

Engagement of the Slovak Armed Forces in Future Crisis Management Operations

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Abstract: *During the past two decades, the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic (AF SR) have participated in more than thirty operations under major international organizations and coalitions. Despite the political interest to sustain active engagement of the AF SR in international crisis management operations, the declining level of capabilities coupled with the urgent need to modernize most of the military equipment compels the Slovak Ministry of Defense to commence a complex optimization process. Even though the evolving security environment continues to widen the spectrum of military capabilities, AF SR will need to prioritize and optimize their capabilities selectively. The defense planners must make sure that the AF SR will develop and maintain the necessary spectrum of capabilities required for the most likely deployment scenario. The optimization process should be conducted within a long-term conceptual plan that clearly defines the future course of the AF SR development within a limited financial frame. At the same time, the optimization endeavor must include a certain degree of flexibility that will allow for necessary adjustments based on specific operational requirements. In the end, the AF SR may become a modern and flexible instrument of power that could be engaged in crisis management operations abroad, upholding national and international interests effectively.*

Key Words: *international crisis management, defense planning, irregular warfare, armed forces, Slovak Republic*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic (AF SR) have undergone more than twenty years of transformation and modernization. During the past two decades, they have changed from a relatively large army operating under the colors of the Warsaw Pact, to small expeditionary armed forces deployed globally under the umbrella of the EU, NATO OSCE, and the UN. During the process of transformation, however, the Slovak Armed Forces encountered several impediments, primarily caused by insufficient strategic management in the area of modernization and rearmament.

This has led to several setbacks, including the incomplete replacement and rearmament of major military systems and material, decrease in the quantity and quality of training, and decline in the spectrum of capabilities.

As a result, the AF SR have achieved only 54% interoperability with allied forces within NATO. Additionally, more than 70% of Slovak military systems have already reached the end of their life cycles [1].

Despite the abovementioned assessments, the AF SR have been fairly active in the engagement in international crisis management operations. Since 1993, they have

participated in more than thirty operations under major international organizations and coalitions. In the past twenty years, the deployment rate in international crisis management operations has usually amounted to around 600 soldiers at a time.



Figure 1: Number of AF SR personnel in international crisis management operations
(Source: White Paper on Defense of the Slovak Republic)

The security environment of the Slovak Republic irrevocably interweaves with the security of its allies and partners within the euroatlantic area. In line with the principle of collective security, successive Slovak governments have expressed continual interest in sustaining active engagement of the AF SR in international crisis management operations under the auspices of international organizations.

While the AF SR have already gained some experience in multilateral operations abroad, their engagement in future security environment remains shrouded in a cloud of uncertainty. Based on the latest security paradigms, the nature of armed conflicts has changed dramatically.

Contemporary conflicts have been set apart by an increasing rate of complexity and irregularity, manifested in the diversity of the actors as well as the means they use to achieve their goals.

Hence, in the future, the AF SR may be likely deployed in an irregular warfare scenario, where one or more parties to the conflict do not use conventional armed forces as their main element of power.

Accordingly, future conflicts will likely encompass new domains of warfare, since the actors may seek to extend the battle space to cyber space and outer space.

Even though the spectrum of desired military capabilities continues to widen, small and medium-sized armed forces such as the AF SR will need to prioritize and optimize their capabilities selectively.

The optimization process should be conducted within a long-term conceptual plan that clearly defines the future course of the AF SR development within a limited financial frame.

At the same time, the optimization endeavor must include a certain degree of flexibility that will allow for necessary adjustments based on specific operational requirements.

2. ARMED FORCES ENGAGEMENT POLICY

By examining political objectives and legislative limitations, the engagement of the AF SR in crisis management operations follows certain preconditions. The Slovak republic has a vested interest in contributing to the international effort of crisis management, including conflict prevention, resolution and stabilization. From a geopolitical point of view, Slovakia will primarily pursue military engagements that align with its foreign policy priorities. The preeminent political interest of the Slovak republic lies in the stability and integration of a broader neighborhood region, encompassing the Western Balkan. In addition, Slovak foreign policy strives to strengthen security, promote sustainable economic development, and foster European integration to the East of its borders.

Through the Eastern Partnership program of the EU, Slovakia continues to uphold transformation and reform process in Ukraine, Moldavia, Georgia and Armenia. One of the efforts in the region represents the management and resolution of so-called frozen conflicts [2]. Besides the Western Balkan and the states of Eastern Europe, Slovakia will most likely continue to engage in other geographic areas as well; it will approach each prospective deployment individually, carefully weighing all the factors involved, including security environment, political circumstances and operational requirements.

Whereas the AF SR will continue to represent one of the most important instruments of the Slovak contribution in international crisis management operations, they may be substituted or complemented by other national assets; they comprise civilian experts, policemen and custom officers. Each contribution, whether homogeneous or combined, will depend on a specific mission. While the contribution of the AF SR would be most likely part of an international operation under the umbrella of the EU, NATO, OSCE and the UN, Slovakia will continue to coordinate its security policy with neighboring countries of the Visegrad group. Indeed, regional security and defense cooperation in Central Europe has become more intensive recently.

The flagship project of the Visegrad group represents the establishment of the Visegrad EU Battle Group that will be put on stand-by in the first half of 2016. The V4 EU BG will comprise an organic unit in the size of a small regiment. The four countries have pledged to contribute around 3 000 soldiers, with Poland taking up the largest contribution. Besides the Battle Group project, the V4 countries have also initiated cooperation in different areas, including joint defense planning, exercises, acquisitions, modernization as well as coordination of Visegrad policy statements and declarations within the EU and NATO. Likely, the four countries will continue to discuss prospective joint deployments in crisis management operations abroad [3].

By looking at legislative framework, the deployment of the AF SR in international crisis management operations draws upon strategic security and defense documents as well as appropriate legal acts and long-term concepts. Both the Security and Defense Strategy of the Slovak Republic were approved in 2005, one year after the accession in the EU and NATO. With rapidly evolving security environment, both documents require revisions that reflect current and future developments. In 2013, the Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic unveiled the White Paper on Defense that serves as the foundation for an updated Defense Strategy, which may be released by 2016. In accordance with the Slovak Constitution, the

deployment of the AF SR itself must be approved by the National Council (Article 84), issuing a mandate for one year.

The deployment of other national instruments to international operations is regulated by respective legal acts, for instance, the Act No. 503/2011 on the deployment of civil experts to crisis management operations abroad. In 2012, the government approved a conceptual document entitled the Complex civil-military engagement of the Slovak Republic in international crisis management [4].

In order to ensure effective engagement of Slovakia abroad, it calls for the need to closely coordinate all national assets within national contributions. In the future, the spectrum of national and international instruments needed for crisis management will continue to evolve.

The Slovak Ministry of Defense must make sure that the AF SR, as one of the crucial national assets, will develop and maintain the necessary spectrum of capabilities required for the most likely deployment scenario. Notably, while the defense budget as a percentage of GDP has been gradually decreasing, the international crisis management expenditures have increased comparatively, particularly in the past ten years, corresponding to the membership in NATO and the EU.

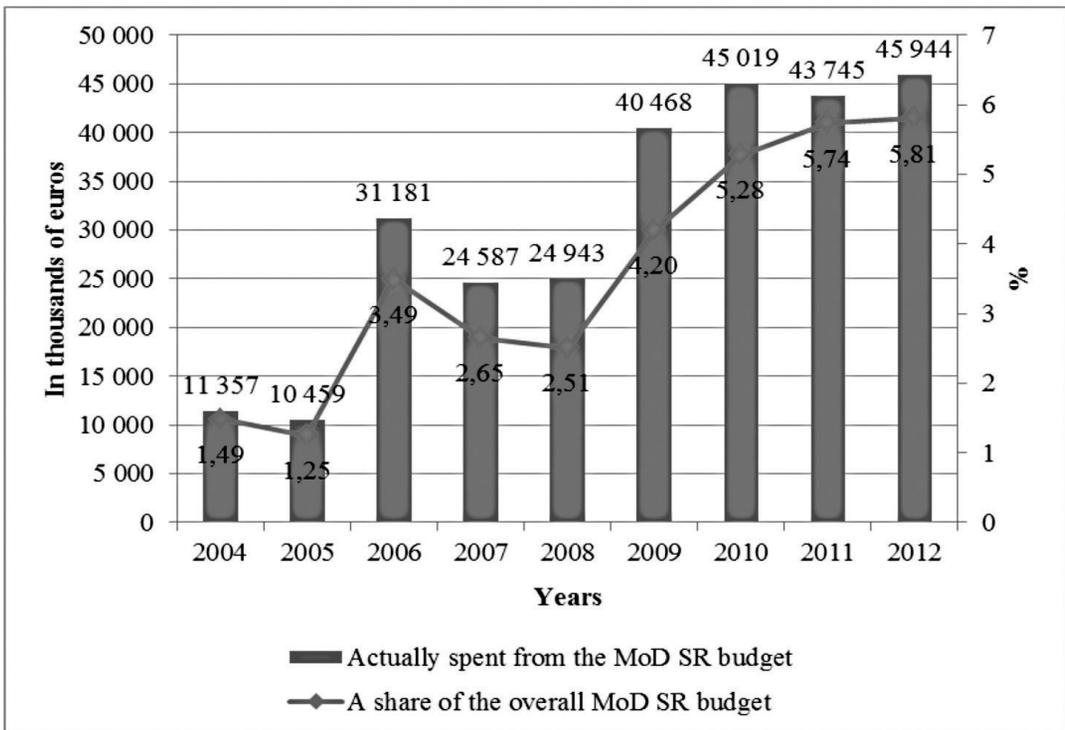


Figure 2: International crisis management operations expenditures (Source: White Paper on Defense of the Slovak Republic)

3. FUTURE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

The security environment of the Slovak Republic reflects not only upon security and defense developments the neighboring states and the broader European community, but also on the ambitions of world powers, including the United States of America, the Russian Federation,

and the People's Republic of China. The dominant actors on the international scene both influence and form the global security environment.

Whereas the rate of inter-state conflicts has in the past 50 years continued to decrease, intra-state conflicts, including civil wars, have become ever more frequent developments of unsuccessful social, religious, and economic struggles [5]. Interesting to note, key geopolitical players tend to engage in most conflicts, either in direct or indirect ways, and shape the development of respective situations towards their interests. Up to recently, the common threat perception, especially in the Euro-Atlantic community, had ruled out the use of hard power in the European theatre.

With the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, the paradigm of redrawing borders by the use of armed forces has been revived. The involvement of the Russian military in the conflict, both in direct and covert ways, has changed the security landscape and formed the basis of a future security environment.

The conflict itself could be best characterized as a hybrid war featuring irregular warfare tactics and procedures. It also pointed to many vulnerabilities of a globalized order, including the growing interdependence on economic trade, energy security, and social and political stability. The future security environment has become ever more unpredictable, widening the spectrum of possible conflicts that could range from small wars using asymmetric approaches to a full-scale inter-state conflict using technologically-advanced capabilities [6]. Whereas economic powers have the capacities and resources to maintain the full spectrum of capabilities, small and medium-sized countries will need to prioritize and optimize their capabilities selectively. The optimization process shall draw on strategic and tactical intelligence, forecasting the most probable use of a country's armed forces, and followed by cautious defense planning.

The changes in security environment come along with the evolving nature of modern warfare. It can be inferred that future warfare will revolve around irregular approaches. The center of gravity will continue to shift from the armed forces towards the population, or oscillate between the two.

Furthermore, as the situation in Ukraine shows, the distinction between an intra-state and inter-state conflict may erode as multiple actors enter the battle space. These hybrid wars may feature a mixture of conventional and unconventional tactics with less or more advanced military technologies [7]. New domains of warfare will continue to occupy a larger part on the battlefield, including outer space and cyber space. Particularly, information warfare will play an indispensable role in influencing the will of the people as well as the legitimacy of a ruling government.

The White Paper on Defense of the Slovak Republic assesses that the prospective deployment of the AF SR in the future security environment will involve irregular warfare. It predicts that future theatres of war, in which the AF SR might be engaged, will feature insufficient support of the indigenous population as well as multiple lines of conflict. The deployment will likely occur in an area with deficient infrastructure and eroding governing institutions. Therefore, the main effort of the AF SR will be carried out against actors conducting irregular warfare and using asymmetric approaches, including terrorism. It can be inferred that the optimization of the capabilities of the AF SR will to a high degree follow the developments in irregular warfare.

The future spectrum of capabilities of the AF SR may not be large; nevertheless, it shall comprise a selective set of military instruments that will best contribute to completing goals and missions within multinational operations. Whereas in the past decade, most of the small and medium-sized states in the Central and Eastern Europe concentrated their efforts on

building modern and interoperable expeditionary forces, the recent developments in Ukraine suggest that defense planners will need to keep an eye on the territorial defense as well [8]. Among other things, the continual and demonstrable credibility of collective defense will bear a considerable influence on how will small countries react to new paradigms in security and defense policy.

4. DESIRED SPECTRUM OF CAPABILITIES

Based on the current state of the AF SR on one hand and the rapidly evolving security environment on the other hand, it can be inferred that Slovakia will need to put their armed forces through a complex transformation process. Such an optimization effort shall yield a limited, but highly-specialized spectrum of capabilities suitable for future conflicts. In addition, some capabilities can be pursued in cooperation with international partners, especially on regional level within the Visegrad group. In essence, the strategic management of the AF SR will need to revitalize the national defense planning system that may become closely coordinate with selected partners.

Defense planers will need prioritize and then interconnect all the means available as to develop desired capabilities within available resources. As of now, the White Paper on Defence already talks on some of the goals that the AF SR plan to fulfill in short-term horizon, including rearming one battalion with multipurpose tactical vehicles. At the same time, the Slovak government has recently approved a classified version of the Conception of the Air Force [9]. Meanwhile, the Slovak Ministry of Defense continues to work on a future Conception of the Land Forces.

The optimization process of the AF SR is rendered on a continual basis. With regard to their engagement in international crisis management within future security environment, certain capabilities will need to be further improved, while others may become surplus to requirements. It is also possible that the AF SR will develop a set of new capabilities, particularly through multilateral cooperation with its neighbors.

After two decades of partly-successful transformation, the AF SR will need to embrace new challenges and prepare to operate in entirely new domains such as cyber space and outer space. By advancing readiness to engage in irregular conflicts, the AF SR will need to prioritize the development of capabilities on selective basis. The AF SR already possess several capabilities that will continue to play significant role in future conflicts, including Special Operations Forces (SOF), Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) and Chemical, Biological and Radiological protection.

These capabilities have been proven in international crisis management operations. Within the optimization process, it turns out beneficial to not only keep these capabilities, but also further improve them. Some of the prospective capabilities that have been planned for the AF SR include improved Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), Psychological Operations (PSYOPS), Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC), and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV).

With regard to new domains of warfare, particularly outer space and cyber space, the AF SR will need to cautiously assess their requirements and possibilities to fulfill them. While national requirements continue to occupy considerable part in defense planning process of the AF SR, NATO defense planning process may markedly influence its final outcome. In line with multilateral endeavors to develop joint capabilities, Slovakia will continue to advance cooperation with several international partners, including the United States and the neighboring countries within the Visegrad group.

5. CONCLUSION

The recent events in Ukraine have shown that the security environment has retained the traits of complexity and unpredictability. Future conflicts will likely feature multiple actors, both state and non-state, using a mix of conventional and unconventional approaches [10]. Irregular warfare will bring about a broadened spectrum of capabilities that will compel defence planners to commence optimization processes within their armed forces. Whereas great powers may choose to maintain the full spectrum of capabilities, small and medium-sized countries will need to prioritize and optimize their capabilities on a selective basis. Even though the AF SR have undergone two decades of transformation, their capabilities remain to a high degree inadequate for effective engagement in international crisis management operations. Only 54% of the AF SR are interoperable with allied nations within NATO. Nevertheless, since the accession in NATO, Slovakia has shown a credible commitment to contribute to the efforts of the Alliance and the AF SR deserved the status of a reliable and professional partner in operations abroad. The commitment is also demonstrated by the increasing trend of crisis management operations expenditures within the defense budget.

The effective engagement of the AF SR in crisis management operations within future security environment lies in the successful identification of capability requirements and cautious defense planning process. While developing a desired spectrum of capabilities, the optimization process shall draw on intelligence resources and assess the most likely deployment of the AF SR in the future. The defense planning process itself will continue to represent a crucial part of the effective optimization of capabilities. In order to ensure effective engagement of the Slovak Republic abroad, the government also needs to closely coordinate all available assets within national contributions. In addition, the Slovak Ministry of Defense shall engage in multilateral defense planning initiatives, particularly within the Visegrad group.

From political and legal points of views, the future deployment of the AF SR will occur within multilateral operations under the auspices of EU, NATO, OSCE and the UN, conditioned upon a valid mandate of the UN Security Council. In terms of geography, Slovakia will primarily pursue those engagements that best align with its foreign policy priorities. Some possible areas of deployment include the Western Balkan, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Yet, Slovakia will most likely continue to engage in other geographic areas as well. In principle, it will approach each prospective deployment individually and cautiously consider all the factors involved.

Each contribution, whether homogeneous or combined, will depend on a specific mission. Above all, by actively supporting endeavors in crisis management abroad, Slovakia will strive to maintain the status of a reliable partner among its allies. The optimization process will not only bring the AF SR innovative and improved capabilities, but will also serve as a catalyst to further modernization and rearmament, increasing their interoperability with allied forces. In the end, the AF SR may become a modern and flexible instrument of power that could be engaged in crisis management operations abroad, upholding national and international interests effectively.

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