

Why entrusting armies with the supervision of universal national service is not appropriate

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L'Armée de Terre dans la société

SThere is no longer any question of resuming compulsory military service, since France no longer knows its enemy since the Soviet threat disappeared.4In the light of the fact that a significant proportion of young people are in a state of confusion about the challenge posed to society by the situation of a significant proportion of its young people, the plan to entrust the armed forces with the supervision of the future universal national service is a response to a certain confusion of minds in the face of the challenge posed to society by the situation of a significant proportion of its young people.

Not only does this project have the consequence - if not the unspoken aim - of relieving society as a whole and our elites in particular of the indispensable rebuilding of the social fabric, but it also has the consequence of reducing the need for the social and economic development of our society. It is based on erroneous and flawed principles - one should even say, in fact, on an absence of principles - both on the role of the State and the role of armies. It could even drift towards a form of authoritarianism in which it would be up to the State, before all intermediary bodies and civil society, to provide for the education of young people.

As a matter of principle, is it really up to the State, through the military institution, to raise and educate the youth to enable them to find their rightful place in civil society and the national community? While some States have embarked on such an undertaking in the course of history, most of the time the experiment has ended in resounding failures for the supposed good of society. In fact, this desire to control individual minds and behaviour is essentially a totalitarian regime. It may be objected that the context of the day is fundamentally different; yet the causes of such a situation should be analysed with accuracy before claiming to correct its effects.

Starting from the observation of a youth that is untrained and aimless, disoriented, desocialized, even radicalized in places, the immense task of putting them back in their place in society is not the result of a military mission and does not in any way serve the purpose of armies. It even constitutes a detrimental diversion from their true missions.

Moreover, trying to correct the effects of the lack of authority, combined with a lack of education and civic sense on the part of families and schools, does nothing to address the causes of the regrettable situation in which a large proportion of young people today find themselves.

It might be added that claiming to correct the state of mind and behaviours of young people aged eighteen and over by a four-week "social mix", even under the supervision of military personnel, is part of an astonishing naivety and a profound misunderstanding of the human psyche and the most basic psychology. At the time of real military service-which, moreover, was denigrated by a certain political class and whose purpose was to protect and defend the nation against external aggression-it was a very different matter. The army officers knew that a young person's mentality only changed favourably - when it did - after a period of several months well beyond a semester...

This national service would be implemented in an interministerial framework for its general management, the provision of trainers, the content of the programmes and, to an undetermined extent, the delivery of material resources. It is clear that the heaviest burden, given its permanence and requirements, will fall on the armies for everyday life (individual management, accommodation, food, etc.). It is clear that the heaviest burden, given its permanence and requirements, will fall on the armies for day-to-day life (individual management, accommodation, food, etc.), the rules of community life (discipline) and the restoration of social ties; all things that military officers master. All things that military managers master - we are rediscovering this now - thanks in large part to the perspective, presented to the soldier, of operational commitment, which does not allow for the "almost-about". This military purpose will not exist here for young people, some of whom it is feared will find it difficult to find meaning and legitimacy in this obligatory passage into military hands.

On the interministerial aspect, experience shows that such a level of governance does not work well in France; it dilutes responsibilities, leaves parts of the attributions in disinheritance, and leaves the military with a lack of legitimacy. It dilutes responsibilities and leaves parts of the remit unclear, especially since the civilian administrations, except in principle that of national education or the interior, have no expertise in "mass management" and are totally lacking in material resources adapted to this new mission. Not to mention the financial and budgetary management of this complex, which some will hasten to blame on their neighbour.

As far as armies are concerned, there are many obstacles in the way of such an undertaking after the hijacking of their purpose. The military institution is reduced to its simplest expression through political will, which recent dramatic events have shown to be largely insufficient to accomplish its long-term missions. The size of armies and their resources, including financial resources, are disputed within the state apparatus, mainly by Bercy. It is therefore doubtful whether priority should be given to this task in order to ensure the viability of a new universal service. This is not a trial of intent, but a realistic vision justified by experience, which is still recent.

Moreover, with regard to this new mission devolved to the armies, several phenomena are to be feared, such as the moral and physical wear and tear of cadres with a limited number of personnel, who are obliged to repeat tirelessly every month the same efforts of persuasion and moral training which do not strictly correspond to their vocation. This could lead to a recruitment crisis as a result of lassitude among officers and non-commissioned officers faced with the prospect of employment outside their vocation in addition to their natural missions. On the other hand, the same efforts would not be required of those whose *raison d'être* it is, namely families and school; the latter should

remain the legitimate and priority place for social mixing and learning to live in society.

Rather, under these conditions, should we not begin by restoring a sense of authority wherever it is lacking, by re-establishing the meaning and role of the family - with the appropriate assistance, part of which is the responsibility of the State?and restoring to national education and the million civil servants it houses the means and the desire to respond, after the family, to its vocation of education first and civic training second?

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