combat readiness of the armed forces. In the case of Singapore, unless there are spare capacities in the military, the excessive commitment of conscript forces to perform other non-military functions may derail the conscription system.

Civil-Military Relations—Conscription Continues

Currently, a quarter of Lee's cabinet members were former military scholars and more than half of the appointment holders had prior military experience.¹³⁵ Those who did not serve NS were either too old when the conscription policy was put in place or are female. The only exception was Minister for Health, Khaw Boon Wan, who became a New Citizen through naturalization and he did not have to serve NS.

¹³⁴Goodman, 39.

¹³⁵Singapore Government, —Cabinet Appointments,” <http://www.cabinet.gov.sg/content/cabinet/appointments.html> (accessed 26 April 2011).

Even though the current conscription policy ensures that a majority of the cabinet members are familiar with the military through their own NS experience, this may no longer hold true because of two reasons. One, is the increased number of NC joining politics. Second, is the rise in number of women in the parliament. As the number of NC increases, the group of NC joining and representing political groups will rise. China born Niu Liming, 36 years old became a Singaporean in 2007. His recent appointment into the young People's Action Party committee has caused some residents to question the ruling party's criteria to induct members into the political party.¹³⁶ Citizens wondered if Niu possessed sufficient grassroots knowledge to represent them in parliament.

Another recent example was the ruling party's fielding of Dr Janil Puthuchearu as the latest party candidate in the 2011 general election. There was plenty of internet chatter questioning his loyalty, since Janil had only received his citizenship two years ago. When journalists interviewed the newly minted citizen, Janil remarked that he was "staying and fully invested."¹³⁷ Responding to the article, some critics questioned his commitment and even challenged him to demonstrate his dedication by volunteering to serve NS. Even though the number of NC in the parliament is not large yet, the number can be expected to climb based on this trend. Hence, as the number of NC who enter politics increases, it will eventually dilute the overall military familiarity in the parliament.

¹³⁶Xueying Li, "New Citizens, Influx of Foreigners Worry Tampines Residents," *The Straits Times*, 21 February 2011.

¹³⁷Cassandra Chew, "I'm Staying, I'm Fully Invested," *The Straits Times*, 22 March 2011.

Table 7. Women Members of Parliament in Singapore, 1959-2006		
Election Year	Women Elected (PAP member)	Women as a percentage of MP
1959	5 (4)	10% (n=51)
1963	3 (2)	5% (n=51)
1968	1 (1)	1.5% (n=58)
1972	0	0 (n=65)
1976	0	0 (n=69)
1980	0	0 (n=76)
1984	3 (3)	4% (n=79)
1988	4 (4)	5% (n=81)
1991	2 (2)	2.5% (n=81)
1996	4 (4)	5% (n=83)
2001	10 (10)	12% (n=84)
2006	23 (7)	24.5% (n=84)

Source: Lenore T. Lyons, *A Politics of Accommodation: Women and the People's Action Party in Singapore* (Australia: University of Wollongong, 2005), 27; Singapore Elections Department, *2006 Elections Result* (Singapore: Elections Department, 2006).

Next, is the increasing number of women taking on greater parliamentary roles. In 2009, Lim Hwee Hua became the first woman to be appointed a Cabinet Minister in Singapore.¹³⁸ Previously, social mores had kept women out of the once male dominated political arena. The society had once expected women to take on a traditional —*duk* role” of being a wife and a mother. However, this notion became antiquated as the society progressed with more educated females. Women are no longer confined to playing a

¹³⁸ Singapore Council of Women's Organisations, —Wall of Fame,” http://www.scwo.org.sg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=38&Itemid=47 (accessed 25 April 2011).

supporting role to men. Based on table 7, women representatives in the parliament has seen a steady increase and this figure can be expected to continue to rise to as high as a third of the parliament.¹³⁹ As the enlistment act does not require women to be conscripted, this trend could also potentially dilute the NS experience in the government.

Confronted with these two factors, the level of military experience in Singapore's parliament may contract to a level similar to the US Congress. Currently, the number of Senators and Representatives with military experience in the US is at 25 percent and 21 percent respectively, which are the lowest in recent years.¹⁴⁰ The increased number of NC and women MP joining the government without NS experience, could reduce the net level of military familiarity of the government. When this happens, it can potentially amplify the civil/military relations gap between the military and civilian authority. The civil/military relations may alter as the proportion of MP and cabinet members with military experience changes.

Civil-Military Relations–Discontinue Conscription

Without NS, a majority of the current male citizens would not have any military experience at all, since defense would become the sole responsibility of the small cluster of an all volunteer force. Assuming Singapore has a population of 5 million and based on the earlier assumption of the size of the all volunteer force required, only about one and one-half percent of the population would have military experience, compared to 10

¹³⁹Rachel A. Kelly, “Ideal for Women to Form One-Third of Parliament: Lim Hwee Hua,” *Today*, 24 April 2011.

¹⁴⁰Military Officers Association of America, “Declining Military Experience in Congress,” http://www.moaa.org/lac/lac_resources/lac_resources_tips/lac_resources_tips_decline.htm (accessed 25 April 2011).

percent in the year 1999 and 2000. This changing character of the government and the reduction in the military strength would cause a divergence between the two groups to grow. In addition to the two factors mentioned earlier that would cause a dilution in the level of military experience in the government, the discontinuity of conscription could potentially hasten the civil/military relations gap.

Without conscription, defense would have to be provided by a smaller group of all volunteer forces. Because of the intrinsic cultural gap between the military and society, this creates detachment between these two entities. Gronke and Feaver highlight that when this happens, a certain level of mistrust between the two may occur.¹⁴¹ A majority of the civilians may no longer be concerned with or participate in national security decisions. Using the American example, where less than one percent of Americans serve in the military, Adrian Lewis observes that American citizens have become disengaged spectators during the recent two gulf wars.¹⁴² In Singapore, the SAF is also increasing its participation in overseas operations over the years. Bacevich points out that with a professional military, politicians and military leaders can be less sensitive to domestic sentiments when deploying soldiers.¹⁴³ He also cautions that when citizens become indifferent to the military, it would severely undermine the relationship between the

¹⁴¹Paul Gronke and Peter D. Feaver. "Uncertain Confidence; Civilian and Military Attitudes About Civil-Military Relations," *Triangle Institute for Security Studies* (2000): 40.

¹⁴²Adrian R. Lewis, "Conscription, the Republic, and America's Future," *Military Review* (November-December 2009): 15.

¹⁴³Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008), 173.

citizens and the military. Latent alienation between the military and society may manifest without conscription.

Assuming the relationship between the countries of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations and its neighbors are good, based on the progression of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations Charter, external threats facing Singapore would be low.¹⁴⁴ However, the disharmony between the military and civilian elites and disunity between the natives and NC could elevate internal threats. When this happens, Desch's prediction of a worst case scenario of poor civil/military relations could happen. The once strong civilian oversight of the military may wane.

Civil-Military Relations–Neo-conscription

Schiff's civil/military relations model states that when the partnership between the military, civilian elites, and citizens converge, the dichotomy between civilian and military shrinks. Neo-conscription could synergize these three elements by bringing them closer together. The overarching NS would not only provide for military defense and civil defense but also recruit for economic defense, psychological defense, and social defense. Hence, all citizens could participate in the total defense of the nation. New citizens or citizens who join the government would now have NS experience and the overall total defense experience in the parliament would maintain or even increase. Therefore neo-conscription may improve the dynamics of civil/military relations in Singapore.

However, Goodman cautions that as the military extends its reach into the different segments of the society, it may relentlessly pursue its own narrow corporate

¹⁴⁴Secretariat, ASEAN, "Asean Charter," <http://www.aseansec.org/21861.htm> (accessed 25 April 2011).

interest at all cost. Janowitz also observes that the military will often place its organizational interest on top of larger social good.¹⁴⁵ When the military starts to be too involved in public service, this may compromise the democratic process. Since the armed forces are usually well established and better resourced, it may stifle the opportunities for private or public sectors to develop its own expertise.¹⁴⁶ In the case of Singapore, the additional manpower may reduce productivity. Military elites no longer face resource constraints and may squander excess manpower in non-mission essential areas. Furthermore, a well resourced SAF involvement in other non-military areas might also inhibit the development of essential public or private institutions expertise in the free market.

¹⁴⁵Janowitz, 285.

¹⁴⁶Goodman, 39.

Scenarios Comparison

Table 8. Comparing the Different Impacts on Social Cohesion and Civil-Military Relations			
	Conscription Continues	Discontinue Conscription	Neo-conscription
Social Cohesion	Social division may occur between natives and new citizens (poor) Ethnic enclaves may form between natives and new citizens (poorest)	Social cohesion may improve in the short term (better) Social division may happen in the long run (poorer) Alienation between the military and society may occur (poor)	Social cohesion may improve with common NS experiences (best) Social cohesion may improve at the expense of the diffusion of security resources (poor)
Civil-Military Relations	Small decrease in military experience in the government due to increase new citizens and women in parliament (poor) Widens civil-military relations gap (poorer)	Large decrease in military experience in the government (poorest) Poor civil-military relations (poorest)	Increase total defense experience in the government (good) Narrow self interest of the military (poor) Neglect core mission of the military (poor)

Source: Created by author.

In summary, the first scenario shows that the current NS policy may cause a social divide between citizens and NC, formation of ethnic enclaves, and change in civil/military relations. On the one hand, social cohesion amongst natives who continue to share a common NS experience can be expected to be maintained. On the other hand a social divide may form between the natives, NC, and PR. Even though the government constantly reviews tangible monetary benefits for NSmen, to recognize the yoke citizens

bear to serve the country, the growing tension between NC and natives on the fairness of the system, may cause social disintegration in the long run.¹⁴⁷

Civil/military relations may also change due to the evolving demographics of MP, as an increasing number of women and NC are serving in the parliament. Hence, as the number of MP with military experience declines, the gap between the military and civilian authority may widen. Goodman highlights that in the post Cold War world, it is imperative that civilian policy makers understand the needs of the military establishment.¹⁴⁸ He believes that without the necessary knowledge, the civil/military relations will be degraded. Thus, the military may be further isolated from the civilian elites and eventually lead to a similar political breakdown situation that occurred in Venezuela in 1992.¹⁴⁹ Even though a coup is unlikely to happen in Singapore with a conscription system, the decrease in military experience in the government, due to an increase in females and NC as MP, is likely to affect the existing civil/military relations balance. According to Horowitz, a fundamental linkage between military experience of civilian elites and policies exist.¹⁵⁰ In the same vein, the lack of military experience of the policy makers in Singapore may have an impact on military related policy in parliament.

¹⁴⁷Rachel Chang, 'Nsmen to Get \$9,000 _Recognition Award', *The Straits Times*, 30 August 2010.

¹⁴⁸Goodman, 41.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁵⁰Horowitz and Stam, 4.

Comparing the second scenario to the first case, the discontinuation of conscription might cause a slight improvement in social relationships initially, however the net impact on social cohesion in the long run would deteriorate. Without conscription, the gap between the people and the military may widen. In the first scenario, military experience forges a link between the military and the people. It also reduces the idea that the military is just another occupational group. Without conscription, the skewed representation in the professional force may cause a prevalent sense of social exclusion. Hence, as the population in Singapore gets more diverse, maintaining social harmony amongst the different groups becomes a challenge. Despite the myriad of social programs, none is as powerful as conscription. Even though there may be critics of the NS policy, a majority of citizens agree that conscription has an important role in building social cohesion. The National Service obligation serves as an integration tool that brings people from all walks of life and ethnicities together for a shared experience. Additionally, the strong civilian political leadership oversight over the armed forces, which was beneficial to both groups, may disappear. With a reduction in the level of military experience in the government, ministers and MP may accord less priority to the military.¹⁵¹

In the final scenario, neo-conscription appears to provide a middle ground between option one and two. It leverages the benefits of conscription and mitigates its negative consequences by conscripting all male citizens. Hence both NC and citizens would share the responsibility for total defense. This does not only provide a holistic defense framework in the form of total defense but also facilitates the interaction of the diverse groups.

¹⁵¹Horowitz and Stam, 4.

As the number of NC in Singapore increases, natives become wary of the NC ability to integrate into the society. Natives often regard NC as a “fair weather” group, who are here for economic gains and would leave as soon as trouble brews. The unfamiliarity between the two groups may have caused this mental model. Based on current NS policy, which helps to integrate the diverse ethnic groups in Singapore, conscripting NC may also help to create a shared experience between citizens and NC. Studies have shown that integrated military service creates a positive impact on acculturation and cross-cultural learning.¹⁵² Without NS, this rite of passage disappears. Therefore if the government terminates conscription, they need to put in place other programs to assimilate the two groups.

Recently, the government has implemented the Singapore Citizenship Journey. In this program, NC have to complete an online tutorial and quiz, a half day tour to key national institutions, and a sharing session with grassroots leaders to help these naturalized citizens to readjust to the way of life in Singapore.¹⁵³ The programs may be useful but ineffective because of the lack of social interaction with Singaporeans from different segments of the society. In this case, conscription could better serve this social integrative function.

In terms of civil/military relations, a majority of the population gets to know the military through either personal experience or a conscript in the family. Without NS,

¹⁵²David L. Leal, “The Multicultural Military: Military Service and the Acculturation of Latinos and Anglos,” *Armed Forces and Society* 29, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 219.

¹⁵³National Integration Council, “Singapore Citizenship Journey,” <http://app.nationalintegrationcouncil.org.sg/SingaporeCitizenshipJourney.aspx> (accessed 25 April 2011).

Singaporeans would get to know the military via television or open houses. In fact, Nair observes that conscription in Singapore has already forged a national identity that replaces individualism.¹⁵⁴ More often than not, she observes that citizens who had served in the military would bring along military core values such as discipline, teamwork, and efficiency into the workforce and society at large. Lecomte also made similar observations in France. He saw conscription as the core carrier of the values of the French Republic and as a national institution that imbued virtues in the people.¹⁵⁵ Without NS, the military and society cultural gap would be widened; these two entities may soon be out of sync with each other.

Singaporeans generally agreed that NS had served the nation's security and social needs well.¹⁵⁶ Compared to an orientation program, the NS journey would have a greater impact on citizens from all walks of life. However, with the influx of NC, the current policy may create division amongst the population if left unchanged. Hence, neo-conscription may present a possible option as the new policy, even though it has its own set of issues. The greatest fear is the diversion of NS resources into other total defense areas that may affect the operational readiness of the armed forces. Additionally, the implementation of a fair and transparent system to ensure equity may be a challenge. The first part of the analysis shows that some form of conscription is useful and its removal may possibly worsen social cohesion in the long run.

¹⁵⁴Nair, 10.

¹⁵⁵Joenniemi, 69.

¹⁵⁶Ng, –Speech by Dr Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Education and Second Minister for Defense, at Committee of Supply Debate 2010.”

Screening Criteria

This section will screen the three scenarios using the three key principles that underpin conscription policy in Singapore: meeting critical needs, universality, and equity.

Table 9. Decision Matrix			
	Conscription Continues	Discontinue Conscription	Neo-conscription
Meeting Critical National Needs	Yes	Maybe	Yes
Universality	No	Yes	Yes
Equity	No	Partial	Partial

Source: Created by author.

For the first criteria, all three scenarios would be fulfilled. The first and last scenarios would realize the first criteria with a conscript force. The only difference between the first and the third option is the expansion of national critical needs to include total defense requirements, in order to justify the employment of both citizens and NC conscripted in the third option. Without conscription, critical nation defense needs would have to be manned by an all volunteer force in the second scenario. Based on the size of the armed forces in the last ten years, Singapore would require about seventy two thousand and five hundred active soldiers to meet its defense requirements. This number may or may not be met, depending on the recruitment results.

Second, universality ensures fairness of the system as everyone will be conscripted. Amongst the three, scenario one does not meet this principle because the

policy does not oblige NC to serve. Otherwise, scenario two and three would fulfill the principle of universality since the system presents identical management of both natives and NC. Either they are not conscripted or both are conscripted.

Lastly, equity ensures that the system treats everyone fairly and impartial, regardless of status and social background. In the first scenario, equity does not exist it segregates citizens and NC and the latter does not need to serve NS. As NC are usually professionals who belong to the middle or upper-income class, citizens may perceive NC as “paying” to be exempted from national obligations. Equity may exist at the micro level in the second scenario, given that both citizens and NC do not need to serve compulsory NS. However, inequality may occur at the macro level since the burden of national defense would rest on a small cluster of an all volunteer force. As seen earlier in the example of the US Military, more often than not, disparities and inequalities in ranks may also cause inequality at the macro level with an overrepresentation of a specific minority group.¹⁵⁷

Similarly, for the third scenario, equity may exist at the micro level but not at the macro level. Even though neo-conscription requires both citizens and NC to serve, regardless of social status and background, the system would differentiate conscripts and assign them to serve in one of the five arms of Total Defense based on the demand of the system and their qualifications. Although the policy does not distinguish between them based on citizenship, the added credentials of professional New Citizens may give them an advantage over younger citizens to serve in the economic or psychological sectors.

¹⁵⁷Watkins and Sherk, 7.

Summary

The net analysis suggests that status quo may no longer be a viable option because the emerging population pattern can no longer maintain universality and equity. At this point, it may be tempting to discontinue conscription since both scenario two and three are more feasible solutions. Without an obvious external threat to Singapore, it may be politically easier to cease conscription completely, compared to expanding the concept of NS. However, the danger of that is the removal of a key national institution that unifies the diverse population. Meeting critical needs by an all volunteer force is also contingent on the MINDEF's ability to recruit the required numbers. The burden of nation defense would then fall on a selected group which may create equity issue amongst the different social classes. Coupled with Singapore's changing demographic pattern, this may inadvertently cause social disintegration in the long run. The community spirit amongst the different ethnicities and sense of responsibility to the nation could dissipate.

As a small country, Singapore has always emphasized total defense as part of its holistic defense strategy.¹⁵⁸ The key to this is Singapore's ability to mobilize the entire population to defend against any threats. Neo-conscription is an extension of this model. Joenniemi sees it as a form of recruitment that allows citizens to be ~~part~~ part of and influence larger constellations.”¹⁵⁹ Hence the broad definition of conscription allows greater participation of citizens in servicing the nation. The additional manpower and assets recruited would reinforce the total defense model.

¹⁵⁸Ministry of Education, “Total Defense,” <http://www.ne.edu.sg/fiveaspects.htm> (accessed 25 April 2011).

¹⁵⁹Joenniemi, 8.

Additionally, conscripting both citizens and NC in neo-conscription maintains the principle of universality. The people have an obligation for the defense of the nation: citizens and NC. With more people taking up defense related activities, the overall social cohesion and civil/military relations can also expect to improve over time. As Uffe points out, conscription can indeed bind the people into a coherent whole.¹⁶⁰ Using his logic, the real impact of conscription may sometimes lie beyond the security sphere. According to Avant, the notion of social contract will develop over time because a person is only a citizen through participation in soldiering.¹⁶¹ On the other hand, Leander and Joenniemi have also observed the rising cosmopolitan nature of military function.¹⁶² Many armed forces these days are participating in multi-national operations overseas under the ambit of international organizations. This is also true for the SAF. With this, the nationalism argument that conscription engenders, may not be that apparent anymore.

Using the changing demographic pattern in Singapore as the springboard, this chapter has analyzed the social impacts and civil/military relations based on three different scenarios, namely, (1) conscription continues, (2) conscription discontinues, and (3) neo-conscription. The analysis shows that even though conscription is important to Singapore, maintaining the current policy may no longer be tenable. As the number of NC increases, the social rift between citizens and NC is widening. Similarly, the civil/military relations gap between the military and civilian authority may also expand

¹⁶⁰Joenniemi, 6.

¹⁶¹Cohen, *Citizens and Soldiers: The Dilemmas of Military Service* Cornell Studies in Security Affairs, 117.

¹⁶²Joenniemi, 179.

with a reduction in the level of military experience of MP in the government. On the other hand, discontinuing conscription could remove the social bond and may cause a deterioration of the overall social cohesion. The civil/military relations gap may widen, when the defense of the nation relies only on a small cluster of an all volunteer force, causing the military experience of the public and civilian elites to diminish.

The future of the NS policy in Singapore may tilt towards neo-conscription. The pluralization of NS would obligate all Singaporeans, both citizens and NC, to serve under the ambit of the total defense framework. Therefore, conscription may no longer be drafting solely for military defense purposes, as conscripts could perform non-traditional military tasks under the other four pillars of civil defense, psychological defense, economic defense and social defense. Importantly, this expansion of the NS obligation may promote greater involvement of the society, which not only maintains Singapore's defense requirement but also encourages social cohesion within the diverse population. At this point, even though neo-conscription may seem to be the panacea to existing concerns, it is definitely not the silver bullet. It poses its own implementation challenges, such as transparency of the system and increased cost due to expansion of conscription. Chapter 5 will conclude with a summary of how a neo-conscription policy in Singapore could be implemented and recommend follow up research on the topic.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

National Service has played an important role throughout Singapore's history. It not only contributes primarily to the defense of the country but also serves to integrate the diverse population, with a unique Singaporean identity. Importantly, conscription gives concrete meaning to fulfilling national obligation. With the changing demographic gaining prominence in recent years, the main aim of this thesis was to determine the fate of the conscription policy in Singapore. To this end, it has discussed the impact the three different possible scenarios, namely, conscription continues, conscription discontinues, and neo-conscription, would have on social cohesion and civil/military relations. The net analysis suggests that even though conscription remains important and relevant, status quo may no longer be viable. Discontinuing conscription would also take away the integrative mechanism that conscription provides, which is important with the current demographic trend. Hence neo-conscription could present an attractive alternative, especially in socialization of the NC.

So whither conscription in Singapore? Ultimately, the dynamics of the situation precludes any perfect solution to the conscription challenges in Singapore. From the social perspective, with the increase in the number of NC and the corresponding acculturation challenges, what is clear is the need for a review of the current conscription policy. However, because of the fact that conscription has been closely knitted into the social fabric, any changes to the policy would create other unintended secondary impacts. Amongst those discussed in this thesis include social cohesion and civil/military relations. The analyses have shown that NS in Singapore does have its benefits. In

addition to defense against external threats, it also balances Singaporean's pursuit of economic self interest against social civic obligations. On the one hand, ceasing conscription is an unlikely option currently because of the long term social benefits that conscription provides. On the other hand, remaining status-quo might also cause potential social issues. However, what is clear is that Singapore should continue to maintain some form of NS to take advantage of the hosts of benefits that conscription provides. From this perspective, neo-conscription might be the likely trend of a conscription policy in Singapore in the foreseeable future. It could even represent a step towards professionalizing the SAF eventually, a step that the Taiwanese armed forces have already taken.

Recommendations

In order for neo-conscription to be successful it must adhere to these three key principles: Meeting critical national needs, universality, and equity.

First, the five pillars of Total Defense represent the critical needs of the nation. With neo-conscription, a conscript can serve in any one of the five sectors: military defense, civil defense, social defense, psychological defense, economic defense. The notion of total defense is to draw on the strength of every sector of the community to build a resilient nation. The MINDEF continues to be the main agency responsible to administer the conscription policy and allocate conscripts to one of the public sectors, depending on the demand of the nation and supply of draftees. As seen in table 10, each sector could correspond to one or more of the ministries. Importantly, the flow of conscripts is in the order of priority as listed in the table and the military must remain as the top priority. This is to ensure that the system continues to support the primary core

mission of NS. Based on the inflow, the number of conscripts allocated is likely to taper off towards the bottom of the table.

Table 10. Mapping Neo-conscription			
Priority	Total Defense	Ministries	Positions
1	Military Defense	Ministry of Defense	Singapore Army, Republic of Singapore Navy Republic of Singapore Air force
2	Civil Defense	Ministry of Home Affairs	Singapore Police Force, Singapore Civil Defense Force i.e. firefighters
3	Social Defense	Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports Ministry of Education	Social workers Counselors Teachers
4	Psychological Defense	Ministry of Information, Communications and The Arts	Media Relations Strategic Communications
5	Economic Defense	Ministry of Finance Ministry of Trade and Industry	Economists

Source: Created by author.

Second, the first generation of male NC are liable for NS alongside the natives as part of universal conscription. Two of the oft-cited reasons for not drafting NC are their age and their alternate contribution to the nation. In this case, neo-conscription could provide greater flexibility in the deployment of conscripts into the five sectors of Total Defense. It commits the two groups together for a mandatory period of time. This is where they share the responsibility of citizenship as an act of selfless service to the country. From the economic perspective, it is true that NC are usually economically productive already, however they are also getting the corresponding remuneration for

their labor. This is different from NS where the civic obligations come before self interest. The value of NS is the commitment to provide for the good of the society and the compensation is often modest. This involves a sense of sacrifice. The secondary benefit is the common integrative platform that NS provides to unify the community. By having the two groups working, eating, and living together for a period of time, a common Singaporean identity could be forged amidst the rapidly changing demographics. Similar to the Taiwanese system, everyone should go through basic military training before channeling them into the different sectors in Total Defense.

Third, the MINDEF has to administer the system to preserve equity. One of the potential challenges that may undermine neo-conscription is the disproportionate NC serving in non-military areas. As mentioned previously, NC would generally possess higher qualifications compared to younger native Singaporeans. This allows them to be more mobile for deployments in total defense areas other than military. Even though conscripts can state their deployment preference, the actual allocation should depend on the MINDEF's allocation. The measure could ensure that each sector has a suitable representation of the society. Additionally, the MINDEF could also vary the NS duration to balance the "attractiveness" of each sector. For example, amongst the five sectors, the military and civil defense are the most demanding and should have shorter NS durations, compared to the other three.

The three key principles articulated are neither prescriptive nor concrete. It is simplistic to suggest that the implementation of neo-conscription is easy. The principles merely provide an initial framework that might guide the policy realization. In fact, the extensiveness of neo-conscription would create complex administrative and

organizational tasks. Potential challenges such as the increase in monetary and resource costs of conscription and the interagency challenges, to administer the system across the different ministries would arise. Realistically, any policy changes that may have a major impact on the population and country should be first carried out in small series of experimental programs.

The qualitative analysis in this thesis concludes that the current conscription policy in Singapore could be improved and reviewed to better reflect existing demographic trends. Even though the analysis shows that neo-conscription has the potential to replace the current policy, it is a relatively new concept and most of the social impacts discussed, are deduced from other countries. As Singapore's diverse population trend and demographic pattern are rather unique, there is a need to delve deeper with the empirical examination of the subject. A series of studies and public opinion surveys should be conducted to test and verify the deduction logic as a follow up to obtain quantitative analysis on the subject.

1. As the population increases, what is the size of the SAF required and can support, to meet its critical defense requirements?
2. What is the attitude of NC towards NS?
3. What would the demographics pattern of an all volunteer military be like?

National Service has been an important component in the Singapore society. At the end of the day, the form of NS is secondary. What is key is to have a policy that first meets the fundamental purpose of armed forces in Singapore, which is for the defense of the nation. Unless its purpose changes or is fulfilled by other means, the fate of

conscription in Singapore is very much dependent on this function. As long as NS still serves its intention, it will continue to survive albeit taking a different form.

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