

Democracy and the ‘citizen-soldier’ military: The case of Kosovo and Israel

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Abstract

The intention of Kosovo’s government to establish a ‘citizen-soldier’ military creates an opportunity to do the ‘right thing from the beginning’—the current comparative study elaborates on the steps that have to be taken in order to establish a military in a young and small democratic state, with a strong normative base, that will provide confidence in the defence system alongside constructive socialisation. The structure of constitutional analysis serves as a base for in-depth discussion concerning the military service model in democratic states. The analysis is followed by an elaboration on the ‘citizen-soldier’ military model in the context of cultural aspects and the connection to the constitutional base, combined with an analysis of Israel’s and Kosovo’s social–cultural features, security challenges, and geo-strategic situations, similarities and opportunities regarding implementation of a military model. The study reveals that in democratic states, the ‘citizen-soldier’ model has to be anchored in the culture and in the constitution in order to prevent social conflicts concerning rights and duties, establishing a constructive social platform that empowers national resilience alongside defensive abilities. Kosovo’s success in implementing a ‘citizen-soldier’ model is built on the adoption of positive ways of social integration using Israel’s experience while minimising its weaknesses: the existence of constitutional definitions that will balance civilians’ rights and duties in the context of military duty, harnessing the education system as a socialisation agent, and establishment of a reserve military force that will be anchored in national duty, in the security view and the social view.

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Introduction

Throughout the 20th century, the ‘citizen-soldier’ military model was universally employed in the Western world. In many countries young men were conscripted into military duty for a number of years by dint of state-mandated draft laws (Tamari, 2012). Upon completion of their duty, they transferred to a reserve unit to be called up for annual operational training, and as needed in times of war. Furthermore, in the past, the ‘citizen-soldier’ military had a unique role that was reflected by the shaping of a national ethos, creating social cohesiveness, and building social resilience against major threats (Janowitz, 1964).

Since the 1990s, almost all of the standing armies in the world have been converted into professional armies (Lopez, 2023), with no need for mandatory conscription. Nevertheless, a small number of countries still require that its citizens carry out mandatory military service as well as reserve duty—examples can be found in Greece, Israel, Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore (Tamari, 2012). Most of these countries have continued to follow the ‘citizen-soldier’ model due to their challenging security situations and small populations.

This article is focused on a comparison between Israel and Kosovo: both are small countries with a democratic establishment, and both have been established after a war that established their independence. While Israel implemented the ‘citizen-soldier’ model from its beginning in 1948, Kosovo’s government is considering the model after more than a decade of relying on North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces as a defensive platform.

The social functionality of the Israeli military model has been under debate in the last decade: the ultra-orthodox society, which is 20% of the Israeli population, is exempt from military service, as is the Arab community. Furthermore, the military needs for reserve service grows slowly in proportion to the fertility and childbirth rate—less than 2% of Israeli population are serving in the reserve military (Friedman, 2018). Another issue is the gender factor—while conservative society in Israel opposes female military service, the liberal side encourage females to join up and even serve in combat units. These arguments raise questions regarding the functionality of the military as a social integrator, also leading to social tensions.

Although Israel and Kosovo share significant similarities, the way of implementing Israel’s military features in Kosovo has to be discussed deeply—Israel’s military model also has dysfunctional elements, and Kosovo’s society has its uniqueness and substantial differences compared to Israel.

During the last decade, studies have presented varied and sometimes even contradictory concepts in the context of the functionality of the ‘citizen-soldier’ military model: as a social ‘bridge’ (Rosman, 2020), tension between civilians and military personnel (Cohen, 2022), and religious–political effects (Michael, 2022). The current study is an attempt to fill the knowledge gap concerning the optimal way to implement the ‘citizen-soldier’ military model in democratic states, focusing on similarities between Israel and Kosovo. The main research question in this study is as follows: What can the government of Kosovo learn and implement from the Israeli case of the ‘citizen-soldier’ model?

This question has to be elaborated by substantial steps that must be considered in the process of constructing a military that has a social role besides its security and defence effectiveness: constitutional aspects for a democracy or developing democracy, social ramifications, and governmental actions, including learning from other countries’ experience.

Methodology

The current study is based in its first stage on constitutional analysis, elaborating mainly on the balance between civilians' rights and obligations in a democratic system, which is a base for further discussion concerning the military service model. This analysis is followed by an elaboration on the 'citizen-soldier' military model in the context of cultural aspects and the connection of the issue to the constitutional base.

The comparative part elaborates on Israel's and Kosovo's social-cultural features, security challenges, and geo-strategic situations, similarities and opportunities regarding implementation of a military model in view of constitutional aspects. This part includes an analysis of gaps in Israel's social-military relations and lessons that can be learned from them for adopting a custom model for Kosovo.

Constitutional analysis

In democratic countries in which a 'citizen-soldier' model exists, the obligation to serve in the military rests on the shoulders of that country's citizens. This obligation is just one of an aggregation of requirements that are imposed upon citizens in modern society, which also provide them with a superior status (Levy, 2008). By actively bearing the burden in defending one's country, citizens gain a voice, human capital, social mobility, and channels for participating in the public sphere open up for them. In most cases, this obligation is anchored by the constitution, and yet, despite their prevalence, constitutional obligations do not often appear in either academic or legal discourse.

At the same time, constitutional obligations have substantial legal consequences as well as normative superiority over ordinary legislation (Knox, 2008); they are protected from arbitrary legislation; they have symbolic, educational, and ethical meaning; the values they represent trickle down into private law; they impose a duty on legislators; and perhaps the most important consequence of all is the effect constitutional obligations have on us as social beings: they provide protection and realisation of our fundamental human rights, in ways that constitutional rights may fail to do.

Several countries impose a constitutional obligation on their citizens to serve in the military, such as Greece, Israel, Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore, to name a few. The wording of this military service obligation is typically universal, and therefore frequently includes authorisation by lawmakers to enact legislation and determine methods of enforcement.

A study of various constitutions shows that duties imposed on the individual are for the most part vertical: obligations towards the state or community, including paying taxes, serving in the military, carrying out jury duty and voting in elections. Generally, these duties apply to citizens who belong to a certain community, groups of individuals, rather than specific individuals, and are enforced by the governing authorities on behalf of society as a whole. The purpose of these vertical obligations is to protect a society's basic laws or constitutional interests, and in this respect the obligation to serve in the military is no different.

The obligation to serve in the military stands on its own, and is not necessarily connected to the right of each individual in a country, or certain individuals in a country, to life or security. It seems that from a practical point of view, focusing on the subject of the obligation, instead of on the recipient of the action who has the right, could lead to a more appropriate guarantee of the constitutional interests that we wish to protect.

Constitutional obligations rebuff the libertarian approach, and serve to connect individuals to the community in which they reside ([Rawls, 1999](#)).

Modern citizenship has built a new relationship between a state and its citizens that is a continuous legal bond between the individual and their state:

Every citizen, even while they are far away from their homeland, retains citizenship and remains connected to their country, as if through an umbilical cord, and therefore is not exempt from its laws. The country is therefore entitled to order its citizens who reside abroad to return home to serve in the military, to require them to pay taxes, to demand that they appear in court ([Dinstein, 1972](#)).

Hence, modern citizenship determines status and identity, and encompasses within it the principle of equality. It establishes rights and obligations between individuals who are citizens and other individuals who are not citizens, thereby perpetuating the superiority of the citizen over individuals who are not. In this way, citizens can take an active role in the public sphere, whether it be by carrying out one's military service or jury duty, or by voting in elections.

From a point of departure, there is a widely accepted minimum that we are all committed to as citizens, such as the obligation to preserve one's country as a precondition for protecting our freedom, for example. This approach imposes certain obligations that are a necessary prerequisite for the protection of the state and the functioning of its administration, namely compulsory military service, paying taxes, active participation in politics, or commitment to basic principles.

It is in this way that citizens' duty to serve in the military opens up opportunities within the military framework for advancement, training, benefits from the state, and influence within the public sphere ([Itsik, 2020a](#)). This is why the feminist revolution, for instance, got its start by establishing equality from inside the framework of institutions that obligated service by citizens.

For many years, women were excluded from the public arena as a way to protect their honour and their privacy. This protection, however, was a cover for exclusion. Women were prevented from participating in the public sphere: they did not pay taxes, they could not vote, and they were not called for jury duty (*de jure*).

These precise claims were raised in a petition to the Israel Supreme Court by Alice Miller, who already had a civilian pilot's licence before she was scheduled to begin her compulsory military Israel Defense Forces (IDF) service. Miller, who had completed a degree in Aerospace Engineering at the Israel Institute of Technology, requested permission to participate in the first phase of the IDF pilot training course. Her request was rejected by the IDF for 'logistical reasons', with claims that there were fundamental differences between women and men. The Supreme Court overruled the state's ruling, declaring that not allowing women the opportunity to serve as pilots was an act of inequality, humiliation, and an affront to their dignity. Equality, the majority opinion determined, costs money, and 'a society that respects its fundamental values and the fundamental rights of its citizens, needs to be prepared to pay a reasonable price so that the value of equality does not become an empty vessel with no content' ([Grinberg, 1994](#)).

Imposing an obligation to carry out military or national service in a country where service for the benefit of society is a value in and of itself, and all the more so in a country where the service is an existential necessity. The public interest leads to the protection of military

service as a value, and without constitutional protection a fundamental constitutional value could be harmed by a simple majority in the legislature. This is a real discussion that affects the state of Israel. From the moment it was established, and continuing to this day, all Israeli youth are obligated to serve in the IDF. They are required, if necessary, to sacrifice their lives for the sake of defending their homeland, and this has many ramifications for their integration in Israeli society.

The value of serving in the armed forces does not only have declarative symbolic value. In fact, it carries with it a great deal of both social and economic values. The purpose of mandatory conscription is to protect social interests, including human rights.

Therefore, it can be claimed that military service itself is a social value, and should consequently be part of the state's founding document. A legal interpretation that considers mandatory military service a constitutional law could influence the normative manner by which the constitutional duty can be limited and protected as a fundamental constitutional value against change by a simple majority.

The obligation to serve in the military versus other rights

Beyond the protection provided by constitutional anchoring, and the symbolic and educational value, constitutional anchoring gives supremacy to the obligation to serve, and convenes interesting purviews between the constitutional obligation to serve in the military and other constitutional rights. This can be seen with regard to the right to equality in a precedential ruling that was handed down by a German Constitutional Court ([Plesner et al., 2024](#)), which decided that imposing the constitutional obligation to serve in the military on men only disproportionately harms women's constitutional right to equality.

The German court ruled that while it balances the duty and the right, and even though the duty is imposed on men only, the state has the authority to constitutionally enshrine the duty of the state to defend itself, and left the inequality as it was. Later on, after the claim of infringement of equality was unsuccessful, women were allowed to serve due to petitions that claimed infringement of the freedom of occupation.

In South Korea, the duty to serve in the military is enshrined as a constitutional obligation. Details of this constitutional obligation are anchored in the Service Act, which contains a provision punishing those who evade enlistment in the military. In a judgement in which the case of a man who requested an exemption from military service for reasons of conscience was discussed, the court rejected the appeal and ruled that the duty to protect one's country is the most basic duty because of its importance for protecting Korea's political independence and territorial integrity, especially: 'special realities of security circumstances of division into the North and the South with military confrontations, and of insecurity and unpredictability' ([Bundy, 1964](#)).

The court ruled that it was not justifiable cause to not enlist under Article 88(1) of the Military Service Act. Referring to the relationship between rights and obligations, the South Korean court ruled that the purpose of military service is to protect human rights:

The duty of national defense, as a constitutional duty, imposed on the citizens in a modern democratic state is justified in the sense that national defense is a necessary thing for citizens as sovereigns. In other words, the imposition of a duty of

national defense as a constitutional duty is justified by the fact that the citizens should contribute to the existence and security of a state that serves as a premise for the realisation and protection of their basic rights by shouldering this constitutional duty (Kim, 2020).

The court held that the duty to serve outweighed the freedom of conscience:

Since it is obvious that if military duty is not observed and the national security is not ensured, the dignity and value of citizens, as human beings, would not be guaranteed, military duty is ultimately for guaranteeing the dignity and value of all citizens as human beings. Because the defendant's freedom of conscience is not superior to the above benefit of the Constitution in its value, the limitation of the freedom of conscience of the defendant, in favour of the above legal benefit, under the Article 37(2) of the Constitution is constitutionally justified (Kim, 2020).

Hence, it can be seen that the concept of a citizen's obligations exists as a continuum between the concept of rights and the concept of public interest. By defining a person's obligation as a constitutional obligation, the law recognises each citizen's constitutional obligation towards the community they live in. Despite the fact that the concept of rights recognises that a person is part of his environment, and therefore sets limits on his rights, it inevitably focuses on the individual person. On the other hand, when it comes to a person's obligations, the focus of the discourse is no longer the individual, but the community. When discussing constitutional obligations, both rights of the individual and fundamental social values are protected.

To conclude, basic social principles are encapsulated inside an individual's obligations towards the state: paying taxes, carrying out military duty, doing jury duty, and voting, which all constitute the infrastructure of the democratic system of government. Anchoring the duty of military service as a constitutional obligation affords all the citizens of a country equal status and equal opportunities to have influence and become an active member in the public sphere. At the same time, this also works to anchor military service as a fundamental educational value, protects it from arbitrary harm by legislators, and gives it supremacy and the ability to retain balanced rights and values.

As for Kosovo and Israel: while in the Israeli case the constitution is not yet established, in Kosovo the situation is different due to a constitution that was defined since its establishment. The gap in the Israeli case can be taken as a lesson by the Kosovar government: the problem in Israel is a consequence of a major social disagreement which radiates to civilian–military relations, while in Kosovo's case, the constitution defines civilian duties. In that case if the Kosovar government decides on a 'citizen-soldier' military, it must be anchored as a principal in the constitution—in the Israeli case it is more complex.

Professional model versus 'citizen-soldier' model—pros and cons

The inherent advantage of the 'citizen-soldier' military is due to the fact that a vast majority of the population serves in the military by law. This way the army is social by nature and enjoys a great deal of legitimacy from the people (Janowitz, 1964). An example of this advantage can be found in the case of the popular uprising in Egypt during 2011, that led

to the downfall of a corrupt regime and, later on, to orderly change of government. The heads of the Egyptian army, which is essentially a ‘citizen-soldier’ military, enjoyed widespread trust within Egyptian society, avoided using brute force against the demonstrators in this uprising and, in many ways, they prevented descent into civil war during the “Arab Spring” in 2011. The Egyptian public perceived the ‘citizen-soldier’ military in Egypt as a legitimate institution that stabilised the situation.

The ‘citizen-soldier’ military has another inherent advantage over a professional army, which is minimising the risk of a military coup d’etat taking place by a military junta that is in control of the centre of absolute power within the military (Hacohen, 2014). The ‘citizen-soldier’ military is more widely accepted among the people, and is actually well placed to prevent such an eventuality, since it does not have such centre of absolute power within it.

Another advantage, which is relevant, particularly in small countries under a clear and immediate security threat, is the army’s ability to mobilise, within a very short time, all of society’s resources, primarily its human capital (Tamari, 2012). An example of this can be found in the case of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022—the Russian onslaught that sought to topple the government in Ukraine and to take over the country encountered stiff resistance from the Ukrainian ‘citizen-soldier’ military, which managed to organise itself rapidly ahead of the Russian invasion (Follorou, 2022). The mass recruitment drive initiated by Ukrainian President Zelensky brought to the fore popular power in fighting back an invader. This response weakened the Russian army’s ability to consolidate its gains and to bring Ukraine to its knees (Shuster, 2023).

Countries that have switched to a professional army do not have this advantage, since those who enlist in a professional army usually come from a very specific sector of society (Schnack, 2012), mostly a socio-economically disadvantaged sector—which produces a bitter conversation, counterproductive in terms of solidarity, about ‘which section in our society is paying the highest toll in blood?’ It is worth noting here that in such countries, over the years the army has been downsized and the motivation to enlist in it has been reduced (Segal and Segal, 2005).

This being said, in countries with professional armies, the social conflict over equality of duties versus rights is diminished, since there is no conscription, and the recruitment is on a voluntary basis.

Another issue typical of the social conversation regarding the ‘citizen-soldier’ military is the macro-economic cost—conscription leads to a 2–3-year delay in the entry of young adults into the workforce, with the economy sustaining a disadvantage in workforce productivity (Arad, 2010). On the other hand, professional armies can be more expensive due to the high wages over the years that are invested in the soldiers’ careers. This issue can be counterbalanced by the fact that there is no need for frequent repetitive cycles of basic training, which are required in a ‘citizen-soldier’ military, incurring a perpetual outlay of investment (Bolton, 2015). It is worth noting that there is a long-standing dispute between the two models regarding their economic effectiveness—it is impossible to make a clear determination of which model of military service is more economically effective.

This being said, the above-mentioned balance between the pros and cons is at the root of the knowledge gap regarding the optimal service model—a country needs to adapt the service model for both social imperative and security needs. Regarding newly independent countries, or small or threatened countries, it is doubtful the professional service model can address these challenges (Guillot, 2004). Clearly, the vast majority of countries that

have adopted the professional model have much larger populations, and typically they enjoy stable security circumstances.

The way in which armies have been used in recent years is important when considering the effectiveness of the 'citizen-soldier' model in the context of military force build-up and in coping with conflicts.

Ramifications and weaknesses in the Israeli model

In Israel's society, the IDF is widely perceived as 'Our IDF' (Livio, 2012), meaning, it is a system in which virtually the entire society has a stake, and therefore the IDF is consistently the most highly respected organisation among the Israeli public. It enjoys a very high level of trust above and beyond any other establishment-based organisation (Itsik, 2020a). Furthermore, the IDF has expanded the circle of female service, especially in combat units, a fact that increased its trust among liberal groups in Israel's society (Sharvit-Baruch, 2022).

However, the main area of conflict in the last decade in the effect of social discourse in Israel, and in the context of stresses concerning the nature of IDF military service, is the way certain special-interest groups from within Israeli society are attempting to achieve values-based and concept-based changes within the military (Lebel, 2013). This comes particularly from two distinct political directions: one special-interest group is the liberal-feminist conversation, which is working to include women in all of the IDF's roles, including roles that in the past had been the exclusive domain of males (Levy, 2014), for example the elite units, as combat fighters. The second special-interest group is the national-religious group, which is working to thwart that liberal process, realising that it affects the balance between the military as fundamentally a security-oriented organisation (Michael, 2022) and its social role (Bahir and Avidar, 2017)—these are the points of great importance in the context of the knowledge gap about the balances between the army and the society, and especially in the context of studies in this field of knowledge, which tend to see the phenomena as dichotomous (Cohen and Cohen, 2020). Thus, the attempts of social special interest groups to influence the force-building concepts within the military might disrupt the decision-making processes within the senior command while causing politicisation within the military rank and file.

Requiring almost all citizens of a country to carry out military service in a 'citizen-soldier' army strongly influences shared values and fosters feelings of solidarity, especially in countries with multicultural populations (Stern, 2009). Moreover, due to the fact that military service is another link in the socialisation process, the IDF in Israel functions as a platform for positive social stratification (Itsik, 2020a). If there were no mandatory draft or constitutional obligation for all citizens in Israel, these individuals would never have met each other (Itsik, 2020b). Hence, the 'citizen-soldier' military can serve as a real bridge between cultures, yet this kind of military service has to be legislated as a constitutional issue.

On the one hand, having a 'citizen-soldier' military allows for the regulation and balancing of social tensions, but at the same time it also creates tensions of a different sort. In Israel some claim that the cohesiveness, uniformity, and focus on achieving military goals are eroded in the face of the conflict between conservative and liberal communities. According to this claim, both communities use the military as a platform to promote their own agenda and goals, and fail to reach a consensus. It has been asserted that this process

could possibly undermine the resilience of a ‘citizen-soldier’ military, thus impairing its operational competence ([Michael and Even, 2016](#)).

Untangling the advantages and disadvantages of the ‘citizen-soldier’ model raises many questions regarding individualism in the postmodern age. Furthermore, the fact that not all citizens are actually drafted into a ‘citizen-soldier’ military prevails as a difficult legal matter that is difficult to enforce, especially when the rate of change in the military is not keeping up with population growth in society, a fact that challenges the ‘egalitarianism’ principle in any democratic state.

Israel and Kosovo—similar features

Studying the Israeli case and comparing it to Kosovo reveals significant similarities: the situations of both nations are a consequence of ethnic conflicts that led to independence wars, and both are under western ‘sponsorship’, mainly by the United States.

This reality and historical background affected the nature of both nations—Israel is a democratic state and Kosovo has a democratic constitution and is in a perpetual attempt to convert its hybrid regime into a fully democratic one. Both countries are small in comparison to the geo-strategic situation that surrounds them, and both are under an imminent security threat. Israel and Kosovo actually have no other choice but to defend their sovereignty with an army that consists of a small population, multi-ethnic society, and being on alert for imminent attacks.

Furthermore, both countries have ethnic and national minorities who identify with rival countries: several Arab groups in Israel, and Serbs and Bosnians in Kosovo. These minorities are equal citizens in their countries and entitled to equal rights. In the case of Kosovo, the Ministry for Communities is the responsible government body for monitoring the rights of minorities in the country.

According to civilian duties, in both countries these minorities suffer a structural dilemma—especially concerning the duty to serve in security organisations as police or military. In this context, the government in both countries avoids recruiting them. Hence, in both countries there is an unbalanced situation between rights and obligations—a major problem flying in the face of democratic principles that leads to constitutional contradictions.

While Israel adopted the ‘citizen-soldier’ model for its army since its establishment—Kosovo’s defence still consists of NATO forces, but the need for full independence will drive the Kosovar government to a decision—to establish a military similar to Israel, based on a large reserve force, or establish another model, a more professional one.

From its beginning, the Israeli army had a unique social role that was decided by [Ben-Gurion \(1971\)](#), the first Israeli Prime Minister. He described the military as a ‘melting pot’ for social tensions, and military service in Israel became a civil duty, by law ([Itsik, 2020b](#)). Hence, the IDF was formed as a socialisation platform, and as a multi-cultural integration stage, where young people from different backgrounds meet and collaborate in security missions ([Rosman, 2020](#)).

Yet, there are also some claims that the IDF has some dysfunctional symptoms: female military service is controversial, mainly among religious communities whose men nowadays

play a major part in combat service. Besides that, there is an ongoing conflict about equal duty between Jews and ethnic minorities in Israel. Another conflict concerns the proportion of reserve soldiers that in the current decade are no more than 2% of Israel's population—a major problem in view of the social burden, followed by damage to the positive effect on youths' motivation to volunteer in the community and also the motivation to join the military (Itsik, 2020a). These challenges are a major obstacle in forming a full democratic constitution—this is an enormous challenge for Israel's democracy and a stumbling block in establishing the 'citizen-soldier' military model as a constitutional requirement.

Kosovo has a significant advantage—this nation established a constitution from its beginning, and the Kosovar defence forces are still in their initial building stage. This gives Kosovo an opportunity to establish a 'tailored' military model, while in the process the country is still defended by NATO. Israel had to establish its military during a war for survival and independence—this fast and immediate process had continuing defects, long-term effects, some of them lead to the need for changes, mainly the exemption of the orthodox community from military service, which became a major political obstacle during recent decades, a conflict that erodes Israel's national resilience and undermines political stability (Michael, 2022). In hindsight, this challenge could have been avoided if Israel was established with a constitution, followed by a tailored service model.

Therefore, if the Kosovar government decides to adopt the Israeli military model, it has to consider the constitutional consequences and implement legislative principals that will combine rights and obligations as part of the civil culture. That process can use the Israeli case study in order to construct a well-balanced defence and social mechanism, which will minimise social tensions and maximise its effectiveness as a defence mechanism.

The case of Israel—Current trends

The main difficulty surrounding the issue of the 'citizen-soldier' model and reserve duty in Israel, which has fully adopted the 'citizen-soldier' military model, is in how the burden of service is shared by its citizens. This model, which in the past was accepted as the consensus in the State of Israel, is currently subject to serious debate in Israeli society, and the political ramifications of this debate are causing considerable governmental instability (Tamari, 2012). At the centre of this conflict lies the ethno-cultural aspect that is a result of the fact that a part of the population, which in the past was a small minority in Israeli society, was exempted from carrying out national service, including conscription into the IDF. Over the years, these populations have grown and now up to 20% of Israel's total population (Black, 2021).

This situation has exacerbated the social conflict and led to increased tensions, since all Israeli citizens have equal rights, even though currently only 50% of Israel's citizens carry out mandatory national service (Plesner *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, only a small percentage carry out reserve duty of ten or more days a year. This reality has led to a situation wherein the IDF, which in the past was a meeting place for members of a wide variety of ethnic and cultural groups in Israel, has become a source of social and political controversy (Levy, 2014).

Since the year 2000, governmental institutions that are discussing constitutional issues related to the Israeli defence service law have also been brought into the conflict. Over the last decade, the State of Israel has gone to great efforts to regulate the defence service law; however, this legislation has encountered obstacles due to political instability, and the

Supreme Court's insistence that the issue of military recruitment as a whole be amended through primary legislation ([Levush, 2012](#)).

The fact that the State of Israel does not have a written constitution makes it even more complex to regulate the current issue of service in a 'citizen-soldier' military, since only about 50% of Israeli high school graduates serve in the IDF. In 2023, the IDF mandatory service issue, including reserve duty, reached a social 'boiling point'. A large segment of Israel's population that identifies with the liberal ideologies began protesting against judicial reforms that would alter the balance of power between the judiciary and the Knesset.

One of the components that led to this outpouring was the lack of equality with regard to military service. Moreover, as part of this protest, a group of citizens who have served in the IDF—most of whom were reservists over the age of 45 from elite units, which means they are a small group—took advantage of their military roles and ranks to bolster the social protest. Some have argued that this phenomenon, in which the protest benefits from the support of retired IDF officers to oppose legislative processes, is what led to the delay of legislative developments ([Bashan, 2023](#)).

The swirling of political debates in Israel surrounding, and from within, the IDF has taken place in the past around issues that were deeply disputed, but it has never gone so far as to influence primary legislation or actual opposition to an elected parliamentary majority. A similar incident took place in the United States in the 1970s when debate surrounding the Vietnam War arose, for which the US Army had instituted a mandatory draft, which had been put forth by the Republican-led administration. A mass and long-lasting public protest broke out, which was partly fuelled by soldiers who had returned from the warfront and who were calling upon the US government to end the war at once. These actions led to the withdrawal of American forces, even though the operations carried out by the US military were for the most part successful. Some argue that this breaking point is what led the US administration to abandon the people's army model, and to switch to a professional volunteer army mode ([Nielsen, 2010](#)).

The breaking point described here creates quite a few questions vis-à-vis the role of a 'citizen-soldier' military in democratic societies, and the legitimisation of reserve soldiers using their military standing to oppose political and social transformations. At this stage, while the social protest in Israel is still at its apex, the group of IDF reservists has demanded that a round of discussions be held among members of the various political parties to discuss the nature of the legislation.

A significant debate could be held focusing on the legitimacy of minority groups influencing parliamentary processes, and there are already individuals from within the IDF that are calling the reservists from these elite units 'first-class citizens', as opposed to veterans of other units who are considered 'second class citizens'. The premise that the IDF is currently dysfunctional, due to the significant dispute that is taking place within the IDF, is becoming clearer. According to public opinion polls, the percentage of Israelis who support IDF veterans who oppose the legislative changes is low, and does not exceed 40% of the general Israeli public ([Uzeli, 2021](#)). This phenomenon, however, creates real cracks in Israel's social cohesion in general, and within the IDF in particular, which are leading to dilemmas regarding the implementation of military power in the face of a complicated security reality.

This current situation brings to a climax the call for the creation of a constitution for the State of Israel. There have been other similar attempts in the past, which led to various versions being drafted that were not in the end approved, but this time the calls have been

more forceful. There is no doubt that every democratic country is required from time to time to examine its internal checks and balances, and to make adjustments in its social contract.

In countries where the military plays a major role in the social solidarity and resilience of the people, it is evident that this type of process is needed, and should certainly be mandatory with respect to multicultural populations that have been swept up in today's tense reality (Aknur, 2013).

The people's army rests on a widely accepted legitimacy, without which Israel would have difficulty recruiting soldiers for these units, and would find it difficult to legitimise significant military actions that involve paying a high price in casualties and loss of life. The State of Israel, now in its eighth decade since its establishment, is caught in the midst of a substantial and complex conflict that puts the relevance of a people's army to the test in a social context. As the situation stands, the Israeli parliament must take significant steps towards establishing broader social and political agreements, which would create a new balance of obligations and civil rights. If this attempt fails, the resulting reality could lead to a further undermining of the military model in Israel.

As for the decision makers in Kosovo—the reality in Israel can be very useful—it brings with it insight from the conflict, with an emphasis on the legislative ramifications that could enable the government in Kosovo to build its military power under the proper social balance, implementing the 'citizen-soldier' military model, and applying mechanisms to regulate social conflicts that arise while building it.

The case of Kosovo

Kosovo was established as a nation state out of the multi-ethnic conflicts in the Balkans in the late 20th century. It was a consequence of Yugoslavia's disintegration and the regional ethnic strife, which led to a massive bloodbath, which required American and NATO military intervention that brought an end to the conflict and divided the region into sovereign states. This settlement of the conflict was sponsored by the United Nations (UN), the United States, and the European Union (EU).

Kosovo's complicated history, including ongoing ethnic conflicts between Serbian and Albanian cultures, has led to instability and waves of migration, creating a complex society by ethnicity (Latawski and Smith, 2003). Kosovo's unbalanced ethnic situation has led to instability, with the Kosovar-Albanian population increasing from 65% to 80% and the Kosovo Serb population decreasing (Malcolm, 1998).

Effectively, Kosovo won partial independence in 2008, since then the UN has permitted Kosovo to maintain a limited security force for border protection; however, the overall security umbrella still relies on NATO forces. The country's independence was also settled in UN Resolution 1244 that foresaw a multi-ethnic state with its governmental institutions respecting all the rights and integration of ethnic minorities in Kosovo population under the protection of international institutions.

In September 2023, a militia that apparently belongs to the Serbian minority in Kosovo attacked Banyska, a village in northern Kosovo. The Kosovo leadership accused Serbia due to the presence of photographic evidence. The leader of this group was Milan Radoicic, vice president of the political Serbian party in Kosovo (Cokelaere and Starcevic, 2023). The international authorities have requested an investigation to be carried out to further

clarify what happened. Meanwhile the Kosovo government accuses Serbia of hiding Radoicic inside Serbia, and has requested to extradite him to Kosovo.

On the other side, the Serbian leadership denies having been involved in this situation. Although the case of Banyska is under ongoing investigation, this incident may be an example of the ethno-nationalist influences on the northern border of Kosovo as well as the consequences of the conflict in Ukraine with regards to the stability of the Balkan region.

Under the current circumstances, in which the Russian army continues in its war against Ukraine, the danger of a Serbian onslaught that would destabilise the region is palpable, and tensions along the border are a fundamental of the present reality there ([Saric and Morcos, 2022](#)). This reality requires Kosovo, which is a small-sized country with a small population, to rely on a 'citizen-soldier' military capable of immediate mobilisation to augment its border defences within a matter of a few hours while remaining prepared for a Serbian invasion.

As in Israel, Kosovo as a nation state has an overwhelming ethnic majority (of Kosovars), and it also includes other Balkan ethnic minorities, including Serbs, Turks, and Romanians. Establishment of a 'citizen-soldier' military could potentially lead to increasing Kosovo's national resiliency, based on a clear defensive ethos, while engaging minority populations in the security endeavour, building a united social identity ([Rosman, 2016](#)).

This being said, there are several challenges with sustaining the 'citizen-soldier' military model in Kosovo, mainly due to ethnic tensions between the minorities and the majority, which are typical of nation-states, and might impede mass mobilisation as part of an equality of rights and duties in the country. This is similar to the situation in Israel in the context of the challenges of the Arab minority.

The constitution, which was signed in the course of establishing Kosovo as a state, provides a democratic framework for issues of civil rights and duties. It thus serves as the basis for the building of a citizen-based security force—a situation which in Israel is under constant stress and has not been addressed by a constitution. The Kosovo constitution also defines gender-based integration in all government organs, in addition to the security forces, and it permits widespread recruitment of women—should such a decision be made—and this concept has gained significant traction within Kosovar society in recent years ([Luzha et al., 2023](#)).

The 'citizen-soldier' military model in a young, threatened country, will enable Kosovo to build itself economically in view of the threats while directing the labour efforts of the majority of the population towards development of the economy, relying on the young adult population for defence security for a limited period of time in a military conscription service—in this context the Israeli model could serve as the correct example for a country such as Kosovo.

The emerging trends following the Russian invasion of Ukraine may also serve the concept of a 'citizen-soldier' military as part of NATO—nowadays such a process is underway in some of the Baltic states, where the build-up of security forces based on the 'citizen-soldier' military model is being considered ([Eggert, 2024](#)). All the dangers involved in the Russian invasion and the regional instability have brought the need for a state-level, independent security solution to the fore. Such a solution would be based on mass mobilisation—this model has proven itself in Ukraine and might serve as a turning point in the general concept of the EU and NATO with regard to 'citizen-soldier' armies.

The establishment of a 'citizen-soldier' military is an opportunity for Kosovo, as a young, developing country, to develop constructive patriotism alongside consolidation of a security force suited to its future challenges. In this context, Kosovo can learn from the process Israel underwent, and the vulnerabilities there, which will lead to the setting up of a model tailored to the unique challenges of the Balkans. In a regional perspective, a Kosovar independent defensive military capability could deter Serbia from potential invasion, safeguarding regional stability—this aspect might even have a Europe-wide effect due to the fact that war in the Balkans could spread into central Europe, escalating the conflict to the brink of a larger-scale conflagration.

In such circumstances, military independence in Kosovo also frees NATO to concentrate its strategic efforts and prevent its dispersion into sub-regions.

Another aspect presently under consideration in Kosovo is the link between the education system and the security forces, realising that should a 'citizen-soldier' military be set up, service therein will become another component in the processes of youth socialisation (Zreik, 2012), similar to the social role assigned to the IDF when the State of Israel was established. In this context, too, Kosovo now has a great opportunity to learn from the educational model in Israel in its security contexts.

The situation in Kosovo, as a young, developing country, affords it an opportunity to do the right thing in terms of its long-term thinking. Correct building of a 'citizen-soldier' military based on the lessons learned in the Israeli society is a great opportunity for Kosovo to strengthen itself as a democratic country with national resiliency and significant defensive capabilities for addressing threats in a geographic region where ethno-national tensions form a key component in its regional instability.

Conclusions

There are many parallels between Kosovo and Israel, considering their historical paths towards their state independence, and their aims for a strong state and society. Since the Independence Declaration in 1948, Israel has overcome many social, governmental, and also international challenges, becoming a strong country with developed domestic and foreign policies. The study has shown similarities between Israel and Kosovo, as both are small countries with small populations, similar security challenges in their conflicts, and post-conflict issues with their neighbouring countries, and also shows which countries can learn from their experiences.

Kosovo was declared an independent country in 2008 and created the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) in 2009, responsible for defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kosovo. In 2018, the KSF was involved in an ongoing process of transformation into the Kosovo Armed Forces.

This study is a fruitful contribution to understand this transformation process, submitting the Israel experience on the implementation of 'citizen-soldiers'. In that view, Kosovo can benefit greatly from following Israel's model on the issue of the 'citizen-soldier' model, but most consideration should take into account, at its centre, the need for constitutional definitions that will balance civilians' rights and duties, especially in the case of military duty. These definitions have to include the situation of minorities with the option of national service as an alternative duty to military service. In that way, Kosovo can avoid the unbalanced situation that Israel suffers from, together with the

substantial political tensions and instability caused by attempts to implement necessary adjustments.

Furthermore, Kosovo has to adopt the positive ways of social integration using Israel's experience, constructing military service plays a major role in a nation's solidarity and cohesion, as a civilian alliance and as an opportunity to assimilate. For instance, the way Israel conducts a multi-cultural integration stage, where youths from different backgrounds meet and collaborate for a substantial amount of time, dealing with national challenges.

The defence establishment in Kosovo has to elaborate on the role of females in military duty as the 'right beginning' of an establishment that builds a national ethos and affects social stratification. Females are usually 50% of the community, and a balanced way of integrating them into the military can affect the socialisation process and result in women's empowerment—the combination of female military service and a 'citizen-soldier' model is an opportunity for national cohesiveness.

Yet, it has to be clear that in a 'citizen-soldier'-oriented nation, the values of service have to be implemented in the educational system—with service in the military being seen as the most significant duty and contribution for the country. The educational system conducts most of the socialisation process in civilians' lives, anchoring values and norms. Education has a significant effect on pre-entry values for the next stage in adulthood (Zreik, 2012), this connects to the fact that a society has to encourage military service—social motivation for enlisting in the military is an important condition for the functionality of a 'citizen-soldier' military, and the educational system has a major role in this context.

Another substantial condition is the establishment of a reserve military force that will be anchored in national duty, in the security view and in the social view—those reserves will be positioned in emergency systems: medical duties, police service, search and rescue, and more. The reserve military is a component in the 'citizen-soldier' method, and it has a major effect not just on the capabilities of the national forces but also on the national ethos implemented by families. Parents who serve tend to encourage their children to volunteer for the community and in the later stage also serve national duty.

It is both appropriate and right to include a clause in the constitution specifically curtailing the influence of special-interest groups on the mix of service personnel. This ought to be done in order to prevent issues of a political nature from penetrating the considerations guiding the build up of military power.

Establishing a military that consists of the Israeli lesson will contribute to Kosovo's national security and its democratic values as a developed European country that is based on a cohesive society.

The case of Kosovo and Israel is an opportunity to construct a unique international study group, multi-disciplinary, oriented on security, education, and legislation—the role of a 'citizen-soldier' military can be vital in view of the current global tensions in the Euro-Asia regions, the Middle East and the Far East—these days we can witness a potentially major security threat to small democratic countries in these regions (Department of Homeland Security [DHS], 2023), and a collaboration between them, focused on social resilience and military power building can be fruitful for their uniqueness and their stability.

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