CONTINUATION OF PUBLIC SERVICE BY OTHER MEANS: THE POST-MILITARY CAREERS OF SINGAPORE'S MILITARY ELITES

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ABSTRACT

This article is an intrinsic case study of the bureaucratic elites in Singapore, specifically on the military elites' post-retirement career patterns. Using original data, this article empirically illustrates that around half of the military elites transitioned to the public sector (and even more if government-linked corporations and entities are included). Through interviews with retired military elites, the transition process is detailed. Drawing upon publicly available sources, this article suggests that this phenomenon can be attributed broadly into two categories: historical institutionalism and sociological reasons. There is a lack of notional distinction between Singapore's civilian leadership and military leadership, with the military seen as just another avenue to nurture public leaders. Moreover, the notions of 'scarcity of talent' and the 'universal applicability of talent' are prevalent. It is under such an environment that many military elites continue their public service by other means after retirement.

Keywords *– bureaucratic elite formation, civil-military relations, historical institutionalism, meritocracy, Singapore Armed Forces*

INTRODUCTION

Retired senior officers of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) play an outsized role in Singapore. *Tatler Singapore* features eight retired generals/admirals in its list of the 300 "most powerful and influential people in Singapore" (Tatler 2020),[1] in a country where all the generals/admirals combined make up less than 0.005 percent of the population. Many in the top echelons of the SAF retire relatively young, in their forties, and then transition to take on plum jobs in the public sector or government-linked corporations and entities (GLC/GLEs) – notwithstanding that they do not seem to have prior industry experience in the job. Prima facie, this seems to be an affront to a tenet of Singapore's national identity – meritocracy – wherein individuals are to be recognised by their abilities and contributions, and not their social backgrounds, status, wealth or connections (Teo 2019). In view of this phenomenon, some of the questions commonly raised include: are the generals really the best men for the job? Is there no one else qualified such that it always has to be *another* general? Is Singapore run by a military junta in all but name?

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Moreover, even though retired military personnel are formally and legally civilians, their widespread transition into leadership roles into the public sectors have raised some eyebrows because a thinking exists that they are different from 'true' civilians. As Burke and Eaglen (2020) notes, retired military personnel "retain a military ethos, training, and sometimes mindset not shared by their colleagues who never served in the armed forces". No doubt Singapore practices conscription, and most men are technically part of the military, conscript soldiers' military experience consists of two years of full-time service, and maximally two weeks per year for the next ten years (to maintain operational readiness).[2] This is experientially different from a career soldier who spends 20-30 years in the military.

Observations about this military-to-civilian transition are not new (Chung 1991, Chua and Wang 1994, Au-Yong 2018). However, much about the military-civilian transition process remains unknown. This article thus seeks to uncover, firstly, to what extent are these general impressions true – how many of the SAF's top echelons indeed transition to the public sector or GLC/GLEs; secondly, how the transition occurs; and thirdly, how this practice came about and why it has persisted.

In studying the top echelons of the SAF, this article focuses on the rank of brigadier-generals (BG) and above, and will collectively term generals and admirals as 'military elites'. There is no standard definition to the term 'military elites'; some include colonels while others restrict to major-generals (MG) and above. While there might not be substantive differences between a colonel and a brigadier-general that both retire after twenty years of active service, the decision to restrict the study to generals and admirals allows comparison with data in Chan (2019) on those ranked brigadier-general and above.

Overall, this article can empirically confirm general impressions: around eighty percent of military elites transitioned to politics, the public sector, or GLC/GLEs in their first job post-retirement. As for the transition process, there are two categories – one which is planned by the government, and the other unplanned, although informal help is readily available. This phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that the military leadership was not perceived as distinct from the civilian leadership in the SAF's formative years, thereby institutionalizing such a norm, and its persistence due to the notion of the 'scarcity of talent'. Critics argue, however, that this phenomenon is a manifestation of a patronage system at work. The flow of the article is as follows: there will first be a discussion of how this research relates to existing literature, an explanation of the methodology, an exposition of empirical data on the military-civilian transition, a look at how and why all this came to be, and finally concludes with an assessment of the significance of these findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The broad contours of the conventional understanding of civil-military relations have been shaped by Samuel Huntington's (1957) *The Soldier and the State* and Morris Janowitz's (1960) *The Professional Soldier*, with Feaver (2003) judging Huntington's theorization as the dominant theoretical paradigm, at least in political science scholarship. Huntington had argued for civilian mastery over a professional military – through

'objective control' – and that professionalized militaries should not be involved in politics. Janowitz, while criticizing Huntington's professional ideal and opted for a more 'pragmatic professionalism', also agreed that the military should not participate directly in politics. Both thus conceived of the military as a force exhibiting political neutrality and subordinating themselves to decisions of a legitimate state authority. Underlying such idealized standard of civil-military relations is the military's distinctness from and subordination to the civilian leadership. Additionally, Finer ([1962] 2002, pp. 14-15) argued that militaries lack the "technical [ability] to administer any but the most primitive community" because "as societies become more complicated, … so the technical skills of the armed forces lag further and further behind them".

The influence of the above-mentioned major works means that conceptual attention by civil-military relations scholars has thus far mainly focused on the relationship between *active* military personnel and the civilians, and much less on *retired* military personnel vis-à-vis the society. Existing studies on retired military personnel have been pursued mostly by those studying leadership and human capital. Some American scholars have looked at the ethics of retired serviceman joining the defence industry and fuelling the "military-industrial complex" (Ulrich 2016; POGO 2018). Others have researched on the issues relating to the transition process of military to civilian employment (Reissman 1956; Spiegel and Shultz 2003; Baruch and Quick 2007; Tūtlys, Winterton and Liesionienė 2018); the leadership skills veterans possess vis-à-vis civilians (Tiller 2007; Dexter 2016); and how military experience influence decision making in the civilian world, especially in the finance sector (Horowitz and Starn 2014; Benmelech and Frydman 2015; Kim, Oh and Park 2017; Guo, Zan, Sun and Zhang 2020). Only in recent years – perhaps due to President Trump's initial enthusiasm for generals in his administration – have American civil-military relations scholars investigated the relationship between retired military personnel and civilian leadership from a more conceptual level (Friend 2020, Brooks and Friend 2020).

The Israelis, given their militarized society (Kimmerling 1993), and following Janowitz's sociological approach, do have a sizeable research output on the second careers of its retired military personnel (Mushkat 1981; Schechter 2001; Kalev 2006; Vigoda-Gadot, Baruch and Grimland 2010; Barak and Tsur 2012). More notable works regarding the permeation of retired military elites into Israeli society (Peri 2006, Sheffer and Barak 2013) are nonetheless still preoccupied with the impact on security policies, à la mainstream conceptualization of civil-military relations.

Beyond the perspective of civil-military relations, it is also possible to see military personnel as public servants and the military elites' post-retirement careers as "informal, tangible rewards" offered to high public officials (Brans and Peters 2012, p. 4). In Japan, such practices are the norm, with elite bureaucrats retiring at fifty-five to either run for public office, join the private sector or semi-public organizations – not unlike Singapore (Nakamura and Dairokuno 2003). In fact, the practice of joining the private sector is so established that there is a term for it – amakaduri[3] (Hood and Peters 2003).

In the context of Singapore's scholarship, military-civil transitions are mainly studied under the lens of civil-military relations and largely based on and developed from Huntington's theorization. Singapore historian Tan Tai Yong (2011, p. 148) described the

civil-military relations terrain in Singapore as having "remained largely constant since the 1960s", with an undisputed predominance of the civilians over the military. Early works on the officer corps' entrance to the public sector include (Huxley 1993 and 2000), which pondered the impacts of increased military involvement in administrative and political roles, and whether the SAF would defend its corporate interests or expand its sphere of influence. Tan (2001, revisited 2011) also provided a different view to standard civil-military relations theory, in what he termed as "civil-military fusion". According to him, the SAF was "deeply wedded to the state through thick structural links with the country's political and administrative edifice … The military is not an independent or oppositional component outside the civilian polity, but forms an integral part of the administrative structure (Tan 2011, pp. 148-149). Walsh (2007, pp. 271-272) critiqued the fusion model as insufficient, arguing that the aristocratic model of political-military elite structure was more apt, because the "very narrow base for elite recruitment" resulted in "social linkages among those recruited", and because "the frequent crossing of elites between the armed forces and politics or the civil service [led] to functional integration between military and political elites." Nevertheless, despite their differences, the focus was still on traditional conceptions of civil-military relations, with Walsh concluding that the "social and functional integration results in a partial civilianization of the military and ensures stable and effective civil-military relations".

Of interesting note is that with Huntington's work being the locus classicus about the notion of the military as a professional occupation, the SAF is placed in a delicate position. In trying to professionalize or project itself as a professional institution, the SAF has had to refer to Huntington's work. But given that Huntington theorizes that a professional military is not involved in politics or the civilian leadership, there appears to be some disconnect from reality, since many military elites leave the SAF and immediately take up senior positions in the public sector. The SAF has thus far side-stepped this issue, choosing not to engage with it. The textbook used for its professional military education (PME) includes a chapter on the "profession of arms" and it states: "[one] of the best accounts of the origins of the modern concept of the 'military profession' can be found in Huntington's (1957) landmark study, *The Soldier and the State*." (Chan, Soh and Ramaya 2011, p. 227)[4] There was some discussion about "who is a military professional" but this was the furthest they went; there was no mention of Huntington's 'subjective' or 'objective control'. Neither was there any discussion relating to the SAF's involvement in politics and the public sector in the seminars that followed the lectures.[5] Therefore, it would seem that the SAF has not grappled with how to deal with this 'issue', to the extent that there is an 'ideal' standard of civil-military relations.

This article is thus ground-breaking in Singapore's civil-military relations scholarship. Instead of asking whether the transition of military elites to the state's civilian spheres will advance the military's interest or reduce civilian control over it, it looks at the relationship between civilians and retired military personnel and the impact on society. From an empirical perspective, this article follows Reissman (1956) and Barak and Tsur (2012). This article can also be seen as a sequel to Chan (2019). While he covered the ins-and-outs of the military elite while they were *in* service, this article kickstarts an overview study of life *after* military service. Additionally, this study is opportune as thirty

years' worth of relevant data between 1990-2020 is now available, something unavailable to Chan (1985), Huxley (1993; 2000), da Cunha (1999), Tan (2001), and Walsh (2007) when they first commented on the phenomenon.[6]

METHODOLOGY

This article undertakes a "mixed methods" research approach, whereby inferences were drawn using both quantitative and qualitative approaches in a single study (Tashakkori & Creswell 2007). This is because practicalities of the research were such that it could not be "driven by theory or data exclusively" and "a process of abduction" enables one to "move back and forth between induction and deduction through a process of inquiry. (Doyle, Brady and Bryne 2009, p. 178)" Among the typologies of mixed methods research, this article's research design falls under "follow-up explanatory", where quantitative findings are first identified before qualitative methods are employed to explain or enhance the quantitative results (ibid).

Quantitative research

The quantitative research sought to establish where retired military elites transitioned to as their first post-retirement job, and where the population of retired military elites were working as a whole across time periods. The dataset consisted of a list of all the military personnel who have ever held a general rank[7] in Singapore from its independence in 1965 to 2018 – 169 men and one woman – and the jobs and other appointments they took on. Initial reference was drawn from Chan (2019, p. 13),[8] with further confirmation and updates sought from newspaper reports, news releases, companies' annual reports and updates to the stock exchange. As of May 2020, 147 of the aforementioned 170 individuals could be ascertained to have retired from active service, eighteen still in service or holding to an active rank, and the status of five unknown.

The organisations that the military elites were involved in were compiled, categorised into five sectors and then enumerated:

1. Private sector
2. Politics
3. Public sector
4. GLC/GLE
5. People sector

[See appendix for explainer of the sectors and annex for list of organizations]

To some extent, there was a risk of biased sampling, as open-sourced research meant a dependence on information available in the public domain, and those who transitioned into the public sector and listed companies were more likely to surface up than those who entered the private sector. However, given that the status of most of the retired military elite is known (145 out of 147), the extent of sampling bias occurring is minimal. Although information is scant for some, at least one of their post-retirement jobs is known and this was still a reference point for broader data interpretation and analysis.

Of note is the need to distinguish between the number of military elites (147) and number of job positions in the dataset (143) because some held concurrent appointments. Moreover, there was a case of a general who held two 'first job post-retirement'.[9] When he took up an appointment in Company A in the year he retired, it so happened that Company A purchased Company B and the general went on to head Company B. This would have generated two job positions that made up the 143 job positions because calculations were reckoned in years; they were unable to capture differences in months and dates. Therefore, the empirical results only approximate the post-retirement job transition and not categorically 'how many retired military elites went where'.

Qualitative research

To understand the military-civilian transition and to gain first-person perspectives on the transition, interviews were conducted. There were three interviewees, the first one who is a known contact, the second was referred by the former, and the last solicited via LinkedIn. They have been pseudonymised and their details are as follow:

S/N	Pseudonym	Vocation	Rank	Sector for first job post-retirement
1	Albert	Air Force	Brigadier-general	Public
2	Bryan	Navy	Rear Admiral	Public
3	Calvin	Army	Brigadier-general	Government-linked Corporation

Although this interviewee sample is very small, the ways they framed their responses were similar – there was also a retired Rear Admiral who did not accept the interview request but shared some of his thoughts in written form and his response was similar – and so to a certain extent response saturation has been achieved. Moreover, in a "follow-up explanatory" research design model, the quantitative phase has the priority (Doyle et. al. 2009).

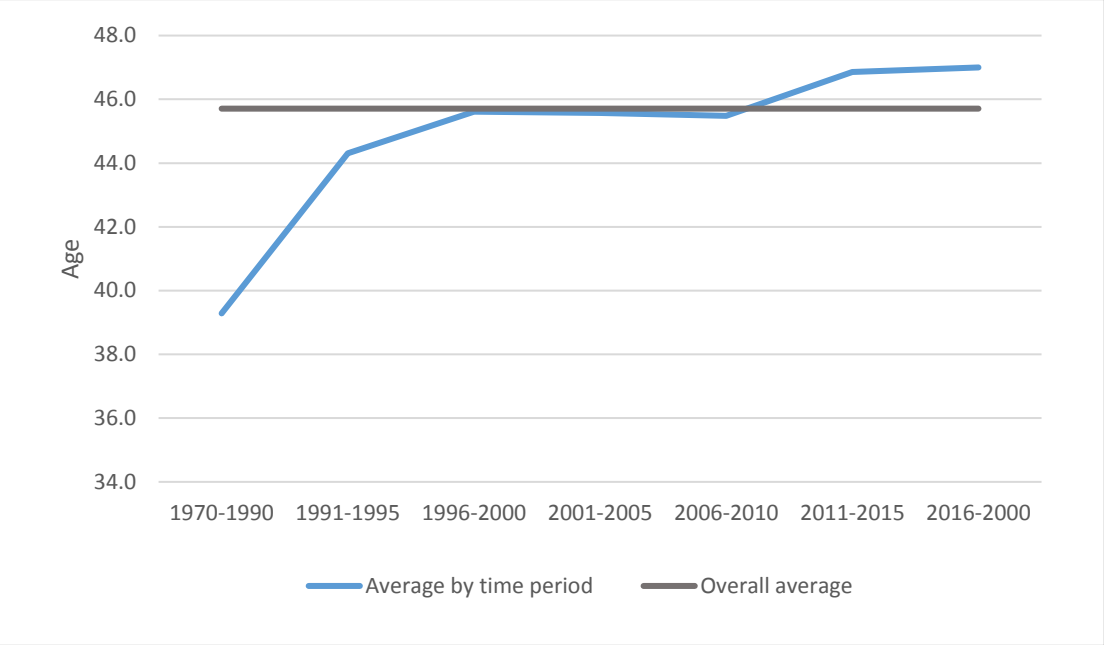
The interviews were semi-structured in nature. A set of questions were prepared and sent to the interviewees in advance for them to understand the inquiry and to form their thoughts. The interviews were free flowing in that a question was posed to kickstart the interview and follow-up questions posed depending on the response. As the author had military experience, he was familiar with the military context and jargon, and was thus able to achieve a certain level of familiarity with the interviewees – although not to the extent that the interviews were so informal as to affect how they shared their experiences close (given rank difference). Information gleaned from the interviews was synthesized and supplemented with information available from primary and secondary resources to develop an exposition of the 'transition process', and the thinking behind such a phenomenon. Primary resources included newspaper articles and press releases, which articulated the government's public stance and rhetoric, while secondary resources include studies others have done related to this military-civil transition.

CLEARING THE FOG: WHERE RETIRED MILITARY ELITES TRANSITIONED TO

The following section discusses the findings from the analyses on the tabulated list of retired military elites.

Q1. How old were the military elites when they retired?

Figure 1: Average retirement age

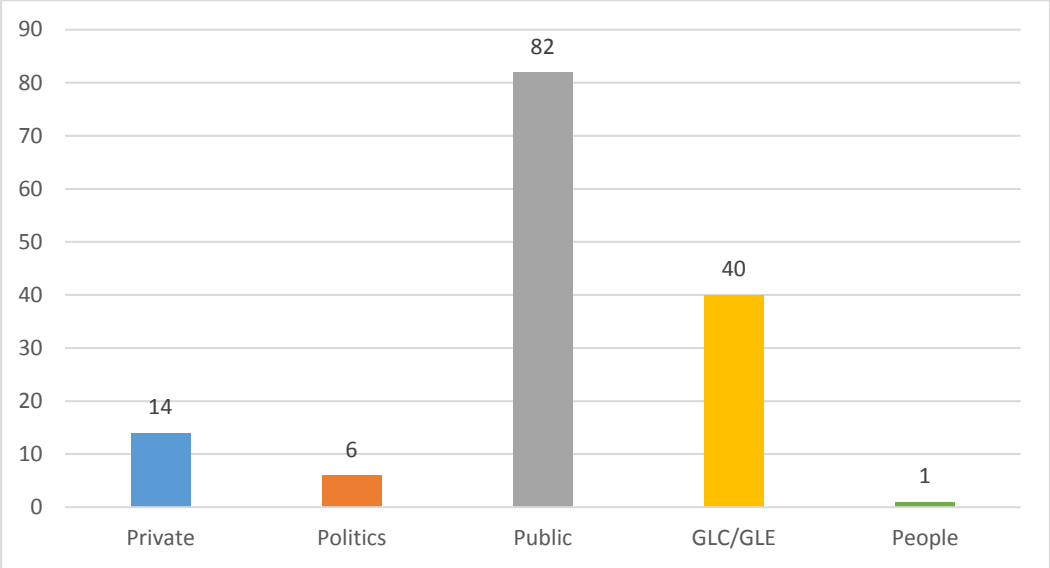


Year	1970 – 1990	1991 – 1995	1996 – 2000	2001 – 2005	2006 – 2010	2011 – 2015	2016 – 2020	Overall
Age	39.3	44.3	45.6	45.6	45.5	46.9	47.0	45.7

It is common knowledge that the military elites retire from active service at a relatively young age compared to the rest of the society but empirical data on it has thus far not been publicly available. Between 1991-2020, the changes in average retirement age have been minimal (Figure 1).

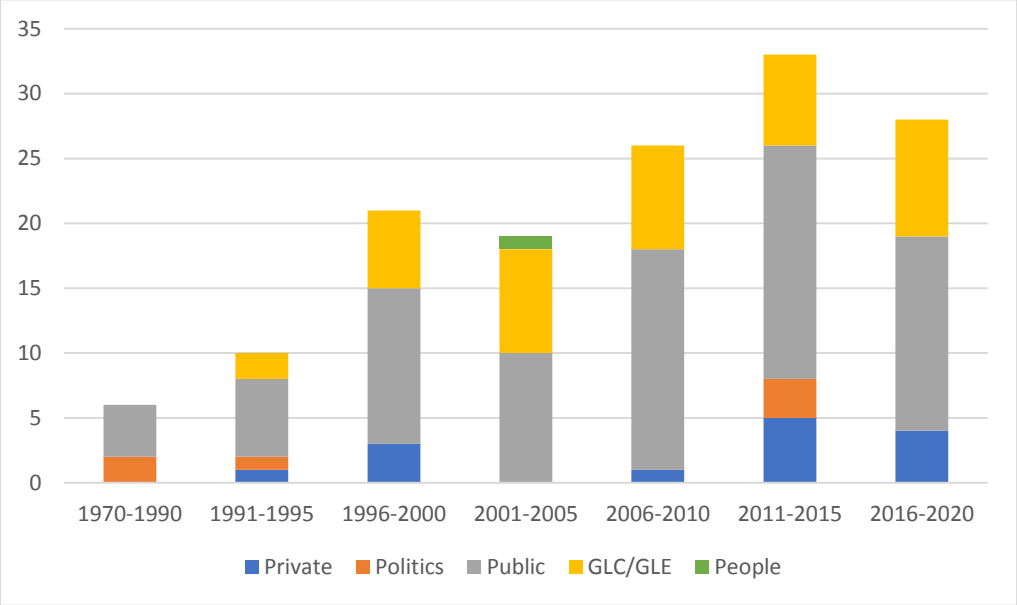
Q2. Where did retired military elites transitioned to? Did they congregate in any sector?

Figure 2: Overall first job position post-retirement



Private	Politics	Public	GLC/GLE	People
14 (9.8%)	6 (4.2%)	82 (57.3%)	40 (28%)	1 (0.7%)

Figure 3: First job position post-retirement, by time period



Year / Sector	1970-1990	1991-1995	1995-2000	2001-2005	2005-2010	2011-2015	2016-2020
Private	0	1 (10%)	3 (14.3%)	0	1 (3.8%)	5 (15.2%)	4 (14.3%)
Politics	2 (33.3%)	1 (10%)	0	0	0	3 (9.1%)	0
Public	4 (66.7%)	6 (60%)	12 (57.1%)	10 (52.6%)	17 (65.4%)	18 (54.5%)	15 (53.6%)
GLC/GLE	0	2 (20%)	6 (28.6%)	8 (42.1%)	8 (30.8%)	7 (21.2%)	9 (32.1%)
People	0	0	0	1 (5.3%)	0	0	0

Around sixty percent of all retired military elites carried on with some form of public service (politics or the public sector) in their first job post-retirement (Figure 2). Breaking down the data into time periods, consistently more than half of every period's retiring military elites transitioned into the public sector after 1990 (Figure 3). This differs from existing literature; *The Straits Times* – Singapore's major English newspaper – reported in 2018:

> A bigger proportion of [one-star generals] head to the private sector than the public sector, say observers. They estimate that about 30 to 40 percent stay in public service. A [Ministry of Defence (Mindef)] survey last year found that about 34 percent of all retired officers – military commanders who have completed Officer Cadet School – joined the private sector upon retirement (Au-Yong 2018).

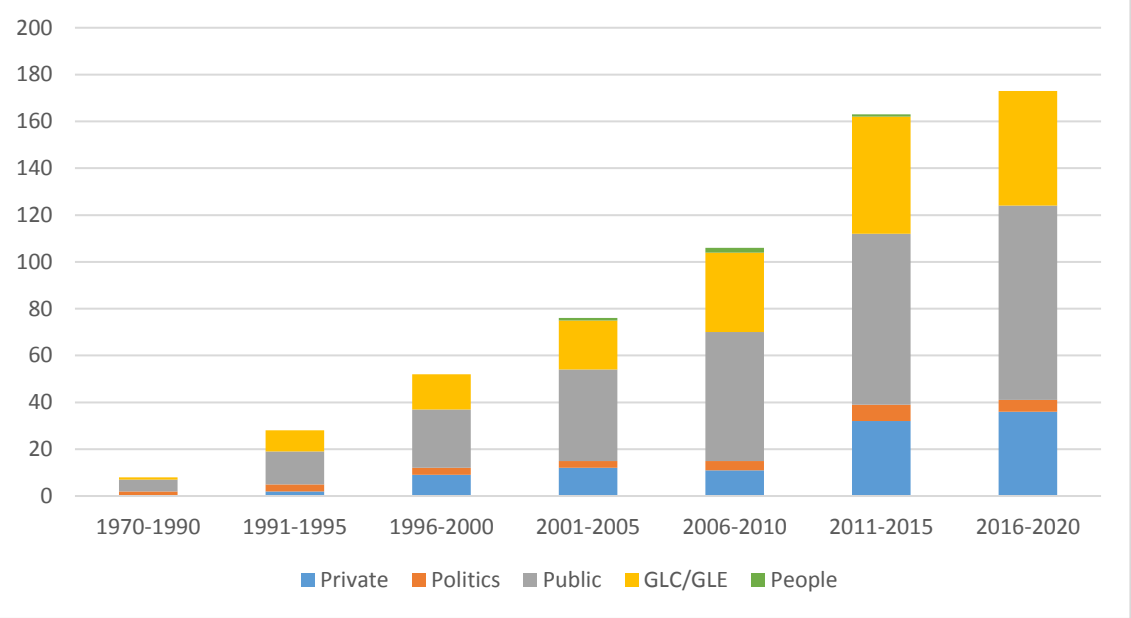
Neo and Chen (2007) otherwise also claimed that in

> the early years of implementation, retiring SAF generals were eased into second careers as heads of statutory boards and government-linked companies. This was changed after 1997 when compensation packages were revised in the SAF. ... This revision probably came about due to difficulties in emplacing retired generals and the mixed results of those actually emplaced (p. 375).

Empirical data does not substantiate this; there is neither a discernible trend nor any significant reduction of retired military elites joining the public sector. The discrepancy with *The Straits Times* could be due to different criteria in categorizing what constituted the 'public sector', 'public service' and 'private sector', as GLCs are sometimes classified as part of the private sector (Koh 2015). Consequently, this highlights the value of this quantitative section, which provides traceable data that can inform future research.

Q3. What is the distribution of the whole population of retired military elites across sectors over the years?

Figure 4: Number of job positions filled by retired military elites in each sector, over 5-year time periods



Sector \ Year	1970-1990	1991-1995	1995-2000	2001-2005	2005-2010	2011-2015	2016-2020
Private	0	2 (7.1%)	9 (17.3%)	12 (15.8%)	11 (10.4%)	32 (19.6%)	36 (20.8%)
Politics	2 (28.6%)	3 (10.7%)	3 (5.8%)	3 (3.9%)	4 (3.8%)	7 (4.3%)	5 (2.9%)
Public	4 (57.1%)	14 (50%)	25 (48.1%)	39 (51.3%)	55 (51.9%)	73 (44.8%)	83 (48%)
GLC/GLE	1 (14.3%)	9 (32.1%)	15 (28.8%)	21 (27.6%)	34 (32.1%)	50 (30.7%)	49 (28.3%)
People	0	0	0	1 (1.3%)	2 (1.9%)	1 (0.6%)	0

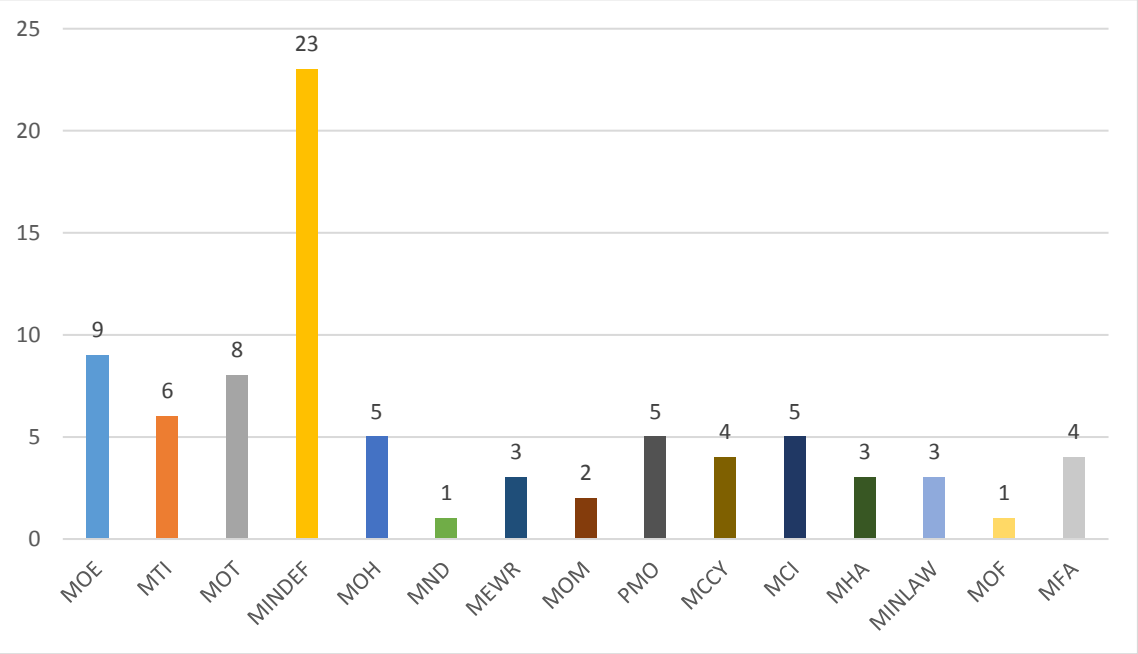
People change jobs over time, but to what extent do retired military elites stay in the public sector? Another way to look at the data is to look at what the distribution of job positions is across the five sectors over a given period of years. Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of jobs across the sectors over every five-year period. Each five-year period

is treated as a single population; every job within that dataset is counted. For instance, fifty percent of the twenty-eight job positions were public sector jobs between the years 1991-1995, and forty-eight percent of the 173 job positions were public sector jobs between the period 2016-2020. Overall, between 1970-2020, around half undertook roles in the public sector.

These figures thus firstly confirm general impressions that many retired military elites *do* transition into politics/public sector and if not, under the umbrella of GLC/GLEs. Only a small number make a 'clean break' to venture into the private sector. Secondly, even as people changed jobs, the bulk of the retired military elites remained in the public sector or GLC/GLEs.

Q4. Where in the public sector did the retired military elites go as their first job post-retirement? Did they congregate in any ministry?

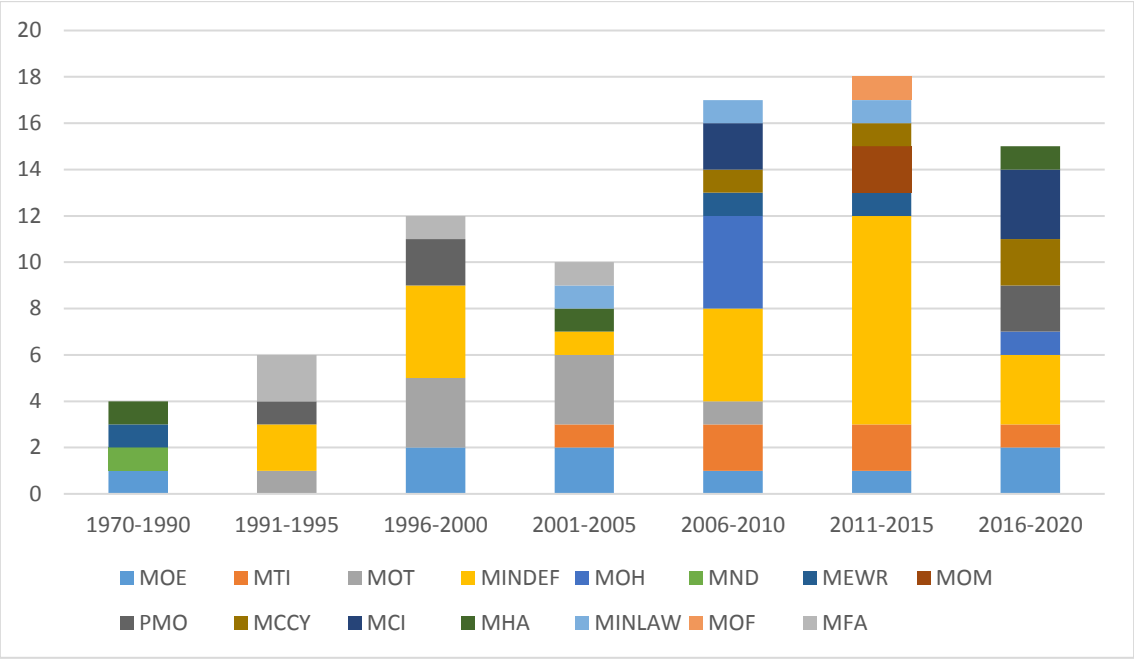
Figure 5: Overall first job position in the public sector, by ministry



Abbreviation:

MOE: Ministry of Education	MND: Ministry of National Development	MCI: Ministry of Communications and Information
MTI: Ministry of Trade and Industry	MEWR: Ministry of Environment and Water Resources	MHA: Ministry of Home Affairs
MOT: Ministry of Transport	MOM: Ministry of Manpower	MINLAW: Ministry of Law
MINDEF: Ministry of Defence	PMO: Prime Minister's Office	MOF: Ministry of Finance
MOH: Ministry of Health	MCCY: Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth	MFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Figure 6: First job position in the public sector, by ministry, by time period

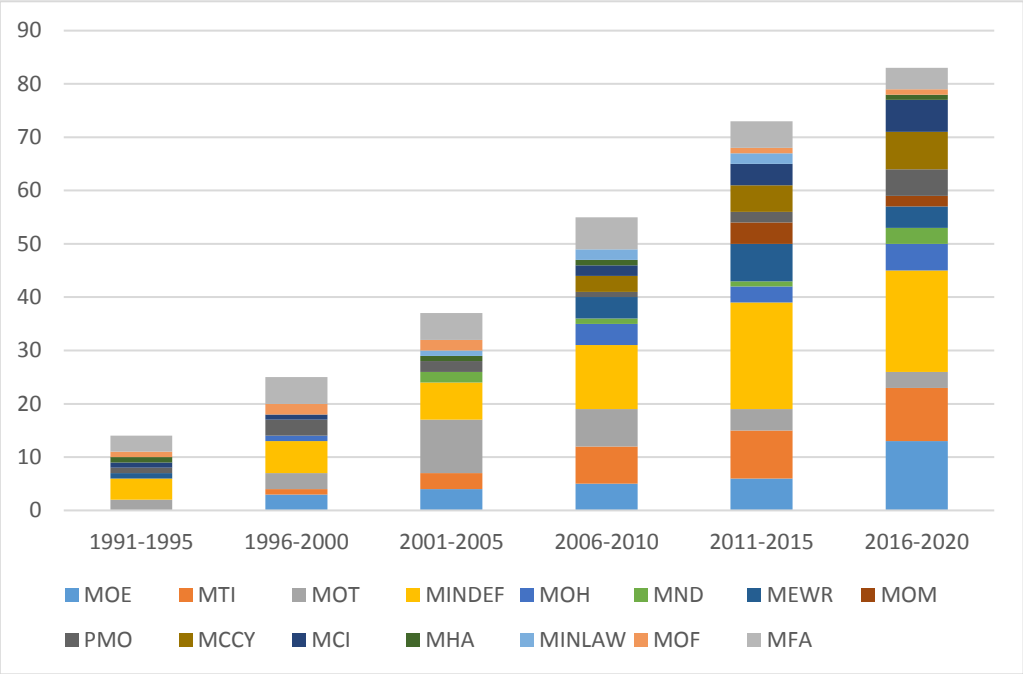


Ministry / Year	MOE	MTI	MOT	MINDEF	MOH	MND	MEWR	MOM	PMO	MCCY	MCI	MHA	MINLAW	MOF	MFA
1970-1990	1					1	1					1			
1991-1995			1	2					1						2
1996-2000	2		3	4					2						1
2001-2005	2	1	3	1								1	1		1
2006-2010	1	2	1	4	4		1			1	2		1		
2011-2015	1	2		9			1	2		1			1	1	
2016-2020	2	1		3	1				2	2	3	1			

Proceeding from Q2, Q4 looks specifically at the public sector. The different public agencies and subsidiaries have been subsumed under their parent ministry for ease of analysis (See Appendix for list of organizations). They illustrate the distribution of the first jobs in the public sector as a whole (Figure 5), and across five-year periods (Figure 6). Between 1970-2020, Mindef took up twenty-eight percent of the 82 public sector job positions in the dataset. Also, over the past twenty years, 2001-2020, Mindef, MOE, and MTI consistently recruited retired military elites every year; other ministries' intakes were more varied. Among all the ministries, none has gone to the Ministry of Social and Family Development yet, perhaps due to it being only established in 2012.

Q5. What is the distribution of the retired military elites in the public sector over the years?

Figure 7: Number of job positions filled by retired military elites in the public sector, by ministry, over 5-year time periods



Ministry / Year	MOE	MTI	MOT	MINDEF	MOH	MND	MEWR	MOM	PMO	MCCY	MCI	MHA	MINLAW	MOF	MFA
1991-1995			2 (14.3%)	4 (28.6%)			1 (7.1%)		1 (7.1%)		1 (7.1%)	1 (7.1%)		1 (7.1%)	3 (21.4%)
1996-2000	3 (12%)	1 (4%)	3 (12%)	6 (24%)	1 (4%)				3 (12%)		1 (4%)			2 (8%)	5 (20%)
2001-2005	4 (10.8%)	3 (8.1%)	10 (27%)	7 (18.9%)		2 (5.4%)			2 (5.4%)			1 (2.7%)	1 (2.7%)	2 (5.4%)	5 (13.5%)
2006-2010	5 (9.1%)	7 (12.7%)	7 (12.7%)	12 (21.8%)	4 (7.3%)	1 (1.8%)	4 (7.3%)		1 (1.8%)	3 (5.5%)	2 (3.6%)	1 (1.8%)	2 (3.6%)		6 (10.9%)
2011-2015	6 (8.2%)	9 (12.3%)	4 (5.5%)	20 (27.4%)	3 (4.1%)	1 (1.4%)	7 (9.6%)	4 (5.5%)	2 (2.7%)	5 (6.8%)	4 (5.5%)		2 (2.7%)	1 (1.4%)	5 (6.8%)
2016-2020	13 (15.7%)	10 (12%)	3 (3.6%)	19 (22.9%)	5 (6%)	3 (3.6%)	4 (4.8%)	2 (2.4%)	5 (6%)	7 (8.4%)	6 (7.2%)	1 (1.2%)		1 (1.2%)	4 (4.8%)

Q5 follows Q3's approach. Figure 7 illustrates the distribution of job positions in the public sector over every five-year period, thereby approximating the distribution of the retired military elites within the public sector. Between 1991-2020, around 20-30 percent of the public-sector jobs are from Mindef, and those from MOE and MTI have been quite considerable too. The proportion of job positions from MOT and MFA has dropped steadily over the years such that they are no longer distinct from other ministries. Therefore, retired military elites who transition to the public sector are more likely to be working in Mindef, MOE or MTI.

Q6. Where in the GLC/GLE sector did the retired military elites go as their first job post-retirement? Did they congregate in any company?

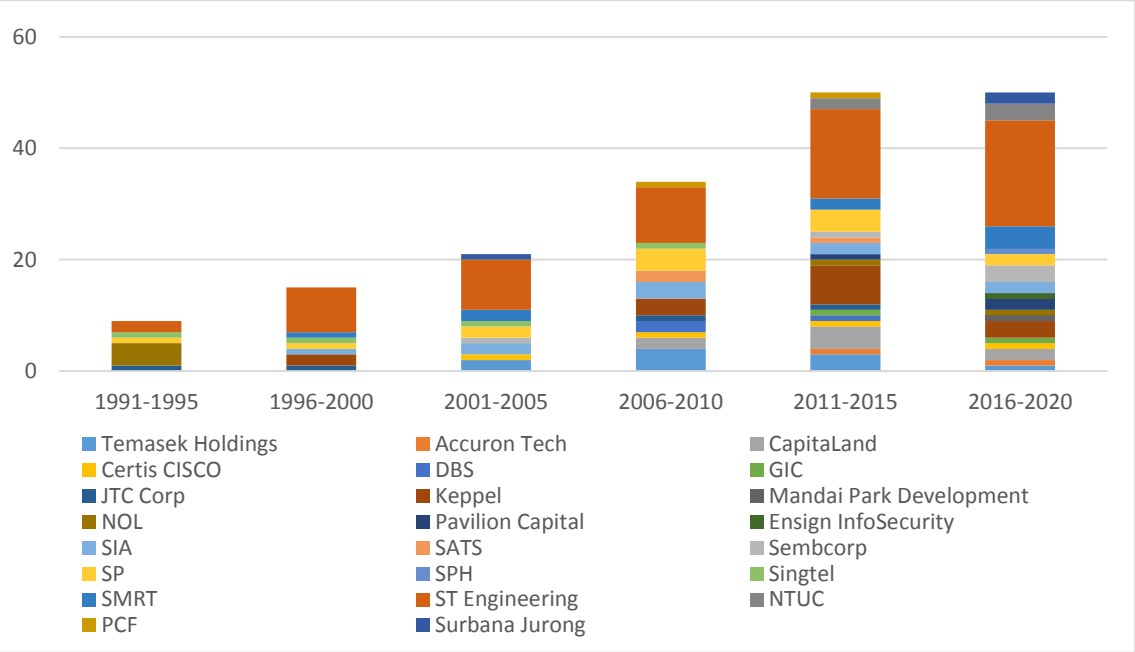
Table 1: Overall first job position in GLC/GLE

S/N	Name of GLC/GLE	Number of job positions	Percentage (100%)
1	ST Engineering Group	17	43.6%
2	SIA	4	10.3%
3	Temasek Holdings	3	7.7%
4	NTUC	3	7.7%
5	DBS	2	5.1%
6	SATS	2	5.1%
7	Sembcorp Industries	2	5.1%
8	Certis Cisco	1	2.6%
9	JTC Corp	1	2.6%
10	Pavilion Capital	1	2.6%
11	Singapore Power Group	1	2.6%
12	SMRT Corp	1	2.6%
13	Surbana Jurong Defence Services	1	2.6%

Proceeding from Q2, Q6 looks specifically at the GLC/GLEs. As some of these GLC/GLEs have many subsidiaries, they have been subsumed under the main GLC/GLE for ease of analysis (Table 1). Between 1970-2020, 43.6 percent of GLC/GLE job positions belonged to ST Engineering Group, a defense company. This suggests that of those that joined GLC/GLEs, around two-fifths returned to something familiar in their first job post-retirement.

Q7. What is the distribution of the retired military elites in the GLC/GLE sector over the years?

Figure 8: Number of job positions filled by retired military elites in GLC/GLE, over 5-year time periods



Company / Year	ST Engineering	Others
1991-1995	22.2%	77.8%
1996-2000	53.3%	46.7%
2001-2005	42.9%	57.1%
2006-2010	29.4%	70.6%
2011-2015	32.0%	68.0%
2016-2020	38.0%	62.0%

Q7 follows Q5 and Q3's approach. Figure 8 illustrates the distribution of GLC/GLE-sector job positions over every five-year period, from 1991-2020. ST Engineering Group's proportion ranged between 22.2 percent (1991-1995) to 53.3 percent (1996-2000). There is no discernible trend in this distribution, but it can be concluded that between 1996-2020, at least around one in three of those who transitioned to the GLC/GLE sector worked in one of the defense companies under ST Engineering Group.

THE TRANSITION PROCESS

Having empirically established where retired military elites transitioned to, this section discusses how they transition. Interviews reveal that not all military elites – even of the same rank – are equal. There are two categories: those that were absorbed into the Administrative Service as Administrative Officers (AOs) and those that were not. One of the interviewees was an AO.

The Administrative Service is a legacy from the colonial period, and it is the apex of public service leadership in Singapore, forming less than half a percent of total manpower strength (Neo and Chen 2007). Most permanent secretaries and chief executives of statutory boards are AOs (Low 2016) and in their various jobs, AOs "exercise high-level leadership responsibilities, remain largely concerned with policymaking, economic forecasting, project planning, and managing staff and procurements (Jones 2002, p. 74)." In 1995, military personnel made up ten percent of Administrative Service staff (Barr and Skrbiš 2008); this increased to 17.8 percent by 2007 (Ho 2008).

For this group of military AOs, their time in the SAF, to quote RADM Bryan, is "a secondment", or "on loan". The government's career plans for them have always included the post-military component and the time in the military is to be seen as an appointment akin to any other civilian AO's career path in the public service. The SAF is simply another avenue for personnel development. Just like how their civilian counterparts are deployed across ministries and statutory boards, this group of retired military elites do not look for a new job when they retire from the military. Deployment is managed by the Public Service Division; they coordinate the "deployment of AOs to key posts in ministries and statutory boards, ensuring that all had proper career paths and that key posts were filled with suitably qualified officers (Neo and Chen 2007, p. 329)."

While one could say that there is a guaranteed job for these retired military elites, from the government's perspective, it might be better to characterize the situation as 'one career, two segments'. The public service career for this group of military personnel is intended to go beyond the typical twenty-odd years of other career soldiers, potentially lasting until the statutory retirement age (sixty-two years old), and with a civilian segment conceived right from the start. Or to quote Walsh (2007, p. 283), this is a manifestation of "civil service in uniform".

This planned career transition – if one wants to see a military career and public sector career as dichotomous for this group of military elites – is not commonly known. Although the existence of a 'dual-career scheme'[10] is public knowledge, it is perceived as referring to secondments to the ministries during one's *active* service days. This is evidenced by the media's reporting of the appointment of then-MG Melvyn Ong as CDF in 2018: "From 2013 to 2014, *through a dual-career scheme,* MG Ong served as Deputy CEO of the Early Childhood Development Agency" [emphasis added] (CNA 2018). Otherwise, the government only alludes to the planned career roadmap. For instance, in a 2001 press release, Mindef noted that: "The training and development provided to these scholars … ensure that they are well-equipped and capable in assuming key positions *in the Administrative Service, other civil service sector* or even the private sector. [emphasis added]" Of course, military AOs have the liberty to not transition into the public sector

when they retire from the military. For those who continue, BG Calvin shared that this group of soldiers are "committed to serve" even though they might have other job offers waiting for them; their "values tell them … for all the benefits as an Admin Service" – which included "exposure" and not just monetary benefits – they would not "use those benefits of exposure and then go and find another job."

Many military elites are not AOs and they do not actually have jobs planned out for them. In principle, they need to make their own post-retirement plans. What accounts for the large number of transitions into the public and GLC/GLE sectors then? BG Calvin characterizes the situation as a 'demand and supply' issue. Demand comes from both the public and private sector – there are always job vacancies. The public sector and GLC/GLEs' demand for retiring military elites is perennial, because firstly, many job positions are limited to Singapore citizens. Secondly, the generals produced by the SAF are deemed to be of a certain caliber – antithetical to this notion is to doubt the quality of the SAF's leadership. In BG Albert's words, generals are a "known quantity" with a "track record" – organizations, especially those in the public sector, are thus happy to hire them. BG Albert further shared that he did not look for a job – he received an unsolicited call with a job offer. BG Calvin also attributed the demand for retired military elites to a "mental model" that existed in some firms, especially defense companies, where because a position was historically filled by a general, they instinctively look for another general to take over the position – although he was quick to point out that this was not a uniquely Singaporean phenomenon.

Public sector organizations and GLC/GLEs will come to know about military elites who are retiring soon because the network among all these organizations at the leadership level is closely knit – BG Calvin uses the term "old boys' network", with many people knowing one another on a "first-name" basis. News of impending retirement spreads and recommendations are made through word of mouth. BG Albert surmised that he got his call from Organization A because his then-superior was 'chatting' with the permanent secretary of Organization A, who was asking if anyone was leaving the military, upon which BG Albert's superior floated his name.

From the perspective of the retiring officers, the 'supply' side, given that non-AO military elites have no obligations in the public sector, where they went depended on their personal inclinations. BG Calvin was sure that he did not want to transition into the public sector – even though he had offers – as he wanted to test his leadership skills in the private sector. Others, on the other hand, were happy to continue contributing in the public sector. There are also practical considerations: BG Ishak, in comments made in *The Straits Times*, said that "the military retirement age which, at fifty, is young enough to keep them working but which makes switching to a career heavy on domain knowledge tough (Au-Yong 2018)." A reason given in the same news article for why many retired military elites joined GLCs was that it was a matter of proportion: more than a third of the top thirty listed companies are owned by Temasek Holdings, with the rest being family-run or headquartered elsewhere.

Overall, these interviews highlight that for the non-AO military elites, the hiring process is fair. First, there was a job vacancy; then the hiring organization deemed being a leader in the SAF as representative of one's capabilities (and hence meritocracy was pursued);

finally, the retiring military elite had the opportunity to engage with the hiring organization, and because both parties were satisfied with one another, the job offer was accepted. There was no overt or clear case of patronage at work; the questions which arise are how wide the public sector and GLC/GLEs do look when they are searching to fill their job vacancies, and to what extent their faith in a military elite is warranted. For the AO military elites, there is a lesser debate in the sense that their career transition is only what it was intended to be. If anything, it is the underlying assumptions behind the career construct of having two segments in one career that need to be tested. Having explored how the transition process took place, this article now turns its attention to explaining how and why the practice came to be.

THE HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF NON-DISTINCTION BETWEEN MILITARY AND CIVILIAN LEADERSHIP

The above exemplifies what Tan (2001; 2011) has termed as "civil-military fusion": the military is not perceived as a separate institution per se, vis-à-vis the public service. If anything, the major difference is that military personnel are uniformed while civilians are not. Consequently, for those still interested in the public sector after retirement and their recruiters, transition is merely a matter of 'skin shedding', and a case of 'continuation of public service by other means' and nothing extraordinary – it is cognitively easy to accept. It could be said that such practices are accepted as the norm and part of organizational culture. How did this seemingly naturally occurring phenomenon come to be? While it has already been noted (e.g. Tan 2011) that the military in Singapore was a creation of the post-colonial state and played no role in precipitating independence like in neighboring Indonesia or Vietnam, and hence does not have its own power base or military and martial tradition, it does not explain how the leadership fusion or integration came to be.

A possible explanation is that Singapore's early political leadership did not see the military leadership as separate from them civilians but as one, and subsequently such notions became normalized. As Rebecca Schiff's ([1995] 2008, p. 44) concordance theory proposed, "particular cultural and historical conditions … will determine whether relations among the military, the government, and the society take the form of separation, integration, or some other alternative." This postulation is supported by the fact that the civilian leadership offered themselves to be leaders of the nascent SAF. Both President Yusof Ishak and the first defense minister, Dr Goh Keng Swee have been pictured appearing and inspecting parades in military uniform, complete with rank – President Yusof Ishak at National Day parades between 1966-1968, and Goh on at least two occasions in 1966. While it has not yet been possible to find out the circumstances in which President Yusof Ishak wore the uniform, Goh's biographer, Tan Siok Sun, shared that Goh "recognized the need for a soldier to lead the army, hence he donned the uniform to indicate he was 'one of them'." He only stopped wearing his uniform when he found "a true soldier" – referring to Lieutenant General (LG) Winston Choo, Singapore's first Chief of Defence Force (CDF) (personal communication, 2020). Therefore, at the very least, Goh had no compunction in blurring the lines between civilian and military

leadership and was not fastidious about the civil-military division.[11] Moreover, a handful of AOs were selected by Goh for secondment over to the SAF, with two of them, Kirpa Ram Vij and Tan Chin Tiong making BG. For them, their transition to the public service was less of a crossover than a return to where they originated.

Chan (2019, p. 192) also noted that the "civilian leadership has held such primacy over the military that they effectively ran the SAF for a good number of years", so much so that the "danger of decisions being taken without professional [military] inputs" existed. A British High Commission memo in 1974 reported that the SAF was "dominated" by "Dr Goh and civilian officials" to the extent that it afforded the SAF "little chance to develop an officer cadre or truly professional expertise. (ibid)" Therefore, as can be seen, the civilian leadership exercised much direct control in the early days of the SAF's development and in this sense the division between civilian and military was even slighter than ever. Given the absence of a military tradition in Singapore, from a "historical institutionalism" perspective (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007), this would be the "critical juncture" which formed the schema in which military leaders are not seen as distinct and are accepted by their civilian counterparts. Consequently, when the first cohort of generals that rose through the ranks retired and joined the public sector – and aided by the precedent of earlier AOs returning to public service – it was accepted as part of the norm.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL REASONS FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR'S CONTINUED WIDESPREAD EMPLOYMENT OF RETIRED MILITARY ELITES

This article argues that underlying the phenomenon is the notion of the "scarcity of talent" in Singapore (Tan 2008), and associated with it, the "universal applicability of talent" to any situation (Barr 2006). These notions have been expressed by Lee Kuan Yew, the founding Prime Minister of Singapore, and whose influence and legacy cast a long shadow. Lee had concluded that all societies displayed signs of what he termed as a "population diamond" – at the top were those with high levels of IQ and competence; the center was the majority, with average intellect and abilities; at the bottom, abilities tapered off. Because of this, the most important jobs in society had to be drawn from the group at the top; they were the yeast that would leaven the whole society (Han, Fernandez and Tan 1998).

Back in 1966, in a meeting with school principals, Lee likened society to be an army battalion – where there are "sixty to seventy officers, one to two hundred sergeants and corporals, and the others, about 500, are privates." "It must be. This is life," he remarked. In another speech in 1971, Lee claimed that the "main burden of present planning and implementation rests on the shoulders of some 300 key persons. … Together they are a closely knit and coordinated hard core. If all the 300 were to crash in one Jumbo jet, then Singapore will disintegrate. That shows how small the base is for our leadership in politics, economics and security." Such views of "talent scarcity" are held by the present government too, with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong articulating something similar in 2008 at an SAF Scholarship ceremony. He talked about how opportunities elsewhere were lucrative and hence the SAF had to present a compelling career proposition to

continually attract talent. It was couched in terms of a zero-sum game where another organization's gain was the SAF's loss. One could see how talent – according to their definitions – was greatly cherished.

Given the view that there is a fixed amount of talent in Singapore, it only made sense for the top leaders of the SAF – especially the military AOs – to transition to politics, the public sector, and GLC/GLEs. This was especially so when the SAF was viewed to have established "a near monopoly [on] the country's top academic achievers (Tan 2011, p. 161)." Then-Defense Minister Dr Yeo Ning Hong mentioned in 1991 that Mindef had a sizeable share of the national talent and that they wanted to share with the rest of the country. As da Cunha (1999, p. 469), argued in a sociological study of the SAF, "scholar-officers are viewed, [as] not just an SAF resource [but] rather a national one, possessing skills and talents that go beyond the purely military." It thus made no sense for the state to invest so much in developing the top echelons of the SAF, only for them to retire from public service, enter the private sector, and 'leak' out of the state.

Associated with the notion of the scarcity of talent and the belief that the SAF has attracted a large share of the talent pool, was the notion that talent – and especially the SAF's – was universally competent. It was the idea of "generalist leadership", where one was able to "manage anything they [turned] their hand to (Gosling, Jones & Sutherland 2012, p. 81)." The logic flowed as such: because every society only had a limited quantity of talent, then naturally every industry's leaders would be drawn from the same pool of talent. As the SAF was perceived to possess a large pool of Singapore's talent, it was expected that they would be able to overcome any unfamiliarity with the industry and discharge their roles well.

There was also much confidence in the training and development offered by the SAF in making its military elites versatile. In fact, military officers in Singapore are seen to "possess higher levels of organizational ability, self-discipline and leadership skills than others. (Aljunied 2020, p. 348)" Dr Yeo had expressed in 1991 that SAF officers' "vigorous training, their wide-spectrum experience and exposure, and most valuable of all, their leadership in the SAF and MINDEF stand them in good stead." Former top civil servant Lim Jit Poh said it most clearly: "Retired senior military personnel have been drilled in discipline and responsibility and have certain skill sets. At the end of the day, it is about talent. It doesn't matter where they came from but whether they can contribute… (Lee 2020)"

An allusion to this generalist leadership concept could also be seen by how PM Lee Hsien Loong explained his choice of appointing former Chief of Navy and former CEO of the Housing and Development Board, RADM Lui Tuck Yew, to a junior ministerial role after the 2006 elections: "If I put Lui Tuck Yew back in [Ministry of National Development] because he used to be in Housing Board or I put him back in Defense because he used to be in the navy, well, I may or may not be stretching him. I put him in Education, it is a new area, let us see. (Li 2006)" Implicit in this was the expectation that even if deployed in a totally foreign environment, the talents from the SAF would have no problem mastering it in time and becoming effective leaders, thereby exhibiting this belief in the 'universal applicability of talent'.

Having established why the government sees it fit to absorb military personnel into the Administrative Service and have them transition into the higher echelons of the public sector post-retirement, one might question why the SAF even set its mandatory retirement age at relatively a young age.[12] This contrasts with the average age in which a British Chief of the Defence Staff relinquished appointment – 60.5 years old – or that of the American Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staffs – 61.6 years old. Could the government not have designed a forty-year career scheme whereby its military elites retired in their sixties, such that they continue contributing to the SAF (and by extension, the country) – thereby stemming any 'wastage'?

A reason offered by the second CDF (1992-1995), LG Ng Jui Ping, who was a 'leading architect' in designing the career scheme, was that it was better to have young generals to be in charge: "If there was a war, what would be the ages you want your generals to be when fighting a war? If you are serious about winning a war, you do not want 65-year-old and 75-year-old generals leading the show. So it was decided that no officer in the SAF shall be more than 50 years old. (Lim and Vijayan 2020)" Walsh (2007, p. 267) echoed this, noting that the SAF was purposely kept young to renew the "energy and focus of military personnel."

More pertinent to this article's discussion is that this is designed to attract and retain the SAF's best talent – especially those earmarked to be absorbed into the Administrative Service. The logic was that top-tier talents were more likely to stay in the military if they felt that the top brass positions were in sight for them and that they would reach the general grade. Ng illustrated with a hypothetical case of someone aged thirty-five assessing his career options: if the "guy up there (the top brass) [was] only forty-eight", and if they were "all going to retire at sixty-five or seventy", then the person would assess that he would "be stuck here for twenty years". It was thought that if he was confident of his own talent and value to organizations, he would leave for more lucrative openings and not wait for that twenty years. Ng further reasoned that such a brain drain would not only be limited to one person, but the whole cohort of top talents, so much so that "if we have a system where the top tier invariably will leave, you have condemned the organization to always have leaders who are second or third best. And then this idea that the SAF will always nurture and draw in top talent will begin to dilute. (Lim and Vijayan 2020)"

Indeed, the SAF was perceived to lack 'top quality' men in its earlier days. It was through much effort in narrative and mindset shaping that the government was able to attract more of those whom they deemed as high-quality men into the SAF. Lee Kuan Yew had shared in 1981 that 19.6 percent of the senior SAF officers were graduates, which paled in comparison to the Administrative Service (97.9 percent), the Public Utilities Board (100 percent), and Singapore Airlines (seventy-seven percent). He remarked that "The SAF is in charge of the most crucial of all our problems. It was totally unacceptable that the quality of senior SAF officers should be inferior to that of the Administrative Service, EDB, JTC, DBS, TAS or PUB.[13] Quite the contrary, the senior officers of the SAF must be distinctly superior."

Consequently, given all these, one can surmise that there was a great emphasis on talent and quality; all the different considerations were interrelated. Because of the notions of scarcity of talent, and the universal applicability of talent and leadership capabilities, the

SAF's top talents were absorbed into the Administrative Service so that they could transition to the public sector, thereby allowing the best part of Singapore's human capital to be shared. However, the SAF was itself deemed to be lacking talents and as defense was a national priority – Singapore was a small and vulnerable city-state – it was thought that Singapore could not "afford to have its best minds in medicine and engineering, and the second best in the SAF" (Lee 1981). The SAF thus sought to offer an attractive career proposition to attract talents by undercutting its 'competitors'. This manifested in the form of keeping retirement age low, so that the climb to the top brass was in sight right from the start.

The above reasoning regarding talent is further supported by the People's Action Party's (PAP) – Singapore's ruling party since 1959 – consistent explanation when inducting retired military elites into politics: an almost sole focus on their competence, intellect, and leadership capabilities. For instance, in 1988 when BG George Yeo became the second military elite (after Lee Hsien Loong) to don party colors and participate in elections, Lee Kuan Yew's endorsement for Yeo was that he was "a good thinker and a candid man". Moreover, Yeo had been persuaded to enter politics because of his "perceptiveness" (*The Business Times* 1988). Twenty-seven years later in the 2015 general elections, LG Ng Chee Meng also resigned from the SAF to enter politics. In his introductory video, his shared that he brought "in a level of organizational abilities' and had the experience of 'running a big organization that is as complex and wide ranging". Over the past forty years, seven retired military elites have entered politics; these two examples covering the earlier period and the latest suffice in illustrating the narrative that the PAP sought to impress upon voters. They also illuminate what the ruling party values about military elites, thus strengthening the explanation regarding the notions of talent scarcity.

In doing so, what is *not* a reason for the permeation of the military elite in Singapore's higher echelons – at least based on publicly available discourse – is highlighted. In trying to explain the state of Israel's civil-security relations, Sheffer and Barak's (2013) *Israel's Security Networks: A Theoretical and Comparative Perspective* plotted out the existence of an "informal powerful security network" that had an "exceptional ability to influence many aspects of public life in Israel", from domestic to external policymaking, and from strategic to tactical policies (pp. 1-2). The network was made up of serving and former security personnel and their partners in the state's various civilian spheres. Its emergence was attributed to the numerous Arab-Israeli confrontations that created real and imagined existential threats to Israel, thereby creating the space for the military and security personnel to enter the public domain and exert influence on war-making and foreign and security policies. Although *Israel's Security Networks* argued that the security network has had significant domestic impact – including the cultural, political, societal and the economical spheres – truly the focus was on the cycle of how security concerns provided the conditions for the emergence of the security network, how members of the network shaped security issues, which impacted the security context Israel found itself in, and which perpetuated the security actors' dominance in Israeli society. Focus thus centered on the security domain.

As part of *Israeli's Security Networks'* comparative study, Sheffer and Barak tried to fit their theorization of the emergence of the security network onto Singapore: that the increasing involvement of SAF officers in Singapore's political system and the assumption of a "significant degree of influence over governmental decision making in a wide variety of spheres" was a response to the "perceived and actual continuous existential threats that it faced (pp. 140-141)." No doubt the "unique position of the military and the security sector in Singapore's affairs" can be attributed to the historical context of Singapore's independence and its geographic location (p. 139),[14] the security aspect has not played up that much in Singapore's public discourse when it comes to accounting for the permeation of Singapore's military elites in the wider society. Whereas Israeli civilian leaders with modest backgrounds in the security sector had "attempted to present themselves as security experts" so as to bolster their credentials (p. 76), entry into politics in Singapore has thus far not depended on past military background.[15] As aforementioned, the primary pitch of the PAP has always been the competence of its candidates. When military experience was brought up, it was in the context of organizational and operations management experience. Tan (2011) also noted that Lee Hsien Loong dropped the use of his military rank a few years before becoming prime minister, thereby suggesting that there was no added benefit in extolling his military background or that it might have even been deemed a liability.[16] Consequently, this suggests that as much as security concerns are a perennial issue in Singapore, what remains at the forefront are the notions regarding talent and capability.

Notwithstanding the above, it is evident that the "network" concept espoused by *Israel's Security Networks* manifests in Singapore. As detailed in the transition process section, the movement from the military to the public sector and GLC/GLEs by non-AO military elites operates informally and is based on a network of active and retired military personnel. It is self-perpetuating as retired military elites introduce retiring military elites to organizations with vacancies – not to say that they discriminate against non-military personnel but given the many years they spent in the military, their networks naturally include many other active and former military personnel.

Nevertheless, undergirding this is the military elites' confidence, justified or otherwise, in the talent and capabilities of themselves and their peers. As BG Calvin commented, generals have "gone through a system that must have graded [them] … leadership in the SAF is direct; meaning you either make it or you don't." This can also explain why although the planned transition into the public sector only applied to a select group of military AOs, so many other retired military elites go through similar paths. It seems that the idea that SAF officers are very well-trained and adaptable to situations, and that they belong to a small group of talent, has been internalized by both the retired military elites and their civilian counterparts who hired them. 'Interlocks' – the intersection between organisations and individuals – occurred, and this allowed for the diffusion of norms and practices across firms and sectors (González-Bailon, Jennings, and Lodge 2013). A theoretical concept to explain this would be 'ideational power', which is defined as "the capacity of actors (whether individual or collective) to influence other actors' normative and cognitive beliefs through the use of ideational elements. (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, p. 320)" There does not seem to be any official policy preferring retired military

elites, but people – at least the recruiters – are predisposed towards them. Summing up, in the public justification of the spread of the reach of military elites in Singapore, notions of talent and ability never escape the conversation.

THE LESS ALTRUISTIC REASONS?

The discussion of the 'network' effect leads on nicely to the issue of some Singaporeans having a nagging sense that post-retirement careers for military elites are rewards by the government to ensure 'elite cohesion' amongst those who are part of the 'establishment' or an expression of trust in the select few. Specifically, on the military elites, journalism professor Cherian George (2017, p. 99) wrote: "When scholar-officers leave the SAF at age fifty or younger, the government doesn't require them to fend for themselves and thus get into mischief. They are transplanted into ministries and government-linked companies, keeping them safely within the family."

Long-time observer of Singapore's political scene, Michael Barr, studied the elites in Singapore collectively – both civilian and military – and argued in *The Ruling Elite of Singapore: Networks of Power and Influence* (2014) that contemporary networks of power in Singapore were a deliberate project initiated and managed by Lee Kuan Yew, designed to empower himself and his family. He critiqued the notions of Singapore being run on the basis of meritocracy (talent) and multiracialism, that the institutionalization of modern methods of professional management in the matters of staff selection, assessment, and peer reviews was not replacing "traditional lines of patronage, privilege and consanguinity" but rather have been placed in the latter's service (p. 115). Also, amongst the features that characterized the national elite was a military background, with the "Chinese scholar-officer corps [becoming] the 'gold standard' of the new elite in the 1980s, routinely drawn into the civilian elite (pp. 81-82)." Those holding on to multiple executive and non-executive roles – and many retired military elites do – are "firm indications that [the] person is trusted by the ruling elite", and the concentrated use of the same few people was due to the "personal character of the system of elite regeneration: a very small number of candidates are produced each year from an already small population pool, and then new personnel are trusted only if a personal trust has been developed with a highly placed patron, which usually means someone close to, if not a member of, the Lee family. This makes elite regeneration a highly restrictive process more directed at excluding people than including them. (p. 126)"

In Barr's mapping of the networks of power and influence, the inner circle consisted of political and administrative leaders in "key ministries, a few GLCs, the military" and the sovereign wealth funds, the mid-range circles consisting of a "wide range of government and government-linked institutions", and the outer networks residing in institutions politically important "but not so central to the elite's institutional base" (p. 107). Hence going by Barr's thesis, the permeation of retired military elites in the public sector and government-linked entities is the embodiment of the power of this group of national elites, of which the centre of gravity, according to Barr, is currently PM Lee Hsien Loong (himself Lee Kuan Yew's son) and his family.

Without access to the highest levels of the government, it is difficult to categorically affirm or disprove Barr's thesis. However, to the extent that the interviewees have been candid in sharing their experiences, the network of power (if it exists) should be much smaller than what Barr has plotted. In the interviewees' sharing of the transition process, the focus was always about what the organizations were looking for, and what the jobseekers could offer; they seemed to be at pains to highlight it as a meritocratic exercise. It also did not seem that the 'centre' of the network had direct influence in the hiring process, and neither was there any mention of post-retirement jobs being a 'reward' for loyalty rendered. They were couched in terms of opportunities to contribute and to be kept engaged intellectually. If anything, they seemed quite removed from PM Lee and his family. Perhaps, it is a case of what C. Wright Mills' *The Power Elite* ([1956] 2000) had described: even though these individuals constitute a close-knit group, they are not part of a conspiracy that secretly manipulates events in their own selfish interest. Nonetheless, it is beyond this dissertation's scope to offer a definitive 'truth'; after all, the public service bargain that governs the relationship between the politicians and bureaucrats is often implicit and informal (Hood and Lodge 2006). Furthermore, without studying the ministries, statutory boards and GLC/GLEs on the whole and looking at their hiring of non-military elites, it would be inappropriate to conclude whether retired military elites are benefiting more than proportionately vis-à-vis 'true' civilians.

CONCLUSION

This article has highlighted that many Singaporean military elites continue their public service by other means after retiring; there is not only cross-sectional pattern but overall dynamic stability. Also, in contrast to standard civil-military relations theory, the SAF is not perceived to be distinct from the civilian public sector – it is but another conduit for talent development from which politicians and public sector leaders could be drawn. This can explain why so many retired military elites enter the public sector and GLC/GLEs.

Historically, it is possible to identify a critical juncture that institutionalized the fusion of civilian and military leadership – when the SAF was in its infancy. Over the years, this phenomenon has self-perpetuated because of the ideational power of the view that talent was scarce and that the SAF had attracted many in this limited pool, making it only natural to continue 'using' them in the public sector. Even in the absence of 'formal' policy (like the planned transition for the AOs), it took on a life of its own in the wider public sector and GLC/GLEs. Some observers criticize this phenomenon as a patronage system at work, but this cannot be proven or dismissed categorically.

What should one make of all these findings? Space constraints preclude a detailed comparison of Singapore vis-à-vis other countries, but a cursory survey suggests that the continuous nature (and justification) of the post-retirement career transition for Singapore's military elite is unique. Israel, South Korea, and Taiwan are some countries commonly compared with Singapore – all are small countries in their region and face perceived continuous existential threats – and they all once had retired military elites playing dominant roles in society. As Israel transitioned to a market economy, Israeli retired military elites have penetrated an increasing number of civilian spheres (Barak

and Tsur 2012). South Korea and Taiwan have also seen the waning of active and retired military elites' influence in the state and society (Choo 2016). The longevity of Singapore's experience is thus quite an anomaly.

The particularity of the Singaporean case can be partially explained by the continued rule of the PAP government, for in contrast to the democratization process in South Korea and Taiwan, there is no exogenous impetus to change things. But to the Singaporean retired military elites' credit, there have indeed neither been any integrity-related scandals, nor have they been perceived to have pursued the SAF's corporate interests from their positions. Moreover, in line with the government's narrative regarding competency, and in rejection of Finer's thesis that armed forces lack the technical abilities to run complex societies and economies, the military elites have been consciously developed to prepare them for their post-retirement careers. At least seventy-nine military elites, out of 170, possessed MBAs or postgraduate degrees in management or public administration (author's own tabulation). Many were appointed board directors of statutory boards too. Without discussing whether these experiences are indeed effective or sufficient, it shows, at the very least, the government's attempt at developing wider competencies and fulfilling its end of the bargain that the military elites are 'valuable'. This would have played some role in gaining public acceptance of such a post-retirement transition.

However, continued public acceptance of this phenomenon is not a given. As Singaporeans become more educated, education qualifications are no longer as awe-inspiring. There have been growing criticisms of the phenomenon, ranging from concerns about groupthink to the lack of industry experience. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to determine how valid these concerns are, or the assumptions that accompany the phenomenon for that matter. To some extent, 'reality' does not matter; what matters is how the situation is perceived (Masket 2018). For instance, it is perceived – rightly or wrongly – that a shipping carrier was mismanaged by a retired general, leading to it suffering losses. Yet, he was not seen to be penalised for his 'failures' but instead 'given' another job. Through all these, where continued widespread employment of retired military elites is coupled with *perceived* failures of their leadership, public acceptance of the practice would foreseeably drop. But more importantly, the government's rhetoric of Singapore not being a society where "social pedigree and connections count for more than ability and effort" will seem to ring hollow(er) (Tharman 2020). This perhaps is the greatest peril: when people no longer believe that they possess a fair chance in society and that opportunities are reserved for the gentry, fissures erupt in the social compact and social cohesion erodes.

NOTES

[1] 2.6 percent of the list.

[2] The SAF was established in 1965 following independence and conscription was implemented in 1967, where every able-bodied male citizen aged eighteen was eligible for call-up. Except for calling-up females, Singapore's initial model of conscription, career army, and reserve service was essentially adapted from the Israel Defense Forces. Israel had responded to Singapore's appeal for help and sent Israeli soldiers train and guide the development of SAF (Raska 2016).

[3] 'Descent from heaven'.

[4] Chan and Ramaya were both career soldiers and Soh a psychologist in Mindef.

[5] See '"Outsiders Inside": Experiences of Privately Contracted Educational Staff in the Singapore Armed Forces' (Ho 2019) for an overview of PME in Singapore.

[6] Although Singapore had generals before 1990, the SAF only matured into its current state in the early 1990s, and the practice of early retirement only institutionalized then.

[7] Some are promoted to a 'local' rank when they take up certain appointments, such as the Defence Attaché to America, and among them some revert to the colonel rank upon relinquishing the appointment, having not been promoted to 'full' brigadier-general. One is known to have retired as a colonel and another possibly as a 'local' brigadier-general.

[8] Chan excluded those "with honorific titles and foreign officers on loan or hired on contract to the early SAF". This article continues this approach.

[9] A job is counted as 'the first job post-retirement' if that is the position the military elite holds in the year he retires – for a general who held the role in Organization X between 2005-2015 and retired in 2010, he would be considered to have taken up his first post-retirement job in Organization X in 2010.

[10] A scheme introduced in 1981, where SAF Overseas Scholarship (SAFOS) "scholars are given the opportunity, after their stint in MINDEF/SAF, to serve in the prestigious Administrative Service as well as in other Ministries (Mindef 2003)." SAFOS is the most prestigious undergraduate sponsorship awarded by the SAF, marketed as second in prestige only to the President's Scholarship. A 'government scholar' is a uniquely Singaporean term, attached to those sponsored by the government to pursue higher education and who are earmarked for leadership roles. This contrasts to elsewhere in the world, where 'scholars' are those who pursue academic and intellectual pursuits. See da Cunha (1999, pp. 466-467).

[11] This highly symbolic appearance of Singapore's civilian leadership reviewing parades and official military functions in military uniform, and its impact on Singapore's civil-military relations seems not to have received academic attention thus far.

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[12] Retirement age for officers was between 50-55 years old before 1998, depending on rank (Singapore Armed Forces (Pensions) Regulations 2001); it was lowered to forty-five in 1998 as part of a 'keep SAF young' policy to engender dynamism and vibrance in the SAF (Mindef 1997). It was then raised to fifty years old in 2010.

[13] Various statutory boards.

[14] See *Securitising Singapore: State Power and Global Threats Management* (Aljunied 2019) on the 'militarization' of society through the securitization of non-traditional security challenges.

[15] Although holding the defense ministerial portfolio has been touted as one of the pathways to becoming the Prime Minister (Koh 2018).

[16] Lee turned fifty in 2002 and completed his National Service liabilities, and hence is 'fully' civilian per se. Nonetheless, there is provision in Singapore to add '(Retired)' behind one's military rank, but no political or public sector leader seems to use it – a plausible reading to this is their desire to highlight their 'civilian' status.

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APPENDIX: EXPLAINER OF THE FIVE SECTORS

'Private sector' refers to companies that are owned and run totally privately, without any known links with the government. Some organisations, like the Singapore Business Advisors and Consultants Council, are also categorised here, because while they are ostensibly non-profit organisations, their primary objective is to 'promote and advance the professionalism of business consulting'. Hence as long as an organisation has been deemed to be furthering the interests of the private sector, it has been assigned to this first category.

'Public sector' refers to all government ministries, statutory boards, organisations found in the Singapore Government Directory[17], and private limited companies set up as wholly owned subsidiaries of the preceding organisations. Statutory boards are a form of public agency established by an Act of Parliament and they provide public services and contribute directly to economic development. They are unique to the Singaporean context: they are autonomous and separate from the rest of Singapore's Civil Service but are still policymaking entities in their own right. This differs from autonomous regulatory agencies in the West, which typically just implement rules and regulations developed by the policymakers and are uninvolved in policy formulation (Woo 2015). Universities and

other educational institutions are included in this 'public sector' category too, even though they might be classified as the 'academic sector' on its own elsewhere, because while they are autonomous, they are funded by the government and their contacts are indeed found in the government directory. As for private limited companies wholly owned by public organisations, an example is MSI Global Pte Ltd – a subsidiary of the Land Transport Authority that offers consultancy services on land transport management.

Government-linked corporations, known as state-owned enterprises elsewhere, refer to firms founded by the government and corporatized over time. They are run by wage-earning professional managers, independent from government subsidies, disciplined by the market and stay in business only if they are profitable (Chua 2016). These firms are managed, and their activities coordinated through Temasek Holdings, a holding company set up in 1974 that has the Minister for Finance as its sole shareholder. Temasek Holdings typically hold a controlling stake in them or possess a substantial number of shares. Based on 2008 to 2013 market capitalisation data, government-linked corporations accounted for thirty-seven percent of Singapore's stock market value (Sim, Thomson and Yeong 2014).

Government-affiliated entities in this case include social enterprises owned by the National Trade Union Congress – a union federation that has a 'symbiotic' relationship with the ruling party and whose Secretary-General is a Minister without Portfolio in the Cabinet. Also included is the charitable foundation of the ruling party; although it is non-profit, it is after all an offshoot of the ruling party and hence it is deemed more appropriate to categorise it as a government-affiliated entity.

As aforementioned categories already include non-profit organisations, the last category has been named the 'people sector' to highlight the chief focus: the people in society. They are non-governmental organisations and include charitable organisations like the Red Cross Society, and sports organisations like the Football Association of Singapore. 'People Sector' is a term used in Singapore by the government and statutory boards in conjunction with the 'Private' and 'Public' Sectors.[18]

Annex 1: List of public sector organisations

MOE	Ministry of Education Academy of Principals Singapore National University of Singapore (NUS) Cancer Science Institute Singapore NUS Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School Energy Studies Institute NUS Institute of Systems Science NUS Yusof Ishak-ISEAS LKY School of Public Policy NUS Mechaobiology Institute NUS St. John's Island National Marine Laboratory The Logistics Institute Asia-Pacific Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine NUS

	Nanyang Technological University (NTU) S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine NTU National Institute of Education Singapore Centre for Environmental Life Sciences Engineering NTU Singapore Centre for 3D Printing Temasek Polytechnic Singapore Polytechnic Republic Polytechnic Ngee Ann Polytechnic Nanyang Polytechnic Institute of Technical Education Lifelong Learning Council Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board Singapore Institute of Technology Singapore Management University SkillsFuture Singapore St Stephen's School Temasek Laboratories @Singapore University of Technology and Design Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovation Cities
MTI	Ministry of Trade and Industry A*STAR Accelerate Technologies Pte Ltd (A*ccelerate) Biomedical Research Council A*STAR Biomedical Sciences Institute A*STAR CommonTown Pte Ltd Institute for Infocomm Research (I2R) A*STAR Singapore Bioimaging Consortium Design Singapore Council EDB Energy Market Authority Enterprise Singapore SPRING Singapore Trade Development Board/IE Singapore Sentosa Development Corporation Singapore Tourism Board
MINDEF	Ministry of Defence Advisory Council on Community Relations in Defence (ACCORD) Main Council ACCORD Council for Family & Community Engagement Defence Management Group Enhanced Agencies Supervisory Board Defence Science and Technology Agency Cap Vista Pte Ltd

	Defence Cyber Organisation DSO National Laboratories Defence Medical Research Institute Mindef/ Defence Medical Research Institute DSTA/ Defence Medical and Environmental Research Institute DSO National Laboratories External Review Panel on SAF Safety Safety and Systems Review Directorate Mindef SAF-NTU Academy Security and Intelligence Division Singapore Discovery Centre Pte Ltd Temasek Defence Systems Institute NUS
MOH	Ministry of Health Agency for Integrated Care Pioneer Generation Office Health Promotion Board MOH Holdings Pte Ltd/ Health Corporation of Singapore Eastern Health Alliance Pte Ltd Integrated Health Information Systems Pte Ltd National Healthcare Group Pte Ltd National Medical Research Council National University Health System (NUHS) National University Hospital Sengkang General Hospital Sengkang Health Singapore General Hospital SingHealth Tan Tock Seng Hospital
MEWR	Ministry of Environment and Water Resources Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority/ Singapore Food Agency National Environment Agency NParks Gardens by the Bay Company Ltd Public Utilities Board Pub Consultants Pte Ltd Public Utilities Board (PUB)'s Risk Management Committee
MND	Ministry of National Development Building and Construction Authority Housing and Development Board Urban Redevelopment Authority
MOM	Ministry of Manpower Central Provident Fund Workforce Development Agency/ Workforce Singapore Workplace Safety and Health Council

MSF	Ministry of Social and Family Development Early Childhood Development Agency
PMO	Prime Minister's Office Civil Service Institute/ Civil Service College Government Technology Agency National Research Foundation Public Service Division Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre
MOT	Ministry of Transport Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore Land Transport Authority MSI Global Pte Ltd Ezlink Pte Ltd Maritime and Port Authority Mass Rapid Transit Corporation Singapore MRT Ltd Port of Singapore Authority National Maritime Safety at Sea Council Singapore Land Authority
MCCY	Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth Charity Council Esplanade Co. Ltd Families for Life Council National Arts Council National Council of Social Service National Integration Council National Museum of Singapore National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre National Youth Achievement Award People's Association Singapore Sports Council/Sport Singapore Youth Olympic Games Organising Committee
MCI	Ministry of Information and the Arts/ Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts/ Ministry of Communications and Information Cyber Security Agency Singapore Broadcasting Authority/ Media Development Authority Infocomm Development Authority/Infocomm Media Development Authority National Infocomm Security Committee National Cybersecurity R&D Executive Committee National Library Board National Archives of Singapore
MHA	Ministry of Home Affairs

	Home Team Academy MHA National Crime Prevention Council
MINLAW	Ministry of Law Intellectual Property Office of Singapore IP Academy
MOF	Ministry of Finance MAS Cyber Security Advisory Panel Singapore Totalisator Board Singapore Pools (Private) Limited
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs

[17] See https://www.sgdi.gov.sg/.

[18] See https://va.ecitizen.gov.sg/CFP/CustomerPages/NEA_google/displayresult.aspx?MesId=1070400&Source=Google&url=va.ecitizen.gov.sg#:~:text=People%20Sector%3A%20e.g.%20grassroots%20organisations,%2C%20clan%20associations%2C%20et%20al.&text=Private%20Sector%3A%20e.g.%20All%20private,%2C%20business%20associations%2C%20et%20al.

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The purpose of the International Public Management Review is to publish manuscripts reporting original, creative research in the field of public management. Theoretical, empirical and applied work including case studies of individual nations and governments, and comparative studies are given equal weight for publication consideration.

IPMN The mission of the International Public Management Network is to provide a forum for sharing ideas, concepts and results of research and practice in the field of public management, and to stimulate critical thinking about alternative approaches to problem solving and decision making in the public sector.

IPMN includes over 1300 members representing about one hundred different countries, both practitioners and scholars, working in all aspects of public management. IPMN is a voluntary non-profit network and membership is free.

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