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EDITORIAL

SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

The Defence Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia, adopted in 2024, makes several references to the environment, assigning several meanings to the word: environment as a social environment and environment as a natural environment. The first occurrence of the word is in the following paragraph: »Dynamic changes in and the uncertainty of the international security environment, combined with the nature of contemporary security risks and threats and their increasing frequency and intensity, require the defence system to be proactive, more flexible and more responsive; require an increase in the scope, spectrum and sustainability of defence capabilities; and require them to be more frequently used.« (Defence Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia, 2024)

Throughout its history, human has not yet learned to coexist with other members of (their own) species, which reflects in the number of armed conflicts currently taking place around the world. According to the Geneva Academy, there are currently more than 110 armed conflicts of varying intensity taking place: most of them (more than 45) in the Middle East and North Africa, more than 35 in other parts of Africa, 21 in Asia, seven in Europe and six in South America (Geneva Academy, 2024).

At the time of writing, the three conflicts receiving the most international attention are the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Israeli-Arab conflict (including the Iran-Israel conflict) and the conflict in Syria. It was the conflict in Syria that entered a new phase at the end of November 2024, when various rebel armed groups took advantage of the political and military weakness of Bashar al-Assad's regime and his allies (Russia and Iran) to launch an offensive in north-western Syria, which led to the collapse of regime forces and the capture of several important towns (Kourdi and Edwards, 2024).

1 CONNECTEDNESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The Syrian case illustrates the interconnectedness and interdependence of the international environment. The main supporters of the Syrian regime (Russia and Iran) are both involved in several other armed conflicts. Russia is focusing most of its military attention on the invasion of Ukraine, while Iran is involved in the struggle against Israel, both directly and indirectly (Gaza, Lebanon). It is in these two conflicts that we have seen the greatest diversity in the extension of the armed conflict to different domains, as well as in the impact on other countries, and hence in the attention paid by researchers (cf. Baliž and Prebilič, 2024; Kogoj, 2024; Pavel, 2024; Somogyi and Nagy, 2023).

Iran, which through its proxies (Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis) attempted to open several simultaneous fronts against Israel (Gaza, the Golan Heights, Syria and Lebanon, and the Houthis' actions) to weaken the only Jewish state in the world, did not expect such a response by Israel. Consequently, Israel not only re-invaded Gaza and Lebanon, beheading both the military and political leadership of Hamas and Hezbollah, but also used its air force to carry out a number of attacks on targets in Yemen and Iran itself (Haynes, 2024; Radford et al., 2024).

The ferocity of Israel's response to the numerous military threats has thoroughly weakened Iran's conventional military capabilities, which has not only lost important military allies and a huge mass of military equipment and weaponry, but has also (re)stalled the Iranian nuclear problem, which poses strategic threats not only to Israel, but also to other Iranian adversaries in the region and elsewhere in the world (Al Jazeera, 2024).

A similar situation has unfolded with Russia. The planned short-lived invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 quickly escalated into an unanticipated protracted conflict, which has now been going on since 2022. Ukraine's weakening defences, which in August 2024 managed to bring the fighting onto Russian territory, required significant reinforcements of Russian troops and equipment. This led Russia to reduce its presence in Syria as early as 2022, though it never fully withdrew (Moscow Times, 2022; Umland, 2024). A comparable situation has emerged with Russia's activities in various parts of Africa, where it primarily operates through its mercenary force, the so-called Africa Corps. The African Corps, which is the successor to the infamous Wagner Group, currently comprises several thousand members, many of whom are veterans of the Ukrainian conflict. The Corps has suffered repeated heavy losses in 2024 in battles against local rebel groups (Brown, 2024; Ehl, 2024).

In their efforts to assert international influence, both Russia and Iran have encountered adversaries that forced them to make greater efforts than originally planned, resulting in a loss of strategic relevance in other areas of action. Syria is the most recent example of such a loss of Russian relevance due to the reckless invasion of Ukraine. The same happened to Armenia, which lost a strategic ally in its conflict with Azerbaijan and,

consequently, the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023. Azerbaijani forces launched an offensive and took control of Nagorno-Karabakh (Mikaelian and Perovic, 2023).

This brings us back to the Defence Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia (2024), which, among other things, emphasizes that »The international security environment of the Republic of Slovenia is complex, dynamic, interdependent, and subject to rapid and unpredictable changes, which may have global dimensions. There are no clear dividing lines between the internal and external dimensions of security«. This was most evident in Slovenia after 2015, with the onset of the global migrant crisis, when Slovenian territory, as part of the so-called Balkan route, was exposed to thousands of irregular migrants. The security environment in Slovenia was at the time thus directly threatened by armed conflicts in Africa and Asia, with consequences not only in the security sphere, but also in the political sphere (Brožič, 2020; Malešič, 2017).

2 CONTRIBUTIONS

Matej Jug's article *Individual and his role in the modern security environment* critically examines the contemporary understanding of individual security, and the role of the individual in the contemporary security environment. The latter is subject to various influences: globalisation, societal transformation, the increase in the complexity and scale of threat sources, and the reduction of the security sector's capacity to perform its tasks.

Silvo Grčar, Andrej Sotlar and Katja Eman discuss the self-awareness of SAF members regarding the ecological consequences of their actions in the paper *Ecological awareness of the personnel of the Slovenian Armed Forces: Self-Identification as a basis for strengthening the environmental aspect of civil-military relations*. The issue of ecology or preservation of the natural environment has become an important social and political issue in the modern era, making it of strategic importance to military organisations.

The recruitment and retention of personnel in the Slovenian Armed Forces has been a pressing issue for the Ministry of Defence for a long time. In their contribution, **Janja Vuga Beršnak, Gašper Ferme, Andraž Melanšek, Andrej Kohont, Ljubica Jelušič and Jelena Juvan** entitled *Should I Stay or Go? A Theoretical Model of Personnel Retention in the Slovenian Armed Forces*, they present a theoretical model outlining the factors that influence retention organisation at all socio-ecological levels within a military organization.

The environment, in terms of geography, remains an important element of military operations as well as military education and training. In their article *Staff rides in professional military education: fusing history, the modern battlefield, and the battlefield of the future*, **Mikael Weissmann and Jonas Björkqvist** highlight the

importance of incorporating visits to battlefields of the past for the development of modern soldiers.

Mark Kogoj's paper *Strategic culture and the U.S. engagement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict* examines the human element of the environment through strategic culture on the shaping of US action in the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The issue of the Russo-Ukrainian war is also addressed in **Vladimir Prebilič** and **Patrik Rebrica's** article, entitled *Cyber Warfare in the Russo-Ukrainian War*. Through an analysis of individual examples of cyber warfare as the fifth operational domain, the authors present its impact on the evolution of modern warfare.

The Ukrainian-Russian conflict is analysed by **Luka Ružičič Červek**, who focuses on all direct and indirect actors in this armed conflict in his article *Analysis of the actors of the Ukrainian-Russian war: two and a half years later (February 2022-July 2024)*.

In his contribution entitled *The Definition of Intelligence Activity*, **Jaroš Britovšek** tackles the challenge of defining modern intelligence, which is an ever-present in a competitive security environment, characterized by the actions of potential or actual adversaries seeking to obtain and protect information.

This issue concludes with a review of the book *Vývoj a proměny československého strategického myšlení* [Development and transformation of Czechoslovak strategic thought] by **Blaž Torkar**.

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