

## Ministry urged to extend military service

Written by Taipei Times

Friday, 08 October 2021 05:49 -

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Troops conduct drills on the beaches of Bali District in New Taipei City during the Han Kuang exercises on Sept. 16.

**Photo: Tsai Tsung-hsien, Taipei Times**

The Ministry of National Defense should extend military service from four months to at least one year, defense experts said yesterday.

The four months of military service in Taiwan are divided into five weeks of basic training and 11 weeks of specialized training at a military branch training center, which is usually near where recruits live.

The four months are only one-fifth as long as the mandatory service required of South Koreans, and yet Taiwan is faced with a greater danger than South Korea, retired air force lieutenant general Chang Yen-ting (張彥廷) said.

The Afghan army — despite being trained by the US military, and supplied with US arms and equipment — lacked the morale and will to fight, Chang said, citing the collapse of the US-backed government in Afghanistan.

“Building up mental preparedness is more important than national defense,” Chang added.

If the government wants to back up its claim that Taiwan would fight to the last soldier, it needs people willing to take up arms, and that requires a combination of conscription and voluntary service, he said.

Given the threat that China poses to Taiwan, the ministry would be derelict in its duties not to extend military service, Chang said, adding that Minister of National Defense Chiu Kuo-cheng (邱國晟) must recommend to President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) that mandatory military service be

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extended to two years.

National Chengchi University international affairs professor Chen Wen-chia (陳文嘉) also urged the military to extend mandatory service to at least one year so that volunteer personnel are free to focus on combat training.

The four months of training teach nothing of substance, Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Legislator Wu Sz-huai (吳斯懷) said, adding that the gaps between refresher training are too long and people forget almost everything.

Policy calls for one week of basic training before reservists are sent to battle, but with modern warfare tactics, they are unlikely to fare well in a war with one week, he said.

The military needs personnel and weapons if it is to live up to the government's expectation to "fight to the last soldier," he added.

Democratic Progressive Party Legislator Chao Tien-lin (趙天麟), a member of the legislature's Foreign Affairs and National Defense Committee, said that extending mandatory service or bringing back a conscription system is difficult in a democratic society.

Reservists in Israel and Singapore know where and who to report to in a time of war, and it would be more practical for Taiwan to set up its reservists like that, Chao said.

In other news, Deputy Chief of Staff Logistics Major General Hsu Chin-teng (許欽騰) yesterday said that the ministry has agreed on funding for logistics, maintenance, fuel and munitions subsidies, and has forwarded a request to the Executive Yuan.

If approved, the subsidies would be distributed on Nov. 1, he said.

Chao said he has since October last year asked the ministry repeatedly how it would fund the

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maintenance costs resulting from a rise in Chinese incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone.

"Money is not the problem. It's a matter of resolve," Chao said, adding that the president has also expressed the hope that the funds could be distributed within a year.

Source: [Taipei Times- 2021/10/08](#)