

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The end of the Cold War

The fall of the Berlin Wall marked the beginning of the end of the Cold War.¹ Soon, by 3 October 1990, both Germanys re-united and the Eastern defence organisation, the Warsaw Pact, ceased to exist. The unsuccessful 'coup d'état' of conservative forces in the Soviet Union during the winter of 1991/92 marked the definite end of the country's world power, leaving the United States of America as the sole superpower. Some considered this to be the end of history with Western values prevailing, and the definite proof of the supremacy of liberal democracies.² However, one important institution, which had guaranteed the Western world the security it needed to develop in prosperity during the Cold War, now faced growing problems: the armed forces.

Practically overnight most of the Western European defence sectors, with their Cold War structures, became seemingly obsolete. The Cold War strategies were no longer suitable in the world of the 1990s, now that their basis, the antagonism of the two superpowers, had vanished. Territorial defence strategies and large territorial armies with heavy equipment, whether in the German lowlands, the Scandinavian Polar Regions, or the Eastern flanks of the Anatolian highlands, were especially subject to increasing criticism. Where they had once contributed to the success of the West, being a necessary condition to territorial defence, they had now become obsolete and, above all, too expensive. The costs of the Cold War had after all been considerable: 'It consumed national wealth, by giving rise to large and costly defence establishments ...'³

Change to armed forces is rather common, but the pace of change since 1989 had been extraordinary. Most armed forces in the Western world had faced serious downsizing. Moreover, 'the main challenge for the armed forces is that changes stemming from the external strategic context and domestic society are not occurring sequentially but simultaneously. Adjusting to both the international and domestic sources of change involves the difficult task of reconstructing the organisation structures, equipment, doctrine and cultural ethos, which were inherited from the past'.⁴ The policy output of most Western defence sectors no longer fitted the demands of the changing environment or the expectations of society. Thus their legitimacy was undermined and they faced an institutional crisis.

However, new - or during the Cold War overlooked - conflicts flared up, and it was these conflicts that had guided most military adaptations in Western Europe. Peacekeeping and peace enforcing became as important as conventional territorial defence tasks. Due to domestic pressure and pressure from their (security) environment most Western European countries made similar choices when it came to the restructuring of their armed forces: downsizing and the change from invasion forces to forces with crisis management capacities. There were, and are, however, major differences in the way these forces were manned. For example, Germany and the Scandinavian countries chose to uphold the system of military conscription, while France, Spain, and the Netherlands abandoned it.⁵ The question arises why some Western European countries abolished military conscription after the Cold War and why some did not.

1.2 Defence policy and conscription after the Cold War

An answer to the empirical question might be found by looking at the transitions from mass army to 'force-in-being' that many Western armed forces underwent. The American sociologist Burk argues that external reasons lay at the base of the changes most armed forces underwent after World War II, that is from 'mass armed forces' to 'forces-in-being'. The term of mass armed forces refers to large standing armies, as they existed until the end of World War II. After 1945, those armies were transformed into 'forces-in-being'. This means that only a selection of soldiers was active and that a large part of the organisation consisted of units that could be mobilised in case of a threat.

Van Doorn distinguishes three meanings of the term mass armies. Firstly, 'mass army' refers to the large-scale forces of the nineteenth century governing military operations. The increase of size, up to one million soldiers under Napoleon, contributed to the nationalisation and democratisation of the military. 'The 'levee en masse' of the French Revolution was continued in the system of general conscription which gave rise to the concept of 'Volk in Waffen' (nation in arms). The mass army is therefore quite rightly seen in relation to the draft.'⁶ Secondly, 'mass army' can refer to an army 'with a highly undifferentiated and homogeneous composition.'⁷ Thirdly, 'mass' in the sense that mass armies played a role in the appearance of mass societies, refers to the capability of a society to mobilise 'their members for large scale collective objectives.'⁸

There are differences between nations in the extent and ways they convert their mass armies to forces-in-being, especially with concern to the abolition or maintenance of military conscription. These differences can be explained by national factors such as national traditions about the military's 'place' in society and prevailing patterns of national integration.⁹ Important factors for abandoning conscription might also be the combination of the geo-strategic position of a country with the financial burden of all-volunteer forces and social inequity between those who serve and those who are exempt.¹⁰ Klein (1998) indicates the importance of alternative service or weapon-free service for conscious objectors in some societies. As Burk already assumed 'ending conscription is not a necessary outcome of the decline of mass armed forces.'¹¹ The reason to abandon conscription obviously depends on national paths.

In order to explain differences between Western countries in dealing with the conscription issue after the Cold War, the Swiss sociologist Karl Haltiner points to the so-called conscription ratio. This is the 'percentage of conscripts compared with the total of a country's regulars without reserves'.¹² In his opinion, it is wrong just to look at the presence or absence of conscription. It is more important to look at the conscription ratio in order to understand incremental changes, which will lead - in the end - to abolition (Figure 1).

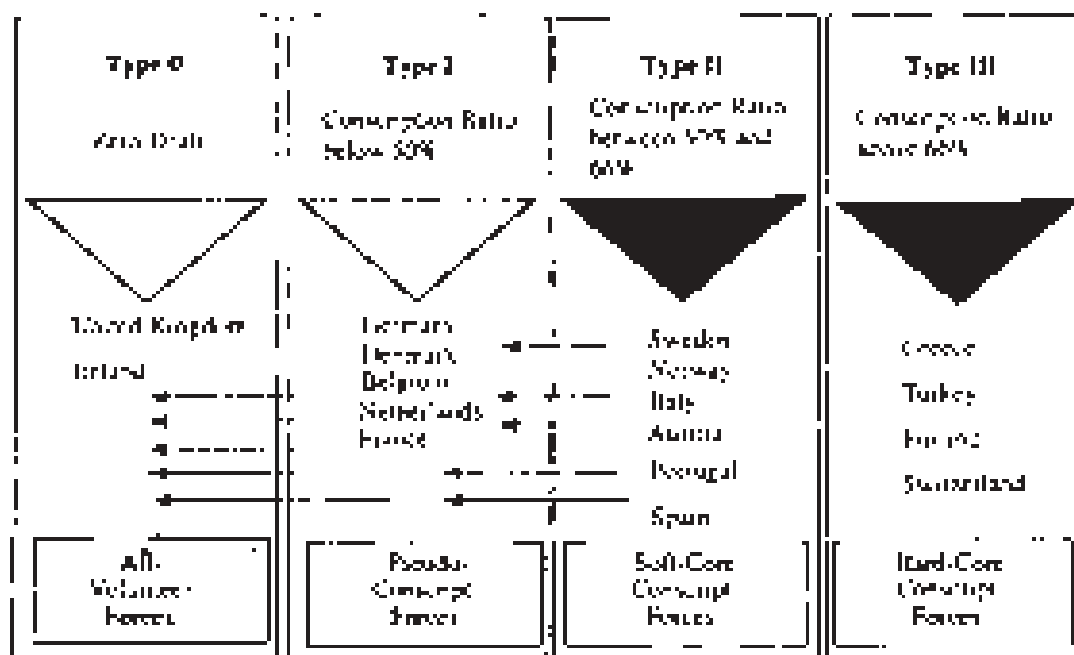


Figure 1: A typology of Force Structures and Expected Changes (Haltiner 1998: 18)

Looking at the conscript ratio, Haltiner differentiates between four types of armed forces:

- Type 0. These forces are purely all-volunteer forces, like the Anglo-Saxon states;
- Type 1. In these forces less than 50% are conscripts. This is why they are called pseudo-conscript forces. This type fosters the unequal burden-sharing of the young men within a nation. Only a minority of every year-class is obliged to serve;
- Type 2. More than half, but less than 66% of the armed forces are filled with conscripts;
- Type 3. Above 66% of all soldiers are conscripts. Regulars and volunteers, often short contracted, have overall cadre or technical functions.

The arrows indicate changes that had already materialised after 1989 or were to be expected.

Haltiner's analysis is valuable for overcoming the dichotomy trap of conscription. Purely differentiating between the sheer existence and absence of conscription leads to unreliable conclusions about the future of conscription. The declining conscript ratio is an important indicator for an incremental process towards the abolition of conscription in many countries. By pointing to the gradations, a first step is set to explain differences in content and speed of national changes of the conscript system.

1.3 The conscription puzzle

Haltiner's innovative analysis refers to social and political pressure for the abolition of conscription. According to him these pressures rise due to the fact that 'conscription is only practised selectively and not universally'¹³ in many type I and type II countries. In other words, due to the increasing inequality of selective draft, conscription will face a growing loss of legitimacy in the countries where it still exists. The author concludes that the choice to uphold or abandon military conscription depends on 'the combination of being a member of a defence alliance and being far from a direct national military threat and participating frequently in international missions.'¹⁴ This last point in particular seems to be of importance, since it is common procedure in all Western democracies that conscripts are not obliged to serve in crisis-management missions.

As valuable as Haltiner's explanation is, it does not tell us anything about the actual policymaking processes within the respective defence sectors, the more he does not elaborate this hypothesis in his article further. Moreover, his approach implies that he does not look at the complex processes within which policymaking in Western democracies takes place, relying instead on a few structural explanations.¹⁵ These structural constraints, such as military threat and being a member of a defence alliance, do not automatically induce or prevent policy and organisational changes. Nor does the increasing loss of an institution's legitimacy automatically lead to pressure on the government by social actors. We therefore must open the 'black-box' of the policy process in order to understand why and how states with conscription respond differently to the same international changes. In particular, we have to focus on the behaviour of policy actors within (inter)national structures.

Since both 'agency and structure are ... the defining components for the understanding of human interaction within a society and of the explanation of social phenomena,'¹⁶ policy outcomes can only be understood by analysing actors' choices, their willingness to choose, within the possibilities the structures provide. In the end, we still do not know for certain how we have to study the political and administrative processes that led to the abolition or maintenance of military conscription in Western Europe after the Cold War. But knowledge about those processes does tell us more about pivotal questions regarding the extent, form and timing of abolition: why did some countries transform conscription while others abolished, and why did some change policy soon after the Cold War while others did not?

This study argues that the post-Cold War changes in Western European defence sectors have to be understood as a consequence of the critical junctures in the security environment of a country. The threats and opportunities those episodes in a sector's history offer to the political, military and societal actors within a country might help to alter the status quo. Crises can break open a path that would otherwise have been closed for policy change, yet whether or not the conscript system is actually changed depends on the policymakers' choices. Although Haltiner admits that the end of the Cold War was important, he only offers partial explanations: 'Strategic and military goal bound factors such as the end of the Cold War and new missions for the armed forces (peace keeping, peace enforcement) seem to be of more importance for the recent changes of force structures in Western Europe [than socio-economic modernisation].'¹⁷ Furthermore, he introduces the tool with which incremental processes towards change in conscription can be recognised, but neglects to go deeper and describe those processes. Are there

dominant actors in these countries, who managed to influence different outcomes? Is conscription a routine or non-political policy issue or can we see political and bureaucratic struggles about this societal institution that had influenced the relation between the citizens and the state for centuries? To answer those questions, the black box of defence policymaking after the Cold War needs to be opened.

This study takes a closer look at two cases from Haltiner's analysis to show that there might be more than structural constraints to national defence policy and that analysing the policy process in greater detail offers a more adequate and precise understanding of how and why states responded to the end of the Cold War in this domain. The study investigates the role of leadership in instigating or opposing reform efforts. It uses a functional approach to leadership and applies it to Sweden and the Netherlands. These cases mark two distinctly different modes of adaptation to the changed environment with regards to conscription within Haltiner's typology stated in Figure 1.¹⁸ In short, the key empirical question of this study is: Why did the Netherlands abandon conscription soon after the Cold War and why did Sweden not do so?

In the past, defence policy and the defence organisation as such had been undeservedly neglected in the study of public administration.¹⁹ Mayer & Khademian claim that scholars neglect defence policy because they do not find it representative for policymaking in general. The authors conclude, however, that defence policy is not merely an extension of foreign policy. Decisions taken in defence policy also influence national policy. In the past, political scientists concentrated on disarmament and polemological questions.²⁰ Furthermore, they described changes of defence policy from a historical perspective.²¹ Especially within Dutch public administration studies only few academic studies have opened the black box of political-administrative defence decision-making, using relevant political and administrative theories. Van Brouwershaven, for example, describes the strategic management at the Dutch Ministry of Defence during turbulent times²² and Van den Hoogen deals with the defence budget decision-making.²³

This study will contribute to the rich sociological tradition of armed forces research by bringing the insights of policy research to the attention of scholars studying civil-military relations. The origins of large-scale policy changes in the 1990s within the stable defence sectors of the Cold War deserve a widespread attention by many different academic disciplines. By paying attention to those changes this study hopes to contribute to an important debate in political and administrative studies about the origins and processes of large-scale reforms in Western policy sectors in general. Unravelling the conscription puzzle in the Netherlands and Sweden serves as an example for the complexity of reforms and policy change in consensual democracies and the role of leadership in those processes. The key theoretical question of this study is, how similarities and differences between the Dutch and Swedish cases can be explained by patterns of leadership in the defence policy sectors of both countries. That is why in the following chapter a theoretical framework will be developed, which takes account of structural constraints, yet emphasises the key role of strategic choices made by policy makers in leadership positions.