

Research Article

From Client to Hardware: The Ontological Inversion of the Service State and the Biopolitics of Forced Mobilization

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Abstract: The transformation of citizenship in digitalized societies under conditions of existential war presents a profound socio-philosophical problem, as the contemporary paradigm of the service state reduces civic belonging to algorithmically moderated consumption, digital access, and administrative convenience. This article aims to conceptualize the ontological inversion of the service state during existential military conflicts, examining how forced mobilization exposes the material and bodily dependence of liberal-democratic citizenship on sovereign survival. The study employs a qualitative socio-philosophical analysis, integrating conceptual reconstruction, critical interpretation, normative analysis, and contextual triangulation to examine the transition from client-based citizenship to mobilized embodiment within the framework of biopolitics and theories of sovereign power. The research reveals that existential war destroys the consumerist illusion of citizenship by forcibly re-embodiment the digitalized subject as the vulnerable substrate of state defense. The analysis demonstrates that when the political order is threatened, the state ceases to function merely as a service provider and reasserts its coercive claim upon the embodied citizen, highlighting the paradox that the enforcement of universal human rights depends on territorial, institutional, and coercive conditions. Furthermore, the study indicates that refusal of mobilization by a defending democratic state does not necessarily preserve civilian autonomy and may, under occupation, expose the population to unlawful incorporation by an occupying power. To maintain democratic legitimacy, wartime mobilization requires a renewed social contract grounded in legality, institutional trust, reciprocal obligation, and the unconditional dignity of the mobilized citizen, preventing the degradation of civic subjects into disposable resources.

Keywords: service state; biopolitics; forced mobilization; sovereignty; citizenship; busification, bare life, social contract

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1. Introduction

The contemporary democratic state increasingly appears to its citizens as a provider of services. In everyday life, the state is encountered not primarily as a monopoly of legitimate violence (Tickamyer, 1981; Weber, 1946), but as an infrastructure of documents, welfare, courts, schools, hospitals, digital platforms, security guarantees, property rights, mobility, and administrative access. The citizen logs in, verifies identity, pays taxes, receives benefits, registers property, travels, studies, consumes, and participates in society through a dense network of institutional interfaces. In this configuration, the state functions as a server, while the citizen appears as a client or user.

This transformation is not merely technical. It corresponds to a broader change in the phenomenology of citizenship. The modern citizen increasingly belongs through access: access to markets, platforms, services, mobility, recognition, education, medicine, documents, and symbolic participation. The implicit formula of such belonging may be described, following the concept of “Buying to Belong” (Healy, 2020), as a mode of social inclusion mediated by consumption, access, symbolic participation, and service infrastructures. The citizen participates in the political community not primarily through sacrifice but through consumption, productivity, taxation, legality, lifestyle, and digital visibility. In this peacetime regime, the coercive basis of sovereignty becomes largely invisible.

Existential war destroys this illusion. When the state faces the possibility of military defeat, territorial disintegration, occupation, or destruction of political order, it can no longer appear only as a service provider. It reveals itself as a sovereign formation that claims the authority to command bodies, redistribute risk, suspend ordinary expectations, and demand sacrifice. The citizen who was previously addressed as a client of services is suddenly addressed as a mobilizable body. The interface reverses. The client becomes hardware.

This article conceptualizes this reversal as the ontological inversion of the service state. The term “ontological” is used because the issue is not only administrative. In wartime mobilization, the very mode of being of the citizen within the political order changes. The citizen is no longer primarily the beneficiary of sovereign protection but becomes one of the physical conditions of that protection. Sovereignty ceases to be experienced only as an external guarantee and begins to depend directly on the citizen’s bodily availability.

Recent scholarship helps identify the two poles of this transformation. Mamedieva and Moynihan (2023) demonstrate that Ukraine’s pre-war digital-government capacities became a basis for maintaining civilian functions and continuity of public services under the conditions of Russia’s full-scale invasion. Strelnyk and Phillips (2025), approaching the problem from the perspective of wartime citizenship, show that contribution to national defence has become an increasingly important marker in the discursive construction of the “worthy citizen” in Ukraine. Taken together, and interpreted through the socio-philosophical framework developed here, these studies illuminate a profound tension between two modes of citizenship: the citizen as a user of digitally mediated state infrastructures and the citizen as an embodied participant in the survival of the political community. Yet the ontological relation between these two modes remains insufficiently theorized. At the same time, Mamedieva and Moynihan (2023) specifically conceptualize Ukraine’s use of pre-war digital-government capacities during the invasion as “digital resilience,” while Strelnyk and Phillips (2025) explicitly identify participation in state defence as an important marker in constructions of the “worthy citizen.”

This article argues that the virtualized environment intensifies this tension by enabling forms of symbolic participation that may simulate civic involvement without requiring equivalent embodied commitment. Digital expression, discursive solidarity, ritualized declarations of support, political commentary, and participation in online conflict can generate a phenomenology of involvement while leaving the material distribution of wartime risk unchanged. Under peacetime conditions, this discrepancy may remain socially inconspicuous. Existential war, however, radically exposes it, because symbolic affiliation can no longer substitute for the material reproduction of the political order upon which digital participation itself depends.

Forced mobilization is therefore treated here not as the primary empirical object of the study, but as a limit case through which a broader transformation in the social ontology of citizenship becomes visible: the transition from the peacetime experience of the state as a service infrastructure to the wartime experience of political belonging as embodied obligation, vulnerability, and shared existential risk.

Against this contemporary transformation of citizenship, the mobilization dimension of the Ukrainian case should also be situated within a longer history of conscription, without reducing the present ontological shift to a repetition of earlier mobilization regimes. Modern mass conscription has never been confined to authoritarian states; historically, it has also constituted an important mechanism through which military obligation, citizenship, political participation, and claims to social membership became interconnected (Hamilton, 2023; Ingesson, 2020; Ingesson et al., 2018). What varies across political orders is therefore not the existence of a sovereign claim upon the citizen’s body as such, but the institutional and normative framework through which this claim is legitimized, distributed, and experienced.

The United States during the Vietnam War provides a revealing comparative case. Project 100,000, introduced under Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, lowered existing physical and cognitive admission standards and enabled the military incorporation of hundreds of thousands of men who would previously have been considered ineligible for service. Recent scholarship has emphasized the class and racial asymmetries embedded in this program, showing how military manpower demands could transform socially disadvantaged populations into disproportionately available reservoirs of embodied military capacity (Cunning, 2026; Warne, 2026). Project 100,000 is therefore significant here not as a direct analogue of contemporary Ukrainian mobilization, but as an earlier example of the biopolitical redistribution of bodily risk under conditions of military necessity.

A different historical configuration operated under Soviet rule in Ukraine. Military

obligation was embedded in a centralized Soviet mobilization system rather than negotiated through a democratic social contract. During the Red Army's return across Ukrainian territory in 1943-1944, military manpower was recruited extensively from recently reoccupied populations, whose political loyalty was often viewed with suspicion after the experience of German occupation (Trofymovych & Sukhykh, 2019). More broadly, scholarship on Soviet wartime and postwar governance demonstrates how military and political incorporation operated within a centralized coercive order that sharply constrained individual autonomy and subordinated personal life to collective state objectives (Statiev, 2010; Weiner, 2001). These precedents demonstrate that the sovereign appropriation of bodily capacity is historically neither exceptional nor uniquely Ukrainian.

These historical comparisons clarify that the specificity of the contemporary Ukrainian case lies not in coercive mobilization itself, but in the collision between a deeply internalized digital-service mode of citizenship and the reactivation of embodied sovereign obligation under conditions of existential war.

The Ukrainian wartime phenomenon colloquially known as “busification” exposes this inversion with particular clarity. The term refers to forceful or coercive encounters between recruitment authorities and civilians, condensing a wider social symbol of fear, distrust, humiliation, legal uncertainty, and the violent return of the state's claim upon the body (Stezhensky, 2025). The fundamental problem is not that mobilization is unnecessary. In a defensive war against an aggressor, mobilization may be indispensable for collective survival. The deeper problem is that the liberal-democratic citizen experiences forced mobilization as a metaphysical scandal because it interrupts the service-state fantasy that rights, consumption, mobility, and private life can exist independently of the sovereign order that materially secures them.

For analytical clarity, this article uses “forced mobilization” to denote compulsory mobilization backed by the coercive authority of the state, while “coercive recruitment practices” refers specifically to physically forceful, degrading, arbitrary, or potentially unlawful methods of enforcement.

The central research question of this article is therefore the following: How does forced mobilization under conditions of existential war reveal the ontological dependence of liberal citizenship on the bodily reproduction of sovereignty?

To answer this question, the article develops a socio-philosophical analysis of the transition from client citizenship to mobilized embodiment. It argues that the democratic state at war must hold together two difficult truths. First, rights require a sovereign world in which they can be enforced. Second, the defense of that world may require bodily sacrifice, but such sacrifice cannot be legitimized through humiliation, arbitrariness, or the degradation of citizens into disposable material.

2. Materials and Methods

This article is based on qualitative socio-philosophical analysis rather than quantitative empirical measurement. Its method consists of four interconnected procedures: conceptual reconstruction, critical interpretation, normative analysis, and contextual triangulation.

First, the article reconstructs the concept of the service state as a political form in which the citizen is primarily addressed through access, service delivery, consumption, digital administration, and rights-bearing participation. This reconstruction is interpreted as a transformation in the social ontology of citizenship: the citizen appears as a user of state-enabled systems rather than as a body potentially claimable by sovereign necessity.

Second, the article interprets forced mobilization through the theoretical vocabulary of sovereignty and biopolitics. The analysis draws on Weber's account of the state as a holder of legitimate violence (Weber, 1946), Foucault's analysis of biopower (Foucault, 1978; 2003), Agamben's concept of bare life (Agamben, 1998), and Schmitt's understanding of sovereignty in the state of exception (Schmitt, 2005). These frameworks are not applied mechanically. They are critically reworked through the Ukrainian case, where the democratic state claims the citizen's body through law, under martial necessity, and in the name of collective survival.

Third, the article utilizes selected documentary and media materials as empirical anchors: contemporary analysis of “busification” in Ukrainian public discourse (Stezhensky, 2025), the Swedish Defence Research Agency's FOI Memo 8786 on Ukraine's mobilization law and its dilemmas (Löflund, 2025), the country-policy information on military service (Gov.UK, 2025), materials concerning human-rights advocacy and conscientious objection (United Nations, 2024), and Pashkova's study of forced mobilization in the temporarily occupied

territories of Donetsk and Luhansk (Pashkova, 2024).

Fourth, the article employs normative analysis to distinguish between the objective necessity of mobilization for sovereign survival and the sociopolitical consequences of arbitrary bodily capture. This distinction is central. The article does not treat all coercive mobilization as authoritarian violence, but neither does it treat existential threat as a blank cheque for the state. Its aim is to identify the conditions under which democratic mobilization remains politically and morally distinct from predatory extraction.

This article does not measure the frequency of coercive recruitment practices, adjudicate individual legal cases, or provide a comprehensive empirical sociology of Ukrainian mobilization. It also does not equate mobilization as such with unlawful violence. Rather, it analyzes the socio-philosophical structure of the transition from the peacetime service state to the wartime state of existential defense. The concept of “hardware” is therefore used diagnostically, not normatively. It does not imply that persons should be reduced to objects; it describes how existential war reveals the bodily substrate upon which sovereignty materially depends.

3. Results

3.1. *The Service State and the User Illusion of Citizenship*

The service-state paradigm engenders a specific epistemological and political phenomenon that can be defined as the user illusion of citizenship. Under peacetime conditions, the citizen encounters the state predominantly through usable systems providing documents, legal recognition, welfare, public order, digital identity, administrative convenience, and social participation. The coercive foundation of the state remains structurally necessary yet phenomenologically hidden.

This leads the citizen to understand political belonging through the metric of access rather than sacrifice. The state is expected to be convenient, predictable, transparent, and responsive, with its legitimacy measured by service quality, anti-corruption performance, technological modernization, and capacity to support individual life-projects. In this configuration, the state functionally resembles a server, and the citizen resembles a client whose primary modes of interaction are requesting, consuming, evaluating, and navigating.

Digitalization deepens this model by translating public authority into interface logic: applications, QR codes, databases, digital documents, notifications, identity verification, and platform access. The theory of deep mediatization provides a framework for understanding how media infrastructures become embedded in the constitution of social reality (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). In parallel, critiques of surveillance capitalism and platform capitalism illuminate how data extraction, algorithmic mediation, and platform architectures structure contemporary digital environments (Zuboff, 2019; Srnicek, 2017), while Han (2017) and Fuchs (2014) reveal psychopolitical and labour dimensions of digitally mediated subjectivity. Together with the concept of virtual introjects (Boichuk, 2025; 2026), these approaches help explain why institutional power is increasingly encountered through interfaces rather than through direct interaction with political institutions. The result is not simply administrative modernization but a transformation in the lived meaning of citizenship, in which the service interface tends to obscure the coercive foundations of sovereignty.

The user illusion consists in the belief that this interface constitutes the essence of the state. It does not. The interface is a historically specific surface of a deeper sovereign structure. The service state can provide rights and access only because there exists a political order capable of defending territory, enforcing law, collecting resources, and organizing coercion when necessary. The smoothness of the service interface depends upon the roughness of underlying sovereignty.

War reveals what peacetime hides: services do not float above violence; they rest upon the state’s capacity to organize and, when necessary, coercively enforce collective defense.

3.2. *From “Buying to Belong” to Mobilized Belonging*

Within this configuration, virtualization changes the phenomenology of civic obligation by lowering the experiential threshold of participation, where virtual environments structurally permit the decoupling of experienced participation from embodied obligation, allowing expression, affective identification, symbolic support, and participation in online political conflict to be experienced as forms of civic engagement without requiring a commensurate assumption of material responsibility or embodied risk. We define this condition as simulated civic participation, representing a mode of belonging in which the

subjective experience of political involvement exceeds the individual's material and embodied contribution to the reproduction of the political community, a discrepancy that may remain socially latent under peacetime conditions but becomes radically exposed during existential war which confronts symbolic affiliation directly with the material demands of sovereign survival.

In the specific context described by the concept of virtual introjects (Boichuk, 2025), algorithmic practices, immersive environments, and exocortical dependence deeply contribute to the displacement of social interaction into virtual space and the corresponding weakening of embodied socialization, meaning war inevitably performs a forced re-embodiment of the subject. The individual who had become accustomed to mediated presence, digital participation, and service-based inclusion is suddenly returned to the vulnerability of the physical body, as mobilization reveals that purchasing power, administrative inclusion, symbolic loyalty, and private productivity can no longer guarantee safety when the architecture of the state itself is under attack.

At this critical juncture, the peacetime logic of "Buying to Belong" undergoes its most radical inversion, since belonging can no longer be sustained exclusively through consumption, taxation, digital visibility, symbolic loyalty, or discursive participation, increasingly confronting the citizen with the inevitable possibility of bodily exposure to danger and death. This extreme transformation may be conceptualized as a transition from "Buying to Belong" to "Dying to Belong," a formulation that does not imply death itself becoming a normative requirement of citizenship, but rather indicates how political belonging is re-embodied through the readiness to assume mortal risk for the continued existence of the community, thereby rearticulating what peacetime citizenship permits the individual to experience primarily as access into a strict wartime obligation.

This inversion simultaneously transforms the moral economy of belonging, wherein the refusal of embodied obligation ceases to be interpreted merely as an individual preference and becomes socially recoded as a withdrawal from reciprocal membership, because the individual continues to claim the protections, rights, services, and future secured by the political community while refusing participation in the material reproduction of the conditions that make them possible. The resulting conflict is therefore significantly deeper than a superficial disagreement over mobilization policy, as it concerns the very criterion of civic reciprocity and questions whether membership in an endangered political community can remain grounded predominantly in entitlement when the survival of that community depends upon a fundamentally unequal distribution of embodied risk.

Ultimately, the state can no longer survive exclusively through digital platforms, legal texts, financial flows, symbolic recognition, or international legitimacy, since sovereignty under existential threat strictly requires bodies capable of defending territory, maintaining logistics, evacuating the wounded, protecting infrastructure, and absorbing mortal risk. Consequently, biological life becomes the final material condition of sovereign survival, disclosing the bodily foundation that peacetime service citizenship and virtualized sociality tend to conceal (Agamben, 1998; Foucault, 1978; 2003; Schmitt, 2005), which does not mean the citizen is normatively reducible to a military function or that the state obtains unlimited ownership over individual life, but rather demonstrates how forced mobilization exposes the absolute limit of consumer citizenship where the body reappears as the primary site of vulnerability, obligation, and sovereign claim the moment the political order itself is threatened.

3.3. The Human-Rights Paradox of Democratic Sovereignty

Forced mobilization exposes a fundamental paradox at the heart of liberal-democratic sovereignty. Human rights are normatively presented as universal, yet their practical enforcement depends on institutional, territorial, and coercive conditions. Rights require courts, police, archives, documents, borders, administrative systems, public budgets, schools, hospitals, and defense capacity. They do not administer themselves.

Contemporary legal and human-rights assessments reflect this tension. It was noted that in Ukraine compulsory national service is a prerogative of sovereign states and that punishment for failure to perform this duty does not, in itself, establish a well-founded fear of persecution (Gov.UK, 2025). At the same time, human-rights organizations criticize restrictions on conscientious objection, anti-war expression, and alternative service, emphasizing that the individual remains a moral subject rather than merely a resource of the state (United Nations, 2024).

This human-rights critique is important because it resists the total absorption of the

individual into the sovereign apparatus. It reminds democratic power that the mobilized person remains a citizen, a bearer of dignity, and a subject of law. However, the critique also faces a difficult ontological limit. If the sovereign state collapses under external aggression, the institutional world in which rights can be effectively claimed may collapse with it. Rights may remain morally valid in the abstract, but they become sociologically homeless.

The appeal to liberal rights may therefore become philosophically unstable when it presupposes the survival of the very sovereign order whose defense is being refused. This does not invalidate conscientious objection as a moral problem. Nor does it eliminate the need to protect individuals from arbitrary or degrading treatment. Rather, it shows that the opposition between individual rights and state violence is insufficient. In existential war, the state does not merely intrude upon private life from outside; it claims that private life itself can continue only if the political world that protects it survives.

Thus, forced mobilization does not abolish the language of rights. It discloses the tragic material conditions of their historical effectiveness.

3.4. Occupation and the Negative Alternative to Sovereign Defense

The temporarily occupied territories provide a stark counterexample to the assumption that opting out of sovereign defense necessarily preserves private life and personal safety. The reality of Russian-occupied territories demonstrates the opposite. When a sovereign order is destroyed or displaced, the population is not liberated into apolitical normality; it is exposed to another sovereign power that may be less constrained, less accountable, and openly predatory.

The research on the forced mobilization of student youth in the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk demonstrates that occupation did not return young people to civilian normality (Pashkova, 2024). Instead, occupation authorities and proxy structures transformed education, youth militarization, administrative dependence, and institutional vulnerability into instruments of mobilization. Student youth became a population prepared, registered, pressured, and in many cases forcibly incorporated into the military needs of the occupying power.

This evidence is philosophically decisive. It shows that refusal to participate in the defense of one's own state does not guarantee liberation from mobilization as such. The body may still be claimed, but now by an occupying power operating outside the protections of democratic law. The citizen does not escape becoming hardware; they are instead incorporated into a more brutal and unlawful coercive apparatus.

Occupation therefore destroys the consumerist illusion that sovereignty is optional. Services, documents, employment, education, medical access, communication, and movement can all be transformed into mechanisms of domination. Under occupation, the service interface does not disappear; it becomes an instrument of coercive incorporation (Pashkova, 2024; United Nations, 2024).

The implication is severe: the alternative to mobilization by a defending democratic state is not necessarily civilian comfort, autonomy, or peace. Under conditions of aggressive war, the alternative may be unlawful forced mobilization by the enemy. This does not excuse abuses committed by the defending state, but it clarifies the ontological stakes of sovereign survival.

4. Discussion

Forced mobilization must be understood as a socio-philosophical event that unmasks the hidden architecture of citizenship. The peacetime absolutization of the service interface leads citizens to perceive mobilization as an irrational interruption of normal life. Yet mobilization also reveals the sovereign foundation that peacetime comfort concealed.

This does not mean that the service state was simply false. On the contrary, rights, services, digital access, welfare, mobility, and administrative inclusion are real achievements of modern political life. The problem arises when the service interface is mistaken for the totality of the state. A state is not only a provider of services; it is also a political form capable of defending the conditions under which services remain possible.

The concept of bare life illuminates the exposure of the body to sovereign decision (Agamben, 1998). Yet the Ukrainian existential war also complicates Agamben's framework. The mobilized citizen is not simply abandoned outside the law as *homo sacer*. Rather, the citizen is claimed by law in the explicit name of preserving the legal-political order itself. The tragedy lies not in the disappearance of law alone, but in the fact that law may become dependent on

the embodied sacrifice of those whom it normally protects.

The concept of biopolitics is also necessary but insufficient if interpreted only as the management, optimization, and normalization of life (Foucault, 1978; 2003). Wartime mobilization discloses biopolitics in its most extreme form: not merely the administration of life, but the allocation of possible death in order to preserve the structural continuity of collective existence. The state does not only “make live”; under existential threat, it may require some to risk death so that the political conditions of life may continue.

The theory of the exception helps explain why existential threat transforms legal and political expectations (Schmitt, 2005). However, the democratic case also resists Schmittian simplification. The state of exception cannot become pure decisionism without destroying democratic legitimacy. A democracy at war must act decisively, but it must also remain answerable to the norms it claims to defend.

The transition from the service paradigm to mobilized belonging is therefore not a regression into archaic sovereignty, but neither is it a simple moral triumph of collective duty. It is a tragic political transformation. The state may objectively require bodies for survival, but the demand for bodies cannot be executed merely as a predatory extraction of resources. The state must navigate the razor’s edge between the necessity of mobilization and the imperative to maintain the political subjectivity of the citizen.

The concept of simulated civic participation developed above reframes this conflict as a discrepancy between subjectively experienced involvement and materially assumed obligation. Its significance lies not in denying the civic value of digital expression, but in revealing the limit beyond which symbolic participation cannot reproduce the political conditions of its own possibility. Existential war renders this limit visible by confronting mediated belonging with the embodied risks upon which the survival of the political community ultimately depends.

Freedom under conditions of existential threat cannot be conceptualized exclusively as the preservation of individual choice. It also depends upon the collective capacity to reproduce the sovereign conditions under which meaningful choice remains institutionally possible.

The practical implication follows from this distinction: mobilization policy cannot be built only around numerical requirements; it must also sustain legitimacy. The democratic legitimacy of mobilization is strengthened when procedures are perceived as lawful, fair, transparent, reciprocal, and socially meaningful; it is undermined when mobilization is experienced as arbitrary, corrupt, humiliating, class-selective, or procedurally opaque.

Training, rotation, medical examination, anti-corruption enforcement, clear procedures, demobilization prospects, family support, veteran reintegration, and public communication are not secondary humanitarian additions. They are part of the political ontology of democratic mobilization. They determine whether the state’s claim upon the body is experienced as shared sacrifice or as extraction.

This is why “busification” must be interpreted not only as a law-enforcement issue but as a crisis of the state-citizen interface. In peacetime, the interface promised service. In war, it demands sacrifice. If this transition is not mediated by legitimacy, the interface collapses into fear. If it is mediated by law, trust, reciprocity, and institutional fairness, mobilization may become not the abolition of citizenship but its most tragic and demanding form.

5. Conclusions

Forced mobilization under conditions of existential war represents the ontological inversion of the service state. While peacetime governance hosts the citizen’s social life through digital platforms, consumption, welfare, mobility, and administrative inclusion, wartime reality reveals that the citizen’s physical body may become one of the material substrates upon which the survival of the state is hosted.

The illusion of “Buying to Belong” collapses when the political order itself is threatened with destruction. Liberal rights, private autonomy, and consumer citizenship are shown to depend on a sovereign order capable of defending itself. The citizen can no longer remain only a client of services. Under existential threat, they may be called to participate in the bodily reproduction of sovereignty.

Yet this article has also argued against any simple apology for coercion. The democratic state cannot legitimate mobilization merely through necessity. If the state treats citizens as disposable hardware, it corrodes the political community it claims to defend. The mobilized body must remain the body of a citizen, not merely a biological resource.

The occupied territories demonstrate the negative alternative. Refusal of mobilization by a defending democratic state does not necessarily preserve freedom. It may merely defer bodily capture to the unlawful and more brutal machinery of an occupying power. The collapse of one's own sovereign state does not abolish coercion; it may expose the population to coercion without democratic law, without accountability, and without meaningful rights.

The final thesis is therefore severe but unavoidable: human rights require a sovereign world in which they can be enforced; sovereign survival may require bodies; but the mobilization of bodies must remain answerable to the rights it claims to protect. A democracy at war survives not by denying coercion, but by refusing to let coercion become its essence.

The necessary social contract of wartime cannot be based on consumer satisfaction. It must be based on institutionalized trust, reciprocal obligation, transparent procedures, fair distribution of sacrifice, and credible and enforceable guarantees for those who risk their bodies. Only such a contract can transform mobilization from predatory extraction into tragic but legitimate participation in the survival of the political community.

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