

THE BELGIAN ARMED FORCES IN THE "POST-MILITARY SOCIETY"

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Introduction

The end of the cold war, technological and social-cultural changes have caused the end of the mass army. With the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and of the Soviet Union itself, our armies' missions have changed. They are no longer to deter a known adversary, but (probably) to maintain or enforce peace in regions where our interests are in jeopardy and/or for humanitarian reasons.

This change in the role of modern military organisations had already been foreseen by M. Janowitz. In a now classical book, published for the first time in 1960, *The Professional Soldier*, he used the expression "constabulary force" to typify such a force that "is continuously prepared to act, committed to the minimum use of force, and seeking viable international relations rather than victory". Recent examples of such constabulary missions are the Gulf War, Somalia, ex-Yugoslavia, Cambodia, etc.

The format Western military organisations should take in the future has been the topic of numerous studies. Various names have been proposed. The two most famous are probably Martin Shaw's (1991) **post-military society** and Moskos' (1992) **warless society**.

If one tries to summarise their arguments, one arrives at the following portrait of future military organisations (Van der Meulen 1992):

- (1) They will be constabulary forces, acting for the U.N. or other international bodies;
- (2) They will be All-Volunteer Forces (AVF);
- (3) To be competitive on the labour market, they will have to become more attractive. They will have to propose better working conditions: better salary, flexible working hours, more open access to women and to minorities in general.

In a constabulary force and in the new engagements scenarios, draftees do not have their place anymore. This explains why, in most countries where a conscription system still exists (almost everywhere in continental Europe), the debate on the end of the draft is now open.

Constabulary missions, however, raise two interrelated kinds of problems for armed forces:

- (1) **Public support:** peace-keeping or peace-enforcing operations, while very popular in the short-term, can be more difficult to

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legitimise in the long-term among the public, particularly if it involves casualties and/or fuzzy goals.

(2) **Recruitment:** Constabulary missions can act as a deterrent as far as enlistment of young volunteer personnel is concerned, because of the higher risks to life involved.

This paper aims at assessing the impact of these new constabulary missions on the public image of armed forces and on recruitment prospects of enlisted personnel. In particular, it analyses the complex relationship between these new missions, public image of armed forces and recruitment prospects. It takes the Belgium armed forces as a case.

In "standard" ("normal") organisations, there is a positive relationship between the image the organisation has among the public and its recruitment prospects (Perrow 1961). In the case of military organisations, a third variable makes this relationship more complex: the degree of risk involved in the job.

Survey data indeed show that, if participating in UN missions has a rather positive impact on the image of the Belgian armed forces, this does not result in making military career more attractive, because of the risks perceived in the new roles of armed forces.

Insofar as Belgian armed forces are more and more involved in the so-called "new" missions, the prospect of recruiting enough volunteers to meet the needs of the future all-volunteer force seems problematic, if no remedial measures are taken.

Surveys in 1993. This paper uses data from two omnibus telephone (CATI) surveys commissioned by the Department of Social Sciences at the Royal Military Academy for the Joint Chiefs of Staff (manpower directorate). Both surveys were carried out by INRA-Marketing Unit.

The first survey was conducted in January 1993 among a representative random sample of the Belgian population aged 15 and more (N = 1008). The second survey was conducted in July 1993 among a representative random sample of young non university Belgian graduates aged 15-25 (N = 1001).

Public Image of the Belgian Military

Controversial opinions of the Belgian armed forces. Respondents in the two surveys in 1993 were asked the following question: "Do you rather agree or rather disagree with the following statement: Since it participates in operations in ex-Yugoslavia and Somalia, I have a better opinion of the Belgian military." Fifty-six per cent respondents in the Belgian population agreed with the statement, and so did fifty-one per cent of youngsters. In both samples, thirty-five per cent disagreed, and nine or eleven per cent, respectively, did not answer the question.

A majority in both samples has a better opinion of the Belgian armed forces since their participation in U.N. peace-keeping missions. This could be partly because a majority of Belgians approve such peace-keeping interventions. For example, the Eurobarometer 39 of Spring 1993 found that 58% Belgians aged 15 and over were in favour of the proposal that "in the framework of a common foreign and defence policy, the EC should intervene militarily in the former Yugoslavia, in order to re-establish peace," and only 24% against it (EC12: 55% in favour, 28% against).

Will this opinion continue to improve along with the continuation and "routinisation" of such constabulary missions? This would be interesting to check through the repetition of a similar survey.

