

# Demobilization

**Demobilization** or **demobilisation** (see spelling differences) is the process of standing down members of a country's armed forces from combat-ready status. This may be as a result of victory in war, or because a crisis has been peacefully resolved and military force is no longer necessary. Peace-time militaries may demobilize batches of conscripts in a fairly predictable routine.<sup>[1]</sup> Militaries can also demobilize their members to become reservists.

Demobilization is the opposite of mobilization, calling up forces for active military service. Forceful demobilization of a defeated enemy is called demilitarization.

## Definition

The United Nations defines demobilization as "a multifaceted process that officially certifies an individual's change of status from being a member of a military grouping of some kind to being a civilian".<sup>[2]</sup> Persons undergoing demobilization are removed from the command and control of their armed force and group and the transformation from a military mindset to that of a civilian begins. Although combatants become civilians when they acquire their official discharge documents the mental connection and formal ties to their military command structure still exist. To prevent soldiers from rejoining their armed groups, important preparatory work must be done to ensure that combatants are ready to be reintegrated into society and capable of returning to their civilian lives. Civilians play an important role in supporting combatants to return to civilian life by exposing them to civilian lifestyles and mindsets that combat the rigid military mindset soldiers acquire during their time of service.

Demobilization can be partial or complete depending on the number of units removed from the command structure. The process is often a symbolic and significant part of the peace process during which the conflicting sides acknowledge their intent to consolidate peace.

The United Nations identifies demobilization as part of a three-pronged approach to conflict management.<sup>[3]</sup> This includes disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration to take combatants out of conflict situations as well as remove weapons and help former

Should this certificate be lost or mutilated no duplicate of it can be obtained.  
 G.P.O. 41729-1943-4-120 000. S. D.D. 342.  
 PARCIMENT CERTIFICATE of Discharge of No. 562176 Rank *Sailor*  
 (Name) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Attested at *Pretoria* on the *5th June* 1942  
 for the *S.A.N.F.* at the age of *18* years.  
 Date of assumption of full time service *6th June 1942*  
 He is discharged in consequence of War Measure 58/43 as amended  
 by War Measure 57/44 as amended by War Measure 16/45 (c)  
*Partial Demobilization*  
 The service he is allowed to reckon *Three years 260* days.  
 His conduct and character while serving have been :-  
 General Character *Very Good*  
 Efficiency *Good*  
 Sobriety *Good* Education *Std. VI*  
 Discharge effected by *IMPERIAL DEPOT*  
 Place *Pretoria* (Signature) *Jan R. [Signature]*  
 Date *20th February 1946*  
 N.B.—Any person finding this certificate is requested to send it in an unopened envelope to the Adjutant-General, U.D.F., Pretoria, South Africa.

Demob papers issued to a South African sailor in February 1946

Campaigns :- To be furnished by A.G. (War Records) G.H.Q. Pretoria, on application  
 DESCRIPTION OF FINAL DISCHARGE  
 Of No. *562176*  
 of the *S.A.N.F.*  
 Age *22*  
 Height *5'10"*  
 Complexion *White*  
 Eyes *Grey*  
 Hair *Black*  
 Trade *Welder*  
 Status *Single*  
 Whether on land or at sea, whether on loan or otherwise  
*Discharged from the 20th day of February 1946*  
 Discharge effected by *IMPERIAL DEPOT*  
 Place *Pretoria* (Signature) *Jan R. [Signature]*  
 Date *20th February 1946*  
 Motives and Decorations :- *To be furnished by A.G. (War Records)*  
 on application  
 30th day of February 1946  
 Payment in lieu of *30 days leave at date of discharge may be made.*  
 QUALIFICATIONS FOR EMPLOYMENT IN CIVIL LIFE:  
*Welder*  
 Signature *Jan R. [Signature]*  
 Commanding *Unit or Corps.*

Back page of demob papers issued to a South African sailor in February 1946

members of armed groups rejoin society. For example, in 1917 the gradual demobilization of Canadian troops from England fostered the Khaki University to facilitate the re-integration of the soldiers into Canadian civilian life.<sup>[4]</sup>

In the final days of World War II the United States Armed Forces developed a demobilization plan which would discharge soldiers on the basis of a point system that favored length and certain types of service. The British armed forces were demobilized according to an "age-and-service" scheme.<sup>[5]</sup>

The phrase *demob happy* refers to demobilization and is broadly applied to the feeling of relief at imminent release from a time-serving burden, such as a career.<sup>[6]</sup> In the Russian language, it is known as *dembel* and has become a certain tradition in the Soviet and post-Soviet Armed Forces. A United States equivalent is "short-timer's disease", comparable to "senioritis" among United States high school students.

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## Two approaches to demobilization

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The United Nations Peacekeeping Operational Manual lists two different approaches to demobilization. These approaches are the semi-permanent demobilization sites (cantonment) or the mobile method which means demobilization at the sites where ex-combatants are gathered.<sup>[2]</sup>

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## Other uses

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In professional diving, demobilization is the dismantling, packing and transport back to storage of the diving spread, and where relevant, restoring the site to initial condition. Mobilization is the converse process.<sup>[7][8][9][10]</sup>

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## See also

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- Demobilisation of the British Armed Forces after the Second World War
- Demobilization of United States armed forces after World War II
- Demob suit
- Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
- Military discharge
- Social history of soldiers and veterans in the United States



Residents greeting demobilized soldiers of the Red Army in Minsk, July 1945 

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## References

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1. Finkelstein, David M.; Gunness, Kristen (26 March 2015) [2007]. *Civil-military Relations in Today's China: Swimming in a New Sea* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=8X6sBwAAQBAJ>). Routledge. p. <https://books.google.com/books?id=8X6sBwAAQBAJ&pg=PT261>. ISBN 9781317474340. Retrieved 16 March 2026. "PLA conscripts are not career servicemen.

They serve for a short period of time, after which they are simply demobilized. Each year the state Council and the PLA Central Military Commission jointly issue a 'Demobilization Circular' (*Tuiwu tongzhi*) governing the release from active duty of conscripts who have fulfilled their military obligations. This usually happens in connection with the annual selection of a new batch of conscripts."

2. "United Nations Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards" (<https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/operational-guide-rev-2010-web.pdf#page=146>) (PDF). *United Nations Peacekeeping*. 2010. Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20221201153431/https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/operational-guide-rev-2010-web.pdf#page=146>) (PDF) from the original on 2022-12-01. Retrieved 2022-05-21.
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4. Henry Marshall Tory (September 1917) A Khaki University for Canadian Soldiers (<https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-108325-78>) via Internet Archive
5. See Alan Allport, *Demobbed. Coming Home after the Second World War*, Yale University Press, 2009.
6. Demob (<https://archive.today/20130416032243/http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/definition/demob>)
7. "Dive Works Special Terms and Conditions" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20200229193630/http://diveworks.com.au/special-terms.pdf>) (PDF). *diveworks.com.au*. Archived from the original (<https://diveworks.com.au/special-terms.pdf>) (PDF) on 29 February 2020. Retrieved 22 November 2019.
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10. *IMCA D 014: IMCA International Code of Practice for Offshore Diving* ([https://www.oceanologyinternational.com/\\_novadocuments/412902?v=636459019496800000](https://www.oceanologyinternational.com/_novadocuments/412902?v=636459019496800000)) (Rev. 2 ed.). International Marine Contractors Association. February 2014.

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## Further reading

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- E McGaughey (2018) "Will Robots Automate Your Job Away? Full Employment, Basic Income, and Economic Democracy", SSRN, part 3(2) ([https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3044448](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3044448))
- Sparrow, John C. (1952) *History of Personnel Demobilization in the United States*, Department of the Army, 370 pages; online (<https://ia600205.us.archive.org/32/items/DA-Pam-20-210/AD1130597.pdf>)

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