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20 LET REPUBLIKE SLOVENIJE V NATU: NEKATERI VTISI O KOŠČKU IN CELOTI

20 YEARS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA IN NATO: SOME IMPRESSIONS ABOUT A TINY PART AND THE WHOLE

Povzetek Pametne države z zavezništvu medsebojno krepijo sposobnost, pripravljenost, odzivnost, odpornost, vzdržljivost in povezljivost instrumentov nacionalne moči. Nato se nenehno večdimenzionalno odziva na spreminjajoče se varnostne grožnje in okoliščine delovanja, tudi s posodabljanjem in izpopolnjevanjem konceptov, načrtov in ukrepov. V zavezništvu je tudi priložnost za samorefleksijo, ne zato, da bi sodili za nazaj, temveč zato, da bi preprečili napake v prihodnosti. Iskreno moramo razpravljati o tem, zakaj smo morda drugje, kot smo si želeli biti in smo to načrtovali, hkrati pa bi lahko kljub majhnosti pogumneje uveljavljali drugačne in izvirne rešitve.

Ključne besede *Instrumenti nacionalne moči, majhne države, obrambne zmogljivosti, naraščanje vojske, Slovenska vojska.*

Abstract Smart states, through alliances, synergistically enhance the capacity, readiness, responsiveness, resilience, sustainability and interoperability of their instruments of national power. NATO is constantly continually responding in a multidimensional way to changing security threats and operational circumstances, including by updating and upgrading concepts, plans and measures. The Alliance is also an opportunity for self-reflection; not to judge in retrospect, but to prevent mistakes in the future. We need to discuss honestly why we might be elsewhere, as had been desired and planned, but at the same time, despite our small size, we could be more courageous in pursuing different and original solutions.

Key words *Instruments of national power, small states, defence capabilities, military build-up, Slovenian Armed Forces.*

“But in war more than in any other subject we must begin by looking at the nature of the whole; for here more than elsewhere the part and whole must always be thought of together.”

Carl von Clausewitz

“The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism.”

Norman Vincent Peale

Introduction

Anniversaries are not necessarily just a time of celebration, as the Dictionary of Slovene Standard Language (Fran/SSKJ, 2024) suggests, but above all a time of remembrance. They are also an opportunity to reflect on the event or happening being commemorated, and the time and processes before and after it. They invite us to reflect on what we have and have not done in the intervening time. Anniversaries, especially ‘big’ anniversaries, benevolently encourage us to reflect deeply and, if we are mature and courageous enough, to be self-critical.

It was on 29th March 2004, 20 years ago, that the Republic of Slovenia (RS) became a NATO member state. The accession of a country to any integration is accompanied by different opinions – as in a wedding, to joke a little – some aunts are absolutely delighted, others are vehemently against it, and there are a few relatives who manage to remain rational and prudent and understand that any new relationship and commitment is a tangle of positive effects and less pleasant obligations that somehow have to be balanced.

When the RS joined NATO, some of us were happy, even joyful, while a minority of others who had opposed membership were disappointed. The feelings in these two groups were exactly the opposite of those in the four years before 2004, when we supporters of membership were deeply disappointed that the RS had not joined NATO in 1999 in a group with Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. Today, after two decades of membership, these two groups of people still exist, but with at least slightly changed feelings – most of the opponents have become somewhat lethargic, and many of the supporters have become less optimistic and more realistic. We have realised that NATO does not offer easy answers; still less magic solutions.

NATO membership is about firm commitments, hard work and the constant adaptation and innovation required by a changing security environment and security threats. It is a complex and intricate interaction of building blocks and the whole. Each of the parts has its own limitations and weaknesses, but at the same time influences its own dynamics and performance and that of all the others. This article will highlight and discuss some of the interesting challenges in this interplay between the RS and NATO. It is quite extensive, simply because we feel that it is maybe not too late, even for those less interested or even opposed to our membership of NATO, perhaps just to be informed in a comprehensive and one-stop-shop way with the circumstances and processes in the international community and in the Alliance which not only still, but increasingly, justify its relevance and value.

In the two decades of RS membership of NATO, our defence system and the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) have not had the opportunity to develop in a stable and predictable social environment – during this time, we have had four Presidents of State, nine Governments, nine Defence Ministers and seven Chiefs of the General Staff of the SAF, and we have been confronted by the consequences of the great financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. There was too much utopian idealisation in NATO, too much self-aggrandisement by the big, which the small abused to hide behind the backs of the big; too much non-fulfilment of agreed commitments both in substance and, above all, in time; too much permissive experimentation, and not enough leading by example. Before I am accused of too pessimistic a retrospective, despite the opening quote, let me confide in you that many of the problems and side-quests of our coming of age in NATO have already been described by other authors (Čehovin, 2019; Grayston, 2019) in the previous anniversary issue of Contemporary Military Challenges on the occasion of 15 years of NATO membership. Over the past five years, however, the geopolitical and social circumstances of our defence-military maturation in NATO have not changed for the better; on the contrary, many issues have become more acute, some with a clear trend of further deterioration.

1 THE FOURTH TURNING AND SECURITY TRENDS

According to the “generational theory”, modern history unfolds in cycles, each of which lasts about as long as a human lifetime. Each cycle consists of four periods of about twenty years, four “socio-political seasons” – growth, maturation, entropy and rebirth. The original concept was introduced by Strauss and Howe in 1997, and updated by the latter in 2023 in a book with the meaningful title “The Fourth Turning is Here”. Western societies are therefore now supposed to be somewhere between entropy and rebirth.

It seems that we are particularly “lucky” with this fourth turn – it seems to coincide with a depression, the fourth economic phase according to the theory of the Soviet economist Kondratiev. The theory states that in addition to short and medium-term economic cycles, there is also a long-term economic cycle, lasting about 45-55 years, in which economic growth, peak, decline and depression follow one another. The previous coincidence of a depression and a fourth turning point was witnessed in the ominous 1930s.

Once again, we are living in very challenging times. The things that are important for security in the world are becoming less every day – less social stability, fewer natural resources available, less willingness to dialogue, less biodiversity, less strength of values, less common sense and so on. On the other hand, the bad things are becoming more every day – more armed conflicts, more natural disasters, more public debt, more economic differentiation and social polarisation, more organised crime, more populism and authoritarianism, more pollution, more illegal migration, more wars...

Almost all of the security threats listed above have been known before; what is new is their frequency and intensity, both of which are increasing. Security developments in our natural and social environment are increasingly complex, dynamic and unpredictable. The different dimensions of (in)security are increasingly intertwined and interdependent. This makes the provision of security an increasingly complex process which, like the Cold War, once again requires the engagement of enormous societal resources. Despite our best efforts, we are not succeeding in eliminating security risks and threats, but are at best limiting them and reducing their negative consequences.

Security threats are increasingly global. We are witnessing a massive change in the geostrategic architecture of the international community. Migration flows and pressures towards Europe are not easing, and in some segments and directions are even intensifying. The end of the war in Ukraine is not (yet) on the horizon, and its consequences are becoming more and more widespread and fatal, not only for the countries in direct conflict, but also for Europe and, gradually, more and more for the whole world. The conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis in Gaza is intensifying and threatens to spill over not only into Lebanon but also into other countries in the Middle East. The escalation of tensions in the Red Sea has already led to an attack by the US-led coalition on Houthi rebel positions in Yemen.

The international community is being further polarised by the complete deterioration of relations between Russia and the West and the intensified rivalry between China and the West. All this is further destabilising the already unstable regions of the Balkans, the South Caucasus, the Middle East, and North and Sub-Saharan Africa. Traditional security threats are being complemented and reinforced by hybrid operations and advanced technologies.¹

These negative security trends represent a huge burden on the global economy, which is showing signs of serious decline. This time, it is no longer just a case of individual countries or regions in recession – for the first time, it is an economic crisis of global proportions. The combination of pandemic stresses, broken supply and production chains, economic and financial sanctions and geopolitical tensions has led to economic deglobalisation, and since modern economics is based on the assumption of constant growth, we are getting closer and closer to breaking point.

2 SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES TO PEACE AND SECURITY

The unipolar world under American leadership is being transformed into a multipolar one, with challengers no longer willing to abide by the existing rules but trying to impose their own and even change the nature of the game: not only by challenging

¹ For example, the importance and value of space, distance and time in military operations have changed dramatically, at the strategic level due to hypersonic missiles and at the tactical level due to the plethora of drones.

the right of the strongest to the exclusive use of (military) power and force, but also by returning themselves to the foundations of “realpolitik” and the struggle for power in the international community.

As was heard at the recent BRICS meeting in South Africa, the enlargement of the grouping “strengthens the struggle for a new international order”, because “the world system is dominated by Western countries and institutions that do not serve the interests of developing countries” (MMC, 2023).² This heralds a serious departure from the institutional theory and practice of international relations that has prevailed in recent decades, according to which subjects are equal in the international community, except when they are not (to be a little facetious). This is when “realpolitik” comes into play, in which decisions are taken by individual great powers or, at best, by the so-called concert of great powers, for whom (military) force is an effective instrument of (foreign) policy.

For small states, this is always an uncertain and dangerous period. They can only reduce their vulnerability by strengthening all their instruments of national power in a timely and comprehensive manner. These are defined by the acronym DIME-FIL, which consists of the first letters of the English words for diplomacy, information, military, economy, finance, intelligence and law enforcement. In the context of a reawakened “realpolitik”, military power is particularly important, primarily as a deterrent.³

Smart states synergistically enhance the capacity, preparedness, responsiveness, resilience, sustainability and interoperability of the instruments of national power through bilateral partnerships and, above all, alliances; not only for mutual security assurances, but also because alliances make it easier to keep pace not only with modern trends in the development of the military instrument of power, but also in ensuring conceptual interoperability.

3 NATO'S CONCEPTUAL ADAPTATION TO CHANGING SECURITY THREATS

Every organisation is a dynamic structure, constantly changing under the influence of internal and external factors. This dynamism is inherent, but it can also be more or less stimulated and directed. The extent and intensity of organisational dynamics depend on the situational awareness, vision and ambition of the intra-organisational actors with regard to the need for the organisation to adapt to changes and challenges from the environment. Where such organisational awareness is at a high level, the

² The key to analysing such statements is the use of strategic empathy, which means being able to take into account and understand our opponent's interests and accept that they are as important to them as ours are to us.

³ It is important to understand that DIME-FIL is a comprehensive concept – we should not rely on military instruments alone but orchestrate all the instruments in a balanced way.

adaptation is proactive and anticipatory, while at an even higher level the organisation seeks to shape the environment and its processes to its own desires and needs.

NATO, like any responsible organisation, continually responds to changing operational circumstances in a multidimensional manner, including by updating and upgrading concepts, plans and measures to address changing security threats as effectively as possible. The following is not a detailed presentation of the content of each of the NATO documents, but rather a general overview which seeks to present the dynamics of their development and to enable a wider audience to understand the relationships between them and their key themes.⁴

At the Madrid Summit in June 2022, NATO leaders approved a new Strategic Concept (NATO, 2022a), which replaced a previous one of 2010. It describes the changed security environment facing the Alliance and identifies NATO's core tasks: deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security.⁵ This is in line with its 360-degree approach against all threats and challenges across the land, air, maritime, cyber and space domains. Enhancing the resilience of member states' societies is an integral part of NATO's deterrence and defence posture.⁶

The dynamic strategic environment led the Alliance to agree on a new NATO Military Strategy (MS) in May 2019. It formalised a significant change to the Alliance's mindset, recognising strategic competition, and initiating a renewed approach which sets out the Alliance's military- strategic objectives and the ways and means to implement them. The Allies continue to support and implement NATO's MS with two military concepts that set the direction for NATO's continual adjustment:

- In 2020, the Allies approved the Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA), focused on force employment to deter and defend today;
- in 2021, the Alliance agreed the NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept (NWCC), offering a vision to guide the Alliance's long-term warfare development (Covington, 2023; NATO, 2021, 2022b, 2023).

⁴ Some of the documents in question are of a confidential nature, so I have drawn on four publicly available online sources to prepare my review: Berti, 2023; Covington, 2023; NATO, 2022b, 2023.

⁵ The Strategic Concept states that Russia is the most significant and direct threat to the Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. It also states that terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, is the most direct asymmetric threat to the security of the Alliance's citizens and to international peace and prosperity (NATO, 2023a).

⁶ Adapting and upgrading NATO concepts is an ongoing and never finished process. Thus, NSC 2022 builds on (1) the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), launched at the Wales Summit in 2014, and (2) a strengthened deterrence and defence posture, approved at the Warsaw Summit in 2016, which resulted in an enhanced Forward Presence in the eastern part of the Alliance (EFP) in 2017, when four NATO multinational battlegroups were deployed in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. At the 2018 Brussels Summit, a NATO Readiness Initiative was launched to enhance the Alliance's rapid-response capability, to bolster the Alliance's readiness, responsiveness and reinforcement to respond to threats in a 360-degree approach. It consisted of providing 30 heavy or medium manoeuvre battalions, 30 kinetic air squadrons, and 30 major naval combatants at a readiness of 30 days 'or less. These forces are being organised and trained as larger combat formations.

The DDA is a strategic redesign of the Alliance's approach to deterrence and defence that has been relied upon. As the first major redesign of Alliance deterrence and defence in the three decades since the end of the Cold War, the DDA shapes the Alliance's approach to deterrence activities⁷ and defence operations⁸ (Covington, 2023).

The NWCC represents a vision in support of maintaining and further developing NATO's decisive military advantage, and continually adapting the military instrument of power through to 2040. The NWCC proves NATO's dedication to a proactive and anticipatory approach to military adaptation, providing five warfare development imperatives⁹ and putting forward an ambitious set of six decisive improvements to the military instrument of power design which aspire to out-think, out-excel, out-fight, out-pace, out-partner and out-last adversaries.

In conclusion, the 2019 NATO MS, the 2020 DDA and the 2021 NWCC provide NATO military authorities with a new baseline on which to guide the development and the use in deterrence and defence of NATO's *military instrument of power*.

This may seem self-evident and unnecessary to point out. However, it is extremely important, because in the RS even some defence experts are still reluctant to accept and apply the concept of "military instrument of power", saying that it could be perceived as too militaristic or as an exaggeration compared to the limited military capabilities of a small state like the RS. They simply do not understand the importance of conceptual interoperability in the Alliance, which we are also trying to enhance with this article. It may help to challenge such scepticism to note that Josep Borrell, in his foreword to the EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence (2022), stresses the importance of instruments of power: "The essence of what the EU did in reacting to Russia's invasion was to unite and use the full range of EU policies and levers as instruments of power" (EEAS, 2022). Sometimes, indeed, it is easier for some people to accept a concept if it is offered not only in a NATO package, but also in an EU package.

⁷ *Operationally in deterrence, the DDA emphasises that preventing the transition to conflict begins in peacetime, not in crisis, and it requires timely and robust, purpose-driven military deterrence activity to contest attempts by an adversary to accrue military advantages over the Alliance. Deterrence in peacetime also requires the integration of multiple instruments of power to contest destabilisation and intimidation, and to prevent its widening.*

⁸ *Operationally in defence, the DDA holds that the employment of NATO forces in response to aggression requires the integration of mutually reinforcing, robust, multi-domain operations on an operational-strategic scale across the totality of the Alliance area.*

⁹ *Cognitive Superiority (Understanding the operating environment and potential adversaries relative to the Alliance's own capabilities, capacities and objectives); Layered Resilience (The ability to absorb shocks and fight on, across all layers, military, civil-military and military-civilian); Influence and Power Projection (Shaping the environment positively to the Alliance's strengths, including generating options and imposing dilemmas on adversaries); Cross-Domain Command (Revitalizing and enabling commanders' ability to understand the multi-domain operating environment and to act rapidly and effectively); Integrated Multi-Domain Defence (Protecting the Alliance's integrity to decide and act against threats in any domain, regardless of their origin or nature).*

4 THE CONCEPTUAL INTEROPERABILITY OF THE RS WITH THE NATO

With regard to the issue of the conceptual interoperability of the RS with NATO, the situation is fortunately not as bad as one could conclude from the ending thoughts of the previous section. In fact, we are not only there, but we are co-creating these processes and outcomes in the form of concepts and other Alliance documents.

Not only that, in the past few years the RS has been in the intensive process of reviewing, updating and upgrading a large number of national defence and military documents, programmes and plans to follow the processes in the Alliance and to adequately respond to the changing security environment and rising security threats. The key basis for guiding the development and operation of the national security system, defence system and the SAF are strategic, doctrinal and planning documents.¹⁰

Among the **strategic (development and guidance) documents** are the two basic documents in the field of national security and defence, respectively:

S1) The Resolution on the National Security Strategy, last amended in September 2019;

S2) The Defence Strategy – the current version was adopted in December 2012 and an updated and upgraded version is currently under preparation. The Defence Strategy is expected to be adopted in the first half of 2024 in a “strategic triple”, together with two new documents written for the first time:

S3) The Military Strategy;

S4) The Civil Defence Strategy.

The Military Strategy is the highest military document of the country. It has been being prepared at expert level in the SAF since as early as 2021. It has been approved by the SAF Chief of General Staff, but it has not yet been adopted by the Government. It is currently being updated to reflect changes in the strategic security environment and to align it with the Civil Defence Strategy, which was prepared in 2023 and also has not yet been adopted at Government level.

Doctrinal documents set out the fundamental principles by which the various subsystems of the defence system operate in pursuit of national interests and objectives.

¹⁰ In preparing my review of these documents, I have drawn on the working document “Hierarhija dokumentov na področju nacionalne varnosti in obrambe v Republiki Sloveniji” (Direktorat za obrambno politiko and Vuk, 2023).

D1) Military Doctrine is the highest military professional document and is the basis of the organisation and mode of operation of the SAF. It was adopted in 2006 and, as almost the oldest of the documents under consideration, it is in need of a thorough overhaul and upgrading, which is fortunately already underway. In this context, it is worth mentioning the Initial Concept for the Military Defence of the RS, which was drafted in 2022 and will certainly influence the content of the new Military Doctrine.

D2) The Doctrine of Civil Defence, adopted in 2002, as the oldest of the documents under consideration, is in need of a comprehensive overhaul, including on the basis of the new Civil Defence Strategy, which is already in the process of being adopted.

D3) The Doctrine of the Military Strategic Reserve dates from 2012 and will also be updated, probably in 2024, on the basis of more modern system solutions from the Strategic Triple and updated versions of the Military Doctrine and the Civil Defence Doctrine.

Planning (development and guidance) documents concretise and implement strategic guidelines by defining measures and allocating financial, human and material resources to fulfil the development objectives of improving the state's defence capacity within specified time periods.

P1) The Resolution on the General Long-Term Development and Equipping Programme of the SAF (ReGLDEPSAF) is the highest of the documents defining the long-term development of the SAF; it is amended as a rule every four years. The current ReGLDEPSAF2040 was adopted in 2023.¹¹ It will be implemented through medium-term defence programmes.

P2) The Medium-Term Defence Programme of the RS (MTDP) was adopted in 2023. It concretises the guidelines given in the ReGLDEPSAF2040 and sets the main orientations for the operation and development of the RS defence system and defence capabilities in the medium-term period; it is usually amended every two years. The MTDP constitutes an important link with the NATO defence planning process, especially in terms of planning the implementation of the NATO Capability Objective Packages for the RS.¹²

¹¹ The ReGLDEPSAF is the only one of the national defence documents which has a legal basis in the National Defence Act and (besides the Resolution on the National Security Strategy) requires a broader consensus in the form of approval in the National Assembly. The document defines the level of ambition with regard to the required level of SAF readiness.

¹² The MTDP also forms the basis for the preparation of national responses to the NATO and EU Capability Development Questionnaires (DPCS and EUMCQ) and for various other MoD implementation plans.

P3) The Strategic Defence Review (SDR)¹³, last conducted in 2016, is primarily an analytical document designed to review the adequacy of the organisation of the defence system and the suitability of its capabilities and forces.¹⁴

P4) Guidelines for the planning of operational, material and organisational preparations for the use of the armed forces are issued by the Minister of Defence to the General Staff of the SAF, as a rule on an annual basis.

Another special feature is the White Paper on Defence¹⁵, which was prepared for the first time in the RS in 2020. This is an analytical and presentational document and can serve as the basis for complementing strategic, doctrinal and planning documents.¹⁶

In parallel with the upgrading of allied and national strategic, doctrinal and planning documents, **operations military documents and plans** are also being upgraded – in NATO these are regional plans, and in the RS the SAF Response Plan, which combines crisis response measures, organisational and mobilisation development, mobilisation plans and SAF operations plans. Logically, due to the confidential nature of these documents, it is not possible to write about the details.

As you have probably already noticed, the sequence in which individual documents are produced or updated in the RS does not necessarily follow their hierarchy, which is of course not optimal. Nevertheless, it is sometimes better, or even necessary, to produce or update a document before a hierarchically higher document, rather than waiting for a favourable resolution of possible political disagreements or even blockages, which are usually more numerous and stronger in the case of hierarchically higher documents.

As proof that the MoD and the SAF are concerned that all the mutually agreed and accepted principles and development guidelines in the NATO and EU allied strategic documents are and will be adequately reflected in the national strategic defence and military documents, we offer a brief analysis of the frequency of use of individual words in the considered national and international documents (see Table 1).

¹³ The SDR goes beyond the content of pure planning documents and has some of the (development and guidance) characteristics of strategic documents.

¹⁴ A SDR is carried out in the event of major changes in the international security environment or in the event of a need to adapt the defence system to the changed circumstances; it can be the basis for changes to existing normative, strategic, doctrinal and planning documents in the field of defence.

¹⁵ It showed the level of development of the defence system (military and civil defence) with related measures to improve the state of the defence capacity of the RS.

¹⁶ In recent years, as security threats have intensified, countries have been moving away from White Papers to strategic development and guidance documents (for example, the FRG, which for the first time produced a National Security Strategy).

Table 1:
Frequency of
use of each
word in the
considered
RS national
and NATO
documents
(The table
was prepared
by Colonel
Bensad
Šiniković as
part of the
process of
aligning the
Defence
Strategy and
the Military
Strategy of
the RS.)

RS national documents					NATO documents			
NDA ¹⁷ 1994	DSRS ¹⁸ 2012	Re SNV-2 2019	Draft DSRS 2023	Draft MSRS ¹⁹	NMS 2019	DDA 2020	NWCC 2021	NSC 2022
Resilience								
0	0	18	30	22	25	13	65	13
Deterrence								
1	3	6	14	32	102	22	45	31
Instrument(s), Instruments of Power, Military instrument of Power								
0	1	1	1	29	186	15	12	0 (tools 4x)

In the revision of all these national security, defence and military documents, we have also taken into account other relevant national documents²⁰ and all the key strategic, doctrinal and planning documents of NATO and the EU, incorporating their intent into our national documents as much as possible. In doing so, we have tried over the years to ensure, with a high degree of prudence, the highest possible degree of coherence in content. These have generally been implemented very successfully, but we face major difficulties in putting them into practice. In the following sections, we will a) discuss some of the current challenges of strengthening the defence capacity of the RS as a NATO member (Section 5), and b) present some of the national systemic and organisational specificities of the re-discovered necessity of the military force build-up process (Section 6).

5 THE CHALLENGES OF STRENGTHENING THE DEFENCE CAPACITY OF SLOVENIA

On our 20-year development path in NATO we have achieved a great deal, but we have also misplaced and missed some things along the way. Like any other societal process, the performance of the RS and the SAF in NATO is an oscillation. It must, therefore, be carefully monitored and steered, and efforts must be made to keep the

¹⁷ National Defence Act.

¹⁸ Defence Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia.

¹⁹ Military Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia.

²⁰ Strategic and planning documents which are the responsibility of other ministries and also have an impact on the activities of the defence sector were also taken into account (e.g. the Resolution on the National Programme for Protection against Natural and Other Disasters; the Strategy for the Development of Slovenia; the Strategy for the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Slovenia; the Strategy for the Participation of the Republic of Slovenia in International Operations and Missions; the Strategy for Cyber Security, etc.).

oscillations in this process to a minimum and the general trend, despite occasional difficulties and setbacks, to a largely positive one. It is important to keep under review whether the development of defence capacity and military capabilities is where it should be in the light of NATO agreements and commitments, normative, development and planning documents, and geostrategic and societal realities. We need to be honest about why we might be elsewhere, not to judge in retrospect, but to prevent mistakes being made in the future. We need to remain properly vigilant and committed before we finally become accustomed to some of the inconsistencies, shortcomings and discrepancies highlighted below.

5.1 NATO membership – a thrust or an obstacle to the SAF's professionalism?

In April 2002 the government of the RS decided to abolish conscription, which effectively ended in 2003, with the ambition of making the SAF fully professional by 2010. It is true that in the RS, in the years before 2003, we had considerable problems due to the rapidly growing trend of conscientious objectors. Nevertheless, it is hard not to feel that the rapid transition to an all-volunteer force was at least partly influenced by the desire to convince the Alliance of our alignment with modern military trends and standards. However, there were no immediate expectations or demands from NATO in this respect. Grayston (2019, p 164) takes a similar view, pointing out that in 2000 conscript armies were not unusual in NATO, and that “there was no particular pressure from NATO for Slovenia to develop fully professional armed forces”.

The project “Transition to a Professional Army, Complemented by a Voluntary Reserve”, abbreviated as PROVOJ, was launched in 2003 and prematurely finished at the end of 2007. According to the final report of the PROVOJ project (Ministrstvo za obrambo, 2009, p 15), the professionalisation of the SAF was to comprehensively address the issue of the creation of a professional army through the implementation of seventeen areas, or sub-projects. Those familiar with the various aspects of the transition from conscription to the volunteer forces understand that five years is really too short a time to declare the process successfully completed. It is, therefore, not surprising that the project's final report (ibid, pp 42-90) listed the following objectives as unmet:

PR3.19 – Satisfied SAF members;

N4.2 – Recruitment and selection of candidates will be carried out in such a way as to achieve the target manning levels of the SAF Standing and Reserve Forces;

N4.7 – Units manned by contract reservists will be manned by former members of the standing forces;

N5.20, PR5.19 – We will adopt agreements with other ministries and major employers on the employment of former SAF members;

PR5.6 – Ensured conditions for the replenishment of SAF units and commands with an adequate number of the personnel required;

PR5.18 – Establishment of an organisation of former SAF members;

ID 651 – Medical care;

N6.3, PR6.3 – Self-help system for family members developed and implemented;

N6.6, PR6.5 – Basic healthcare in the military health service will be provided for family members of SAF members, as feasible;

PR8.5 – The rights acquired to issue public documents/certificates, as the acquired education and qualification will be on a par with related civilian professions;

PR8.6 – Education and training acquired during courses in the SAF may be used to obtain employment when service in the SAF ends;

N11.7 – Adaptation/construction of housing units for single servicemembers according to priorities;

ID 378 – Preparation and verification of educational programmes for the attainment of standard skills for occupations;

PR13.5 – Ensured regulated state of affairs – certificates and licences awarded to all SAF personnel.

When we evaluate these aspects of military service today, we find that most of them are still insufficiently regulated. This is proof that we have still failed to provide the comprehensive conditions for an effective professional army. This is in no way the responsibility of the SAF and the MoD alone; it is also the responsibility of other ministries and Slovenian society as a whole, which has a negative impact on the position and functioning of the military organisation. In any case, we do not want this to be seen as a retrospective accusation, but above all as an incentive to complete unfinished tasks in the future.

Is then NATO membership an incentive or a hindrance to the professionalism of the SAF? Undoubtedly, membership has, at least in part, encouraged and accelerated professionalisation at both the institutional and the individual level. At the individual level, NATO membership has had a strong impact on professionalism. Conversely, at the institutional level, it has gradually become not only a hindrance but even a justification for lower ambitions, not directly but indirectly. Many understood, and still believe, that as NATO members we can lean on the Alliance without, or at least with a limited need, to be fully responsible for our own security. This is because (too) many people still refuse to understand (1) the deeper message and meaning of the

sequence of Articles 3 and 5 of The North Atlantic Treaty (1946)²¹, and (2) that there is hardly any independent NATO force on which to rely, as NATO is primarily a synergistic combination of the military capabilities and forces of the member states.

5.2 Inadequate acceptance of combat burden and risk

The professional SAF is still not a sufficiently combat-oriented military organisation, primarily focused on the development of military power and a combat ethos, alongside which its stabilisation and humanitarian potentials would be developed as a mere complement; rather it is the other way around. In the long term, this may have an extremely negative impact on the self-image of the SAF and its members, as well as on the country's defence capacity. In this context, the phenomena of marginalisation of the more combat-oriented members of the professional armed forces, and even their self-exclusion from the military organisation due to the frustrations stemming from the now three-decade-long non-involvement of SAF formations in actual combat operations, are not negligible.²² The fundamental mission of any army is to provide a real military force with which a state can protect, promote and defend its national interests in times of need, when the use of other instruments of national power does not produce adequate results.

There is a strong reluctance on the part of Slovenian politics and the public to use the professional armed forces in more risky international operations and missions. They behave as if the RS had not made the transition from a conscript army, which is understandably extremely sensitive to potential casualties, to a diametrically different format of professional army. Since entry into the professional army is voluntary, and since it is not territorial in nature, but primarily expeditionary, a higher level of risk for members of the professional army is already assumed by default. We do not want to be misunderstood here; no one wants to suffer casualties. However, political and public fear of casualties should not have a negative impact on the pursuit of national interests, or on the professional military adequacy of SAF formations in international operations and missions. This marked reticence on the part of Slovenian politics and the public is also reflected in the structure of SAF equipping projects, where the procurement of more capable combat systems and platforms is persistently and firmly opposed, while equipping with non-combat and dual-use capabilities is much more acceptable.

Slovenian politics and the public must be aware that such covert civilianisation of the SAF and the prolonged prevention of the verification of the training and

²¹ Article 3 points out that "... the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack." It is important to note that "separately" is written before "jointly", and "individual capacity" is placed before "collective capacity". But only then comes Article 5, which is devoted to the well-known and more familiar concept of collective defence.

²² This can be argued on the basis of several examples of SAF members who, after leaving the standing military, found employment in foreign private military companies, as well as on the basis of their statements and the opinion of some commanders.

readiness of the professional army in real combat situations are preventing its normal development and undermining its institutional integrity. This also exposes us to the possibility of criticism that the RS does not accept an equal sharing of burdens and risks in ensuring peace, security and stability in the international community. This increases the possibility that, even if required to carry out national or collective defence in war, the SAF will not be sufficiently effective.

In this respect, honest self-observation and self-evaluation are indispensable. We need to be brutally honest in assessing our own attitude towards the Alliance – it is the only way to avoid getting ourselves into a situation in which we have a misconception of who we really are, in terms of the quantity and quality of our own military capabilities and forces, and how we are perceived by our allies. It certainly does not help if (too) many have still not internalised the fundamental principle of the Alliance: “one for all, all for one”. Indeed, it is still possible to hear, unfortunately not only from some politicians and officials, that in the event of Article 5 being activated, our declared forces will not actually leave the national territory. If they do, they will come home after completing their six-month rotation, and our obligation to the Alliance will thus be fulfilled. It is estimated that they may return earlier if they suffer losses such that our forces lose operational capability – nothing, therefore, about replacing losses and ensuring their continued operational capability on an ongoing basis, and preferably nothing about meeting our commitments to the Alliance after the first deployment, nothing about continuous re-deployment.

This is not fair at all; first it is not fair to ourselves, then it is not fair to our allies. This is because alliances are not only about benefits but also, once again, about fair burden and risk sharing. As simple as that!

It is not just about showing the flag, being a member of the Alliance and being an actor on stage, but about active and responsible participation in all allied activities and processes, in accordance with our actual capabilities and limitations. In my country, at least in the region where I come from, nobody likes those who join us in the pub only until the bill has to be paid, and then suddenly and mysteriously disappear. This is why we must never behave in the same way when it comes to the fair sharing of the burden and risk in the Alliance.

5.3 (Un)fulfilment of the Defence Investment Pledge

Over the years, the RS has developed into a credible and respected ally, capable of providing peace and security in numerous peace support operations and other similar NATO missions. Unfortunately, in some aspects, notably defence expenditure and the pace of building capabilities, we are not a model worth following.

It is very likely that, in the context of the war in Ukraine, the Alliance’s future capability and force development ambitions will have to be (even) greater than before, not only in terms of scope, but also in terms of quality and the time available to build them up. The logical consequence of this is that there is likely to be (even

more) insistence on delivering on commitments with regard to defence capabilities and defence spending.

The Allies have made considerable progress in increasing defence spending, including investment in major equipment, and have taken steps to share the burden more equitably within NATO. At the Vilnius Summit in 2023, the Allies agreed on a renewed Defence Investment Pledge, committing to invest at least (!) 2% of GDP in defence, rather than just 2% as agreed at the Wales Summit in 2014. This is a minimum, on the basis of which members will be able to establish and maintain the agreed and necessary defence capabilities and forces. This is particularly true for those members who are late in meeting their agreed and accepted commitments and have not yet closed the development gap (NATO, 2024).

With 1.34% of GDP spent on defence expenditure in 2023, the RS is, according to the NATO Press Release on Defence Expenditure of NATO countries (2014-2023) (NATO, 2023b), at the tail end of the Alliance, in 26th place (out of 30 member states), and in the same position in terms of the proportion of defence expenditure on investment and R&D (just over 23% of defence expenditure). Interestingly, the RS plans to achieve 2% of GDP on defence at the latest by 2030 (!) (Resolution on the General Long-Term Development and Equipping Programme of the SAF 2040, 2023). All this, of course, has a negative impact on meeting the agreed capability targets, both from a quantitative and qualitative point of view.

Inadequate defence spending and some significant delays and postponements, mainly due to financial constraints, for example in the procurement of the 8x8 armoured platform, have not been beneficial for the professional development of the SAF. Čehovin (2019, p 83) even pointed out years ago that “Budgetary malnutrition, in combination with malfunctioning human resources management, has pushed the defence system into a spiral quest for the lowest point. By failing to fulfil its commitments on the level and structure of defence spending, Slovenia has lost much of its credibility in the Alliance ...”

5.4 Defence planning – is it driven by capability goals or a whole spectrum of national security interests?

Grayston (2019, p 165) notes that “NATO’s own approach to force planning did not help with Slovenia’s development of its defence plans. NATO’s approach to defence planning is derived from the policies and plans of its larger members. Many of the smaller NATO nations endeavour to shape their entire defence force structure around NATO requirements. However, the leading NATO nations, notably the USA, Great Britain and France, all derive their force structure plans from national defence strategies and then commit to NATO those forces they consider appropriate. This works to the disadvantage of smaller nations, sometimes producing unrealistic defence plans”.

We can agree with Grayston when he describes the defence planning methodology of the leading NATO countries. However, we cannot support his view that this methodology is not suitable for smaller states, which, in his view, should only focus on meeting agreed force targets. If this were to be the main driving force in the development of the armies of the smaller states, it would mean that we would be expecting them to act only in accordance with Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, rather than developing and acting in accordance with Article 3 at the same time. We therefore firmly believe that it is also inevitable for small states to derive their force structure plans from a national defence strategy and, before that, from the full spectrum of national security interests. Limiting military development plans to NATO capability objectives alone is short-sighted and potentially dangerous, not only for the national interests of any member state, but also for NATO itself. This does not mean that we believe that “the small must have everything the big have”. No, but even small NATO member states still need to develop comprehensive national military instruments of power which can support the full spectrum of national interests in the context of collective defence. They should therefore exercise prudent restraint in the development of strategic offensive military capabilities and, while developing agreed capability objectives, also focus on the development of capabilities and forces sufficient in size and sustainability for the tasks of Host Nation Support (HNS) and Safe and Secure Environment (SASE) on national territory.

Finally, we must acknowledge that in the defence planning process, both some member states and NATO as a whole are not agile enough due to organisational inertia and stubbornness. Too often we feel that changing unfulfilled plans which were probably too ambitious or simply wrong is a sign of weakness and lack of determination. In the past, this may have been true, but in today’s multi-dimensional and extremely fast-changing strategic environment, we need to understand and accept that changing plans and solutions on the fly is a sign of agility and wisdom.

5.5 (Mis)understanding of the limitations of all-volunteer armed forces and the Alliance

Over the past two decades, NATO has been adapting to a changing reality, driven by the rise of near-peer states and, after Russia’s occupation of Crimea in 2014 and the war in Ukraine, by the imminent challenge from the East over the boundaries of spheres of influence. At least some misunderstanding and confusion about the new reality has emerged, even in the leading member states. This is why some of the changes in NATO and in the member states over the past decade have proved to be right, and others wrong. The problem for the smaller member states is that they lack the confidence to assess which changes are fully acceptable, which are partially acceptable, and which are not suitable for copying.²³

²³ As I wrote in one of my articles (Kotnik, 2023), “Američane je treba kapirati, ne kopirati!”. This is a play on words in lower colloquial Slovene, where two key words differ by just one letter, but that completely changes their meaning. The translation is: “Americans are to be understood, not copied!” In German this could be “Amerikanen sollten kapiert werden, nicht kopiert!”.

It is an undeniable fact that the professional SAF is sufficient only as a peacetime military instrument of the RS. This does not mean, however, that it should be supplemented only by unmodernised conceptual or structural solutions along the lines of the former Territorial Defence. We are living in a new defence-military reality that allows only for the meaningful application of past and foreign experience, not for its transposition.

This does not mean, of course, that we doubt the concept of collective defence, nor do we believe unquestioningly and uncritically in its omnipotence. It is important to understand that collective defence is, by definition, merely a synergistic set of national defences. Each country must therefore be able to guarantee its own basic military security, and at the same time contribute to the collective military security of its allied and partner states. Since no state can meet this objective with a professional army alone in the event of an exceptional deterioration of the security situation in the international community, NATO member states must also put in place appropriate systemic and organisational arrangements through which, if necessary, more comprehensive military capabilities can be built up to meet potentially larger, more intense and more protracted military threats.

6 MILITARY FORCE BUILD-UP, A RE-DISCOVERED NECESSITY

Over the past three decades, some positive changes and trends in the international community have allowed for downsizing and change in the structure of the SAF, including the transition from a conscript to a professional army supplemented by a contractual reserve. The key milestones that provided a rational basis for the reduction of the RS's military potential were the integration into NATO and the EU. With its full membership of NATO, the RS abandoned the system of self-sufficient national defence and joined the system of collective defence, which, in the current political and security situation in the international community, remains the most appropriate mechanism for ensuring not only the military security of the RS, but also the promotion and defence of its national interests.

Although the RS will always rely to the greatest extent possible on the support and assistance of allied and friendly states in the pursuit and defence of its national interests, it must never give up an adequate degree of its own defence capacity and preparedness, and a reasonable degree of independence and autonomy in the defence and military spheres. The RS has the right to defend its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity at all times by all available means and methods consistent with the provisions of international and humanitarian law. Therefore, while strengthening the collective defence capabilities which it is building on the basis of the agreement with other NATO members and the resulting commitments, it must also maintain and develop those complementary defence concepts and doctrines which have proven, on the basis of its own and foreign experience, to be the most appropriate and effective for the military defence of spatially small countries with limited resources. This logic is literally imposed on us by history, which is full of examples of turning points

when, due to a combination of unfavourable circumstances, alliances have not yet been able to fulfil their mission, or after a while were no longer able to do so.

In conceptual terms, the downsizing and restructuring of the SAF culminated in 2010 with the abolition of the compulsory military reserve and the Military Territorial Commands (MTCs). This was a reflection of the peak of utopian idealism about transforming the military organisations of developed industrialised countries into post-modern expeditionary forces. The various fashionable concepts of stabilisation, peace enforcement, peacekeeping, peace support and the like have literally strangled the more fundamental concepts of military deterrence and military defence. In practice, all this has led to negative assessments of the SAF's combat preparedness, which the President of the Republic, as Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Forces, has been forced to inform us about for almost a decade now.

People are very different in their attitudes towards novelty, and can be placed on a continuum from uncritical enthusiasts to stubborn deniers of all that is new. I would describe myself as a rational sceptic, which I think is a strength rather than a weakness for someone working in the defence-military field. This personality trait of mine is the basis for the now two-decade-long warnings that we should not move too quickly and completely to a professional army only; that the option of voluntary military service (VMS) should be retained; that the concept of the Military Strategic Reserve (MSR) should be developed; that the abolition of the MTCs was a bad decision; that at least after 2014 and the Russian annexation of Crimea, it would have made sense to build on the MSR concept with a structured force; and that the Voluntary Contract Reserve (VCR) does not offer enough choice to citizens. It is now indeed high time to internally differentiate the current single VCR into three sub-forms: 1) deployable also abroad, 2) mobile throughout the whole national territory, and 3) restricted in use to a province/region. This would of course be followed by status differences between members of the different sub-forms of the VCR, in particular the level of monetary compensation, and training standards, while armaments and military equipment would have to be uniform for the entire composition of the whole SAF.

A larger reserve force could at least partially mitigate the trend of the declining RS military potential. It is not only the number of soldiers that is being reduced, both in the standing forces and the VCR, and that the compulsory reserve is no more. It is also a matter of reducing some aspects of the quality of our soldiers – while in some competences they are quite comparable to those of allied countries, the competences of some branches are almost extinct due to the retirement of a substantial number of experienced specialists and a limited number of younger ones with adequate skills and competences. Given the unstoppable rise in the average age, it is logical that their psycho-physical fitness is deteriorating on average over the years. The combat power of the SAF is also declining, not only because of the decreasing number of soldiers and their increasing psycho-physical limitations, but also because of the decreasing availability of weapon systems, on average. Some of them are decades old and therefore difficult to maintain; some need to be upgraded; we are far behind

schedule with planned acquisitions of new ones, such as a basic armoured combat platform for battalion battle groups, not necessarily 8x8, because tracked platforms proved more useful in the war in Ukraine; and we have no plans to procure more modern weapon systems, such as armed drones and remotely operated ground-based unmanned weapon systems.

It seems as if the reduction of the military potential of the RS is fully socially acceptable – as if it has become a social norm, as if it has become embedded in the muscle memory of this state and society, as if it has completely permeated the collective mind and deprived it of the ability to think rationally and to make a realistic assessment of the geostrategic and defence-military trends and developments in the international community. I am a rational sceptic about the latter too; the tensions between the West on the one hand and Russia, China and whoever else on the other will not be short-lived, and their escalation and the spread of war in Ukraine and the Middle East is also possible. I am therefore convinced that we will have to strengthen and accelerate the growth of the military instrument of the RS's power and its military potential.

Particularly for small countries with limited resources, it is extremely difficult and risky to predict what their national security, defence and military needs will be in the somewhat more distant future. In this regard, it is important to take into account both our own and foreign experience, which shows that, particularly in the case of smaller countries or social communities, the synergistic effect of a combination of adverse circumstances can leave them relatively alone in providing military security and defending national interests at crucial historical moments. Experience shows that in such cases they can rely mainly on their own strength and abilities, as happened to the Slovenes three times in the 20th century, in 1918-1919, 1941-1945 and 1990-1991.

There is a lack of understanding in Slovenian society and politics that social developments are not linear, much less constantly improving, but are defined by oscillations and cycles. Therefore, established solutions, even if they are currently producing excellent results, must always be subject to constant evaluation and a healthy portion of scepticism, to protect us from complacency and idealistic optimism.

The Covid-19 crisis and the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, for example, have proved again and very strongly that the concept of “just-in-time logistics” in national security and defence systems is a misconception. The storage and long-term management of sufficient ammunition stockpiles has proven to be crucial to a state's ability to conduct effective deterrence and prolonged defence. We must therefore constantly maintain sufficient reserves and stockpiles of material to enable us to be rationally self-sufficient, at least for a limited period of time, and to be dependent on the support of others only to a limited extent thereafter. Much is already happening, albeit still at the conceptual and planning level, but the trend is positive, as is evidenced by the more frequent use of the term “build-up” in relevant defence-military literature and documents in recent times.

The Defence Act (1994/npb8), the SAF Service Act (2007/npb1) and the Military Service Act (2002/upb1) do not use the term “build-up”. In the Military Dictionary (2002), the term “build-up” does not exist. In the Military Doctrine (2006), “build-up” is found only once in the context under discussion. Also, in the ReGLDEP SAF 2025 (2011), the term “build-up” was not used in the above sense. The same applies to the Defence Strategy (2012)²⁴ and the Resolution on the National Security Strategy (2019). In contrast, the draft revised Defence Strategy (December 2023) uses the term “build-up” six times and the ReGLDEP SAF 2040 (March 2023) uses the term “build-up” in the sense discussed 13 times.²⁵ This is undoubtedly a direct influence of the process of writing the draft Military Strategy of the RS (2023), in which the term “build-up” is used 24 times in the context of increasing the defence power of the RS or strengthening the SAF.

On the basis of the presented data, it can be concluded that this type of use of the term “build-up” in defence-military documents is not new; it appears as early as 2006 in the Military Doctrine (2006) and the English-Slovenian Military Terminology Dictionary (Brinc et al., 2006). Although it does not appear in the Military Dictionary (Korošec et al., 2002), it is true that in the past it was rarer, probably due to the more frequent use of the phrase “increase in size and structure”. The gradual increase in usage can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2:
Frequency
of use of
the term
“build-up”
in defence-
military
documents (in
chronological
order)

Defence-military documents	Year of publication/ adoption	Frequency of use of the term „build-up“
Defence Act (1994/npb8)	1994	None
Military Service Act (2002/upb1)	2002	None
Military Doctrine	2006	Yes, 1x conditional
SAF Service Act (2007/npb1)	2007	None
ReGLDEP SAF 2025	2011	None
Defence Strategy of the RS	2012	None
Resolution on the National Security Strategy	2019	None
ReGLDEP SAF 2040	2023	Yes, 13x
Defence Strategy of the RS – draft revised	2023	Yes, 6x
Military Strategy of the RS – draft	2024	Yes, 24x

²⁴ The Defence Strategy mentions the increase in the size and combat power of the SAF or the defence power of the RS seven times.

²⁵ In the ReGLDEP SAF 2035 (2022), the term “escalation” was used more often, no less than 18 times.

In the Military Doctrine, “build-up” is limited only to the quantitative aspect, but according to the dictionary the term includes not only the quantitative aspect, but also the qualitative aspect. The understanding of “build-up” as an increase not only in quantity, but also in quality, is also suggested by the American definition, or its Slovene translation in the English-Slovenian Military Terminology Dictionary (Brinc et al., 2006), which does not speak only of numerosity, but also of the strength of the units, which is undoubtedly a qualitative category. A similar logic is also introduced, at least indirectly, by a proposal in the Military Strategy, which envisages that, as the peacetime composition of the SAF grows, it is gradually not only increased, but also transformed into a wartime composition, which again presupposes a qualitative change or upgrade of the SAF’s combat power, or the defence power of the RS, as the case may be.

7 DISCUSSION

Traditionally, defence and military affairs have always been on the side-lines in the RS, except in times of national emergency, most recently before, during and for several years after the 1991 War of Independence. In the late 1990s, we saw a decline in interest in the military, especially in the context of the growing resistance to conscription and the definitive abolition of compulsory military service in 2003. This decision was at least partly supported and justified by Slovenia’s admission to NATO in 2004. Despite the constant and direct explanation that NATO membership was only an upgrade of our deterrence, defence and security, it was misunderstood as a substitute, or even a complete replacement, for our own national defence capabilities.

Unfortunately, this kind of misperception is still present and strong, not just among the uninformed public but even within some political parties and quite a number of politicians. Thus, it is still not possible to experience the indisputable and coordinated support of political elites all around the political spectrum to defence and military developmental plans, and accordingly high enough defence spending. A Slovenian proverb says: “For a little money, a little music!” The last thing we would ever wish for in this context is for there to be no national “music” at all, for it to be deafeningly quiet when our own cannons should be thundering. In such a case, the likelihood of having to dance to someone else’s music (again) would increase enormously!

The RS needs to work not only at the level of the state, but also at the level of society as a whole, to develop concepts and plans for the transformation and build-up of peacetime to war-relevant defence and military capabilities. The specific relationship between the professional military and civil society requires special attention to be paid to the comprehensiveness of societal efforts.

Clausewitz described war in holistic terms as a paradoxical trinity comprised of the tendencies of the people, the commander and his army, and the government (Cole, 2020). It is difficult to function and develop well in an environment where the military is observed and perceived with suspicion, mostly not among the people, but

among certain political parties and politicians. Following some of Cole's arguments, one could suggest that the perception of the military as something alienated is held by those political parties and politicians who do not understand war as a rational tendency in the form of an extension of politics, but as an irrational tendency emanating primordial violence and hatred.

This kind of misunderstanding of war and the military by some political parties and politicians, which is occasionally also expressed through military-unfriendly public statements, is unlikely to have a positive impact on the already low level of interest of citizens not just in active military and reserve service, but also with regard to strengthening the overall defence capacity and the multi-layered resilience of society.

The negative security trends presented here call for a coordinated and reinforced response from as many actors in the international community as possible. This, enabling synergies, is the main objective of all alliances. Unfortunately, we are losing cohesion in NATO, which is probably the very essence of any alliance. This weakening of cohesion is not only perceptible at the strategic level, as Hungary and, more recently, Slovakia have openly expressed reservations about NATO's approach to the war in Ukraine; in addition to strategic incoherence, some member states are experiencing a further lack of coherence at the tactical level in their societies. Increasing political and economic stratification and polarisation in some member states is reducing their internal strength and resilience, which is having a negative impact on our common deterrence and defence posture.

Being in the Alliance is a privilege and a responsibility, not only in delivering on commitments and sharing burdens and risks in a balanced way, but also in self-reflection. In addition to highlighting our achievements and successes, we all need to reflect freely and unencumbered on what we are not doing optimally in the Alliance and on what we are doing wrong. In this respect, the small countries could be more vocal and, above all, more heard, if we were, of course, consistent in delivering on the agreed commitments and more balanced in sharing the burdens and risks in the Alliance.

In NATO, while the member states are formally equal, in reality there are of course major differences in terms of actual influence – small members tend to follow the big ones, both conceptually and in action. In this respect, it would be useful, at least occasionally, if there was more courage to assert more forcefully the different and original solutions of the small member states. The causes of our problems and too many of our side-traps are not, as a rule, outside us, even if we like to put ourselves in the role of victim. After 20 years, it really is time to take responsibility for our own actions and our own destiny – honest self-evaluation is required, not self-pity.

Whatever our size, we need to learn from each other and from all of us together – we are not unique as small countries, but in some ways, we are really in a different position. Slovenia, for example, should be more ambitious and confident in developing

some non-kinetic niche capabilities that are game changers, such as intelligence capabilities, artificial intelligence, STRATCOM, PSYOPS, EW and CYBER. As a small member state with limited resources, we are still expected to strike painfully if necessary. This does not mean hitting very hard, but rather unexpectedly striking from an inconspicuous direction, hitting where it hurts the most. However, we need to be balanced in our approach, so the “old-fashioned” kinetic capabilities and forces are still absolutely necessary.

In terms of the development of SAF capabilities and forces, two centres of gravity seem logical for the future: (1) the implementation of capabilities goals, with a clear priority for the two battalions, medium and combat reconnaissance; and (2) the establishment of a structural and organisational framework capable of 2a) carrying out the build-up process from a peacetime to a wartime size and structure of the SAF, including 2b) additional capacity to perform/enable compulsory military service in the event of such a political decision, initially preferably in a selective rather than a generalised form. In the event of a further deterioration in the security situation and an escalation of military threats, it is obvious that on the one hand we need a highly professional force to fight on the eastern periphery of the Euro-Atlantic area, and on the other hand an additional non-deployable force of significant numbers, mainly to perform host nation support (HNS) and safe and secure environment (SASE) tasks.

The latter is of paramount importance to prevent, contain and suppress a) terrorist threats, b) illegal mass migration, c) extremely violent organised crime, and d) unconstitutional and unlawful civil unrest and insurgencies that could escalate in our strategic depth and support the strategic objectives of our enemies. Protracted war is about multi-layered resilience and maintaining the will of societies to fight, and we must prevent enemies from penetrating our physical and cognitive space. In this respect, non-deployable territorial forces are as important as state-of-the-art frontline combat capabilities.

NATO is not without its limitations and mistakes, but it is nevertheless an irreplaceable catalyst of defence-military processes for all member states, especially small ones. It really is easier and more effective to face extremely dangerous security challenges not individually or one by one, but together. This does not mean that we will tackle the same type of threat with less input from each individual, but that with the sum of the correspondingly large individual inputs, we will tackle the same type of threat (1) sooner, (2) with less risk of failure, (3) with less cost due to fewer losses, and (4) with less time spent. The initial surplus of forces is therefore not an unnecessary expense, but means that we will be left with more unspent forces after the conflict, which will then be a more effective basis for starting a new build-up process to deal with the next threat.

Conclusion Deterrence, defence, resilience, sustainability and interoperability are still not given the attention they deserve in the media, the public and in part of politics in the RS, despite the very clear negative security trends presented at the outset. It is as if we are

permeated with utopian idealisation and the hope that we are so small that somehow all this will pass us by, or jump over or overlook us. If anything, it will touch us only very slightly and very lightly. It is as if the concept of AI is at work, not in the sense of Artificial Intelligence, but in the sense of Arrogance and Ignorance.

Taking informed, prudent and timely decisions, including the less popular and unpopular ones, is key to managing national security risks. However, there is always a high price to pay for failing to take the necessary national security and defence-military response measures. Those political actors in the RS who, despite the general unpredictability of developments in the international community, the growing rivalry between the major players and the extreme escalation of military threats in Eastern Europe, are still opposed to investing in the development of Slovenia's defence capacity and military capabilities, and thus to strengthening them, can be considered to be completely lost in time and space. Having one's own state is not only a privilege and a prestige, but first and foremost a responsibility, not only economic and social, but above all a national security responsibility, especially at crucial historical junctures.

In recent years, much has been missed in the area of defence and military preparations and preparedness, due to the excessive optimism that pervades. We have not made sufficient use of the period of peace and stability in Europe. The developments in Ukraine will make up for what has been missed in a shorter time and under less optimal conditions. In particular, it will be necessary to accelerate the strengthening of the RS military instrument of power and the capacity, preparedness, readiness, sustainability and interoperability of its military capabilities, including the ability to build them up.

We in NATO need to prepare for an uncertain future, each member state for itself and all of us together. Member states must take care of their own military and defence capacity as much as possible, and first, and on this basis, NATO encourages, directs and coordinates all of us together in collective deterrence and defence efforts to maximise the common good. Some still cannot understand or refuse to accept this. To return to the joke in the introduction, on the 20th anniversary of our "marriage" there are still too many sceptical aunts among us who are still vehemently against this relationship. Twenty years ago, I carefully weighed up the arguments for and against NATO membership and concluded that there were many more positive aspects and effects. A similar weighing-up now leads me to the same conclusion.

However, I must confess that I personally expected the path in the Alliance to be easier, less winding, more level, less slippery, constantly inspiring and less (self-) limiting. In the process of managing such frustrations and disappointments, I often recall the key paraphrased message from JFK's famous Moon speech: "We are walking this path not because it is easy, but because it is hard". Walking this challenging path in NATO is not too difficult, at least for me, because we are walking it primarily for ourselves; but if it is ever hard, it is mainly because of us!

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* Prispevki, objavljeni v Sodobnih vojaških izzivih, niso uradno stališče Slovenske vojske niti organov, iz katerih so avtorji prispevkov.

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