



BACKGROUND REPORT

NATO and Civilians in the Armed Forces

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Preface

This background report provides a brief introduction into the extensive and intricate subject of civilian involvement in armed forces, with a specific focus on reserve forces. Given the recent Russian war of aggression against Ukraine which highlighted NATO's potential inadequacy in the event of armed conflict on Member States' territory, the aim of the simulated negotiation of the North Atlantic Council could be to enhance reserve forces collectively, for instance by

establishing standards, sharing best practices, and increasing investments among Member States. It is important to stress that each ambassador and state emphasise their most pressing concerns and prioritise issues to address. We therefore encourage ambassadors to create well-constructed position papers that offer factual information about their country's strengths and weaknesses in this area.

1 Introduction

1.1 The role of civilians in state defence

The ability of civilians to support state defence during war can have various meanings, depending on the situation. It could range from a basic preparedness to support regular armed forces, for example with logistics, navigation and orientation, to provide assistance in possible rescue operations, to the membership in reserve forces or mobilisation of conscripts.¹

A legal definition of the preparedness of civilians could be described as "the ability to provide basic healthcare, the preparation to civil defence, leisure time activities focused on technical and sport self-defence, ability to mutual help and other activities".² According to this definition, civil preparedness does not only take into account the ability of civilians to directly take part in armed forces, but also the various activities that might be useful in case of an armed conflict.³

1.2 Reserve forces

Reserve forces are typically organised as a part of nation's armed forces. They usually consist of military personnel who are not obliged to render continuous full-time service, except in the event of compulsory mobilisation, which is usually reserved for defence crises.⁴

Reservists have regular civil professions during peacetime, meaning they cannot fully replace professional armed forces. However, through this, they are also able to further specialise in civil life and thus

often provide the army with capabilities that it does not keep on the full time level, for instance in law or IT.⁵

There are significant differences in the approaches towards reserve forces throughout the Alliance. A short overview of the Member States can show us the National Guard in the United States as a reserve part of the U. S. Army and the U. S. Air Force organised both on federal and state level. On the state level, the reserves fulfil a specific constitutional role of an element of U.S. armed forces particularly organised by the state of federation.⁶ Some Member States that used to be members of the Warsaw Treaty have established reserve forces as an additional component of national defence which replaced the formerly compulsory military service. A similar situation can also be seen in the United Kingdom and some other states of the "Western bloc".⁷

1.3 Service in armed forces

Conscription is a mandatory enrollment of persons into the armed forces, mainly for military service. This process takes place during peacetime, and is intended to provide civilians with military training to perform peacetime tasks and fill required staffing levels. Although the majority of NATO Member States already abolished mandatory conscription, some have retained it to date.⁸

On the other hand, mobilisation or draft is the enrollment of persons in time of war to directly participate in the conflict. Contrary to mandatory conscriptions that have been abolished in the majority of states, almost all countries around the world kept the

mobilisation law in force. Even in the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, both states are mobilised.

Both mandatory military service and the establishment of reserve forces may provide the armed forces with people that went through a certain military

training and therefore can be mobilised and fight. Mandatory military service can make mobilisation easier, as the mobilised personnel already got the training. However, it is necessary to compare its level, which can differ significantly among states.

2 Historical context and legislation

2.1 The post–Cold War era

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the conclusion of the Cold War. At the time, a fervent debate arose about whether European countries should retain their military readiness to counteract possible armed aggressions, and was brought up regularly until the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. As there were no imminent threats, a number of Member States opted to downsize their armed forces and spend less than 2 % of their GDP on defence expenses.⁹

The annexation of Crimea resulted in a prompt change in this attitude and almost all of the Member States started to reinforce their defence capabilities. In the area of reserve forces, this means increasing their personal capacities and the modernization of equipment.¹⁰ In the area of civil defence the “Commitment To Enhance Resilience” was adopted during the Warsaw Summit of 2016, during which allies pledged to strengthen the readiness of the reserves and affirmed that they are each member's responsibility.¹¹

2.2 Legal background

Article 3

In order to more effectively achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.

The commitment to strengthen the capabilities of civil defence is legally based in Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty (NAT). It ensures that NATO members work on “interoperability”, meaning they use existing resources as efficiently as possible and try to actively overcome differences in military tactics or procedures.¹² However, its main objective is to set up a requirement for Member States to contribute to NATO's collective security. The phrasing is purposely unspecific and it does

“Article 3: In order to more effectively achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to

not contain the definition of “capacity to resist armed attack” or the meaning of how such capacity should be established.¹³

In the field of protection of civilians, the important document is the commitment from the Warsaw summit in 2016, which is mentioned in several parts of this background report. Following this summit, the current military concept was adopted in 2018 and its implementation handbook in 2020. All of those documents were also reflected in the Strategic Concept,

adopted in Madrid 2022 in the light of the war in Ukraine.¹⁴

The three most important commitments from the Strategic Concept in the area of readiness of civilians are contained in Paragraph 26:

- Identifying and mitigating strategic vulnerabilities and dependencies, including with respect to critical infrastructure, supply chains and health systems;
- ensuring civil preparedness to provide for continuity of government, the delivery of essential services to population and civil support to armed forces.¹⁵

3 Reserve forces and NATO

The Alliance works with several advisory bodies associating reserve forces and their personnel, such as the National Reserve Forces Committee (NRFC), Interallied Confederation of Reserve Officers (CIOR) and Interallied Confederation of Medical Reserve Officers (CIOMR).

3.1 National Reserve Forces Committee (NRFC)

Established in 1981, the National Reserve Forces Committee serves as an open forum for discussion about reservists and civilian preparedness. In 1996, it also took the role of the Military Committee advisor, providing advice on issues concerning reserve forces. NRFC also has other responsibilities, such as strengthening readiness and civil preparedness by providing a forum for exchange of information and military practices. However, its objectives are neither tactical nor strategic, meaning they do not have any real commanding power on the battlefield.¹⁶

The NRFC is composed of the national officials responsible for the Reserve Forces of the nations signatory to the North Atlantic Treaty and assembles at least twice a year. It comprises the Chairman and

a Secretariat, national delegations of NATO members, invited observers and International Military Staff (also known as Liaison Officers of NATO Headquarters), Allied Command Operations and Allied Command Transformation. The chairing position is always held by a member country for a period of two years. A small number of non-member states also attend, namely Australia, Austria, Georgia, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea.¹⁷

3.2 CIOR and CIOMR and their field of action

The CIOR and CIOMR also serve as advisory bodies. Both of these “confederations” were originally founded in 1948 and both were recognised by NATO in 1976. Their aim is to share best practices and information among reserve forces, similarly to NRFC. CIOR has a permanent representative to the NATO headquarters and the International Military Staff, while CIOMR keeps close relations with the NATO Committee of the Chiefs of Military Medical Services (COMEDS). The main distinction between NRFC and CIOR/CIOMR is that while the NRFC consists of state reserve chiefs (and COMEDS of military medical unit chiefs), CIOR and CIOMR act independently as bodies of officers from individual reserve forces, with their leadership elected by national reserve officer associations rather than appointed by states.

4 Recent examples of the involvement of reserve forces and civilians

4.1 Peacetime activities of armed forces and reserves

Natural disasters could be mentioned as a “typical” event for the involvement of reservists. Well organised reservists can, alongside regular armed forces, greatly help to deal with floods, earthquakes or large-scale fires. In such cases, these forces are usually commanded by “civil” crisis management authorities, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the United States,¹⁸ or the National Firefighter Corps in the Czech Republic.¹⁹ An example of a strategic document prepared for such extraordinary peacetime events is the National Preparedness Goal, published by FEMA.²⁰

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 was a tough test for the healthcare systems of all countries around the world, leading to a frequent involvement of army medical units. In some Member States, the army played a very important role in the management of the pandemic, for instance helping with handling the sheer amount of patients or with logistics, whereas in others, it almost did not interfere at all. The crisis also exposed the differences between the states in the quality of civilian crisis management.

4.2 Non commissioned civilians in armed conflicts

The involvement of reservists during natural disasters differs significantly from their deployment during wartime, where they would likely be engaged in military operations. To prepare for this, a national campaign could be launched to highlight the potential contribution of civilians in wartime activities.²¹ For instance, NGOs in the Middle East have already provided training to civilians on how to survive in conflict zones,²² while the Ready Army Civilian initiative provided

a workforce of civilian experts for the US Armed Forces.²³

As was mentioned in the first chapter, the definition of civil preparedness is truly broad. Some examples of such activities civilians include searching for the injured, providing first aid during shelling of populated areas, repairing damaged civil infrastructure and providing local knowledge in military operations. It remains questionable how well civilians of NATO states are prepared for such situations, as well as which good practices could be shared to improve their readiness among the alliance.

4.3 Reservists in armed conflicts

A well organised system of mandatory military training or the possession of reserve forces is crucial for a state's ability to mobilise and deploy these forces in military operations. However, it remains undecided how much training these mobilised forces require. This can be well illustrated by the heavy losses of the Russian mobilised soldiers, who have been forced to fight in the armed conflict without adequate training.²⁴

Contrarily, one example of an effective reserve force are the Territorial Defence Forces of Ukraine. This branch of armed forces started to gather strength after the annexation of Crimea, although it is constituted from volunteers and not fully commissioned soldiers.²⁵ Despite those units not having the full training and equipment, they play a vital role in the ongoing war, helping to increase the numbers of the Ukrainian army. Especially during the first months of the war, those units were able to successfully defend the cities of Kyiv, Sumy, Chernihiv or Kharkiv.²⁶

5 Summary

In conclusion, the wide-reaching topic of civilians in armed forces can be divided into three simplified questions:

- What can civilians, who are able to fight, do during the time of war?
- What should the rest of civilians do during the time of war?
- What should such civilians do during peacetime?

The policies regarding the readiness of the civilians adopted during the Warsaw Summit were originally based on lessons learned in Afghanistan and Libya. Due to the new experiences arising from the

Russian aggression against Ukraine, there is now room for a big change not only in policy-making on the NATO and state level, but also in society as a whole.²⁷

While during the Warsaw summit of 2016, this discussion was still somewhat abstract, it is nowadays a priority of the Alliance to ensure at least a degree of safety of its own civilians in case of war, having learned the lesson from Ukraine.²⁸ Therefore, one task for the ambassadors will be to find a suitable role for NATO in the process of creating and adopting those policies in their respective states.

Questions for discussion

- Does your state have reserve forces? How do they work?
- What is your state national defence strategy and which role do reserve forces play in it?
- Should reserve forces still be managed on a national level?
- How should the NATO level organisations focusing on reserve forces work in the future?
- Should NATO coordinate national programmes on civil preparations?
- Is there a way to “standardise” civil preparedness programmes or the reserves?

Recommended further reading

The absolute basic information about the topic can be found on NATO websites. It is also highly recommended to read the Strategic Concept. The delegates will be working on a similar document and the Strategic Concept is a good example of how an official NATO document looks like.

- NATO review: <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/about.html>
- NATO Strategic Concept: <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

The “About us” sections of reserve forces websites might help you find more information about them, for example at the following links:

- Armed Forces of the USA: <https://www.army.mil/about/>
- Reserve forces of the Czech Republic: <https://aktivnizaloha.army.cz/>

To dig into more details, you can try to find the official concept of your respective state's reserve forces. Good examples (with lots of information relatable to every member state) are:

- Sweden: <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/siteassets/4-om-myndigheten/dokumentfiler/publikationer/pocket-guide-to-the-swedish-armed-forces>
- United Kingdom: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/985593/20210512_Reserve_Forces_Review_2030.pdf

Non-governmental organisations focusing on topics of civilian defence in a broader context can also be helpful in your research.

- International Crisis Group: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/>
- The Stimson Center: <https://www.stimson.org/>
- The Carnegie Europe: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/>

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Pražský studentský summit

Pražský studentský summit je unikátní vzdělávací projekt existující od roku 1995. Každoročně vzdělává přes 300 studentů středních i vysokých škol o současných globálních tématech, a to především prostřednictvím simulace jednání čtyř klíčových mezinárodních organizací – OSN, NATO, EU a G20.

Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky

AMO je nevládní nezisková organizace založená v roce 1997 za účelem výzkumu a vzdělávání v oblasti mezinárodních vztahů. Tento přední český zahraničně politický think-tank není spjat s žádnou politickou stranou ani ideologií. Svou činností podporuje aktivní přístup k zahraniční politice, poskytuje nestrannou analýzu mezinárodního dění a otevírá prostor k fundované diskusi.

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