1. THE POLICY CONTEXT AND PROBLEM

This chapter provides some context on (1) the reasons why Italy decided to end conscription,\(^2\) (2) the government transition plans for the armed forces in general and the Army in particular, and (3) the most salient issues confronting Italian Army planners as they seek to meet the goals set in such plans.

1.1 THE DECISION TO END THE DRAFT

Several factors have prompted the Italian government to end the draft. As discussed below, strategic, operational and domestic considerations were all critical in weakening the usefulness and acceptability of the draft, both as a method for military manpower procurement and as a social institution.

Strategic considerations

The changes to the strategic environment around Italy since the end of the Cold War have provided a renewed impetus for restructuring the country’s military establishment. The demise of the Soviet Union largely mooted NATO’s in-depth territorial defense doctrine, and therefore Italy’s traditional reliance on large numbers of conscripts. Few planners believe that the country’s territorial integrity is threatened by potential attacks, especially strikes carried out by ground forces.

At the same time, however, geopolitical shifts in Italy’s southern and eastern peripheries have triggered a set of new security challenges. Instability and local conflicts in adjacent regions--such as renewed conflict in the Balkans, or the rise of a North African regime hostile to Western interests--could have a profound impact on Italian national interests.\(^3\) Such challenges can be best addressed by an active Italian

\(^2\) The AVF law does not abolish the draft; it actually suspends it until further notice. This wording was necessary in order to avoid amending the constitution, which enshrines the concept of universal military service.

\(^3\) When describing the security challenges facing Italy, policy makers usually refer to the presence of two arcs of crisis: one that
role in preventive diplomacy and crisis management, underwritten by robust power projection capabilities. Thus, Italy now conceives its national security less in terms of the defense of territory and more as the defense of interests that often require actions outside of national borders.

**Operational considerations**

Italian planners have also realized that, from an operational standpoint, the need for improved power projection capabilities can best be met through a greater use of professional personnel. Italy’s numerous post-Cold War missions overseas, including Somalia, Bosnia, Albania, and Kosovo, have underscored the need to acquire the capabilities for quick and repeated troop deployments beyond national borders. Moreover, operations such as the ones in Bosnia and Kosovo are complex, requiring a level of skill and training that cannot be imparted in—and utilized within—10 month’s worth of military service. These operations also take place in potentially hostile conditions, making the deployments of conscripts politically unpalatable.

The fact that other NATO allies such as France, Spain and the Netherlands have fully embraced the notion of a fully-volunteer Army and are already transitioning toward that model has put further pressure on Italy to follow suit. Since future Italian deployments will likely take place in a coalition context, military planners in Rome have concluded that operating alongside volunteer forces from allied countries requires a similar level of professionalism and skill.

**Domestic considerations**

Perhaps the most immediately important factor behind the decision to adopt an AVF was the weakened sustainability and legitimacy of the draft as a social institution. During the 1990s, a series of developments called into question the very premises on which the system of conscription was based. These include the increase in popularity of

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runs from the Baltic through the Balkans and into the Caucasus, and another through North Africa, across the Middle East and into the Persian Gulf. See Kemp (1996).

4 As of September 2000, Italy had 8,145 soldiers deployed overseas, 7,910 of which are stationed in Bosnia, Albania, FYROM and Kosovo (Italian Ministry of Defense, 2000).
an all-volunteer force among the public, the swift increase of individuals opting out of military service, the steady decline in the size of military-age male cohorts, and the lack of social representativeness of military service.

Increase in popularity of volunteer forces

The weakening of conscription’s strategic and military rationale has been matched by a decrease of its popularity among the Italian public. According to a series of periodic surveys tracking changes in public opinion on military matters (Difebarometro), the option of maintaining the draft to support a mixed/conscript Army has steadily declined since the mid-1990s (see Figure 1.1). The all-volunteer military has instead grown steadily in popularity, with two-thirds of the respondents claiming this would be their preferred system in 1999. In the same year, only 5% of the respondents indicated a fully conscripted Army as the most desirable military manpower model.

**Figure 1.1 Support for alternative approaches to military manpower procurement**

![Graph showing support for military manpower procurement](source: Difebarometro)

To be sure, the government’s decision in late 1998 to consider suspending or eliminating the draft played a role in shaping public opinion. At the same time, however, the marked shift in favor of an all-volunteer force was in large part caused by the realization by most Italians that the draft had become unnecessary, unsustainable, and less legitimate.
Increased opting out

One of the key factors that has significantly impaired the viability and legitimacy of conscription has been the steady increase in the number of individuals of military age who decline to spend the mandatory 10 months in barracks, and instead decide to dedicate an equal amount of time to what is called “civilian” service—working for an approved non-governmental organization or a local government body.

As shown in Figure 1.2, applications to opt out of military service began to mount dramatically in the mid-1990s, when the duration of civilian service was shortened to match the length of military service.5 Faced with a choice between working for organizations such as the Red Cross in one’s city and the rigors of military life, Italian youth began what turned out to be a mass migration away from military service (Figure 1.2).

**Figure 1.2 Number of conscripts vs. opt out requests lodged, 1989-1999**

![Graph showing number of conscripts vs. opt out requests lodged, 1989-1999](source: Italian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS))

Such migration was given a further boost by a 1999 law which greatly facilitated the complete exoneration from service by individuals whose applications for civilian service are accepted (Battistelli, 2000). This provision was certainly a factor behind the large increase in applications lodged in 1999, when they almost matched the number of conscripts actually serving in the military.

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5 The vast majority of lodged applications have traditionally been accepted, albeit with some considerable delay in a number of cases.
Decreasing social representativeness

The likely prospect that in the near future there would be more individuals in civilian rather than military service seriously concerned even the most ardent supporters of the draft within the Ministry of Defense. Equally importantly, the increased popularity of civilian service helped to further weaken the draft as an institution, whose legitimacy is obtained from the notion of universal military service. In fact, the military also had to face increasingly strident criticisms that its conscription system was (and still is) falling short of its basic representativeness goal. As Figure 1.3 shows, the distribution of military conscripts by region of origin and level of education are skewed toward over-representation of lower-educated, and Southern, Italian youth.

**Figure 1.3 Conscripts and objectors by region of origin and education level**

Those who manage to opt out are mostly well-educated Northerners, who can rely on a large local pool of certified NGOs and local government bodies willing to employ them for 10 months (Northern youth as a whole make up a third of the military-age cohort). Less educated Southerners instead form the bulk of the conscript military, in part because the South lacks a vibrant NGO community. In fact, three-fourths of the certified NGOs in which young men can serve are located in Northern and Central Italy (Battistelli, 2000).
Demographic factors

To make matters worse, the pool of potential conscripts is destined to shrink as a result of an imminent decline in military-age male population. This demographic trend started in the early 1990s, and is projected to reach its minimum in 2014, according to a “middle of the road” population growth scenario prepared by the Italian Statistics Institute (ISTAT). The decline is even more significant for the 20-to-24-year old cohort (not shown in Figure 1.4), since it still has to experience the “valley” in the age distribution created by today’s smaller 17-to-19-year old cohort. By 2011, there are forecasted to be 1.45 million Italian males between the ages of 20 to 24, compared to 2.22 million in 1996.

Figure 1.4 Projections for selected military-age youth cohorts

![Graph showing projections for selected military-age youth cohorts](source: Italian Statistics Institute (ISTAT))

Italian military planners had to some extent been preparing for a reduction of conscripts in the force--both in absolute terms and relative to volunteers. In fact, Italy’s New Defense Model (a 1995 white paper issued by the Joint Chiefs) called for, among other things, a gradual reduction of conscripts to 72,000 by 2005, out of a total reduced force of 250,000 (Italian Joint Staff, 1995). However, the combination of several adverse trends, as well as the decision taken in the mid-1990s to reduce a conscript’s tour from 12 to 10 months (which effectively decreased the total man-hours available from each cohort by
16%), put in jeopardy even the most modest numerical aspirations for the draft.

1.2 THE NEW FORCE AND TRANSITION PLANS

The factors mentioned above prompted Italy’s government to suspend the draft, and to move from a mixed conscript/professional force of about 280,000 to one that is significantly smaller (190,000) and made up exclusively of professionals. The government plan calls for a gradual reduction in the number of conscripts until this category is eliminated at the end of 2006. At that point the military will have reached its 190,000 ceiling, although the steady-state composition of the force will not be attained until 2020 (Italian Senate, 2000). The transition period extends over two decades because there is only a small amount of career volunteers currently in service: this personnel category can only be expanded after a larger number of junior volunteers is recruited and progresses through the ranks. Such time delay implies that the military will have to wait until 2007 before it can sense any significant increase in the number of career volunteers, as shown in Figure 1.5. As the number of career enlisted volunteers increases, the stock of NCOs is projected to decrease.

Figure 1.5 The overall transition plan up to 2020

The steady-state force will be composed of 42,000 junior enlisted soldiers (22% of the force); 62,500 career enlisted soldiers (33%); 65,000 NCOs (34%); and 20,500 officers (11%). What is abundantly clear
from such plans is that the steady-state force will be much more senior than today’s. According to the cost projections contained in the AVF law, the financial burdens of the transition are likely to be small. Doing away with conscripts gives no financial leverage, since draftees have always been paid well below the economic value of their services (Cooper, 1977). But the increases in the costs associated with a more senior enlisted force (given the increase in career enlisted personnel) will be offset, according to plans, by a reduction in higher-paid NCOs.6

Army plans

As mentioned above, much of the recent changes to the Italian military manpower structure were guided by the armed forces’ efforts to transition toward a “New Defense Model.” In accordance with such plans, the Army has been gradually decreasing its reliance on conscripts, and instead began to expand its intake of junior as well as career enlisted volunteers (Figure 1.6).

![Figure 1.6 Evolution of the Army’s personnel mix, 1990-2000](image)

The introduction of an all-volunteer force will prompt another significant change in the planned personnel mix for the Army. In all likelihood, the total size of the ground forces will be of about 112,000 soldiers, or 60% of the entire AVF.7 In the new steady-state, there

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6 The costs considered here are average costs per soldier, and are based on the projections contained in the AVF law.

7 As of January 2001, the precise Army force mix was still the subject of discussion within the Ministry of Defense. The numbers
should be approximately 12,000 officers, 25,000 NCOs, and 75,000 enlisted soldiers (most of whom would be career enlisted). This in stark contrast to the today’s force, as well as to the old steady-state force (Table 1.1). While its size will be much smaller, the number of enlisted volunteers will have to almost triple to meet the planned steady-state requirements, while the number of Marshals—the senior NCO category—will instead have to shrink by approximately 12,000 (45%) to 15,000.8

Table 1.1 The new (estimated) Army steady-state personnel structure compared to the previous one and the situation in 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>Old steady-state</th>
<th>New steady-state</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Officers</td>
<td>17,651</td>
<td>11,350</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCOs</td>
<td>29,536</td>
<td>28,400</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshals</td>
<td>27,341</td>
<td>17,700</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergeants</td>
<td>2,195</td>
<td>10,700</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enlisted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>volunteers</td>
<td>25,452</td>
<td>39,722</td>
<td>75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>8,520</td>
<td>16,722</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>16,932</td>
<td>23,000</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscripts</td>
<td>104,628</td>
<td>70,528</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>177,267</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>112,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

source: Ministry of Defense

1.3 TRANSITION ISSUES

The drastic changes facing the Army have prompted several observers to question whether the transition to an AVF will be successful and sustainable. Some, like former Defense Minister Andreatta, doubt whether a sufficient number of qualified volunteers can be recruited and retained.9 The eventual costs of a transformation to a professional force in a very budget-constrained environment have also caused concern among various observers and analysts (Galluzzo, 1999). Others, including several military planners at the Army General Staff, worry about the adequacy of the current policy framework in the long run. Given that personnel stocks for the career enlisted soldiers have reported here represent the best guess of Army planners at that particular time.

8 The personnel categories and the rank structure within each will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

only recently began to fill, and that a military career will on average be of 37 years, the system could prove to be increasingly unsuitable over time. Questions about the Army’s own manpower requirements have also emerged—what types of individuals does the service needs? Even assuming that all plans are geared toward a steady-state to be achieved by 2020, what types of force mixes (especially in terms of years-of-service and grade distribution) and policies should be considered to ensure a given amount of "balance" and readiness over the course of the transition? The following chapters begin to address these critical issues.

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10 Thirty-seven years of service represent an estimate of the actual length of a career from 2008 and beyond. This differs from today’s actual length of approximately 34 years, and the career length counted for retirement purposes. In fact, the administrative YOS count is typically three years greater by the end of one’s career since individuals can "gain" years of service while on operational assignments. Such a gain implies that until 2007 the administrative maximum retirement YOS is approximately 37; from 2008 onwards it will become 40. See Chapter 3 for more detail.