

NEWCOMERS NO MORE?

Contemporary NATO and
the Future of the Enlargement from the
Perspective of “Post-Cold War” Members



2015

Edited by
Robert Czulda
Marek Madej



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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS RESEARCH INSTITUTE - WARSAW

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and

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The Impact of Hungary's NATO Membership. Intra-Alliance Adaptation Between Soft Constraints and Soft Subversion²

This chapter will review NATO's impact on the institutional development of defence in Hungary, with special regard to developments within the military, to see to what extent forces of institutional isomorphism may have operated in this respect. Capability development is also assessed as part of this. Subsequently, the chapter will seek to present perceptions and other cognitive aspects of the way the political elite, the public and the military approach the Alliance, to explain deficiencies identified in the first part of the chapter. Based on this overview, we will finally offer a strategic assessment of how NATO membership has impacted Hungarian foreign and security policy.

The Hungarian military in NATO: institutional change and capability development

To offer an assessment of Hungary's record of adaptation within NATO, this section provides an overview of the impact of a decade and a half of NATO membership, and the preceding years of preparation for membership, on the Hungarian Defence Forces' modernization.

Using a theoretical benchmark, we are interested in seeing to what extent institutional isomorphism may have operated in this respect in the case of Hungary. As a theory, the concept of institutional isomorphism suggests that homogenization among competing units takes place especially under circumstances when the number of actors is large, all experience largely the same structural constraints, and at the same time there is uncertainty as to what brings survival advantages and success.³

NATO's membership cannot be directly viewed as such a pool of actors but there is some incentive to perform well within the Alliance even as there are major

¹ Péter Marton benefited in the conduct of the research for this article from the Bolyai János Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

² The authors have drawn in this study on research they did for the following two previous publications: P. Marton, P. Wagner, *Hungary in Afghanistan: A Default Narrative For a Particularly Prudent Public*, [in:] G. Dimitriu, B. van der Graaf, J. Ringsmose (eds.), *Strategic Narratives, Public Opinion and War: Winning Domestic Support for the Afghan War*, Routledge, London - New York, 2015 (forthcoming); and P. Marton, P. Wagner, *The Hungarian Military in the War on Terror*, "Polish Quarterly of International Affairs," Vol. 23, No. 2, 2014, pp. 107-120.

³ P. J. DiMaggio, W. Powell, *The iron cage revisited: institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields*, "American Sociological Review," Vol. 48 (1983), pp. 147-60.

differences in terms of structural constraints (such as geographical location and the resulting geopolitical constraints, for instance). Due to these and other factors, members may not equally strive to compete well - to say the least. We will seek to make use of our theoretical benchmark accordingly, conscious of these limitations on how much it may apply to the case we are investigating. Reversing this, we operate with the parsimonious assumption that the more institutional imitations we find, the more competitive pressure must have been felt and accepted in Hungary - and this, in turn, may be one measure of the quality of intra-alliance adaptation in its case.

Preparing for membership

Hungary was one of the Central Eastern European countries that at the end of the Cold War showed the most promising political trajectory in its transformation from a state socialist to a liberal democratic system, among the rest of the countries belonging to the post-socialist camp. The Hungarian political elite not only expressed from the beginning its intention to dissolve the Warsaw Pact and the intention to integrate into transatlantic structures but was, in line with this, ready to take proactive and concrete policy measures, including in military matters.

A case in point is crisis management and post-conflict stabilization in the former Yugoslavia. At the time of the outbreak of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the United States asked for permission from Hungary to conduct NATO's AWACS flights in Hungarian airspace. The Hungarian political leadership feared that if they were to allow these, otherwise unarmed, aircraft to use Hungarian airspace, Hungary may suffer retaliation in some form, and that there may be a backlash against ethnic Hungarians in Voivodina, Serbia. In the beginning of 1993, Budapest nevertheless went ahead in giving the green light to NATO, effectively without any security guarantees as to the perceived dangers of this. NATO and the United States interpreted this as an indication of a serious commitment and general trust.⁴ In NATO's Interim Force/Stabilisation Force (IFOR/SFOR) mission following the Dayton Accords, from January 1996, Hungary took part with a unit of combat engineers, at battalion strength. It was a proportionally significant contribution even compared to the contributions of countries that were then NATO members, unlike Hungary.

Active participation in the NATO-initiated Partnership for Peace programme in the meantime, starting as early as in 1993, showed the same commitment. Howev-

⁴ *Washingtoni látószög: Amerika a világban, Magyarország Washingtonban [A Washington perspective: America in the world, Hungary in America], a talk by Ambassador András Simonyi, 7 May 2009, at the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs, Budapest.*

er, this commitment to cooperate with NATO and the inclination to conform to its expectations decreased after its accession in 1999, and Hungary's allies eventually took note of this.⁵ Whilst preparing for accession, the country was a part of the vanguard pursuing membership, upon joining, successive Hungarian governments have felt less of a desire to perform well.

Even though Hungary, like other countries waiting for accession at the time, promised that its defence budget would eventually reach 2% of GDP, between 2000 and 2004, the Hungarian Defence Forces' (HDF) share of the budget remained at around 1.7%. It subsequently fell to 1%, in part, as Hungary regularly explained this in the period of 1999 to 2004, due to cost implications of Hungary's EU accession. However, the trends have not been reversed, and the defence budget is currently at 0.8% of GDP, with a budgetary commitment in place to start raising expenditure from 2016.

Until it joined NATO, Hungary's defence budget was able to remain at a relatively high level given that the modernization of the Hungarian military in the 1990s was almost one and the same with continuous reductions in the number of military personnel. This meant that resources were freed up by the resulting reductions in personnel costs.

The problems that became acute upon NATO accession required a solution, and thus a strategic defence review process followed in 1999 as a result of which a 10-year programme of measures was adopted for the modernization of the Hungarian military. Ret. Lt. Gen. Zoltán Szenes' assessment of the situation in the wake of the Kosovo crisis is quite telling as to why there was a need for this:

"The Hungarian military had practically no combat unit at its disposal that could have, without the devotion of additional resources, been capable of executing its tasks".⁶

The attacks of 11 September, 2001 in New York and Washington DC and the subsequent actions of NATO thus came in a context in which Hungary began to display a somewhat decreasing enthusiasm to fulfil intra-alliance expectations, which held some significance with respect to how the following years' developments played out.

When it came to military operations in Afghanistan, Hungary, for two important reasons, did not take part in the first stage of these. First of all, the

⁵ *Sikerült Budapestet bevinniünk a NATO-köztudatba [Success in putting Hungary on NATO's agenda], interview with State Secretary for Defence Policy József Bali, "Honvedelem.hu", date not indicated, [www.honvedelem.hu, access: 12 September 2014].*

⁶ Z. Szenes, *Magyar haderő-átalakítás a NATO-tagság idején*. "Nemzet és Biztonság", Vol. 2, No. 3 (2009), p. 35.

Hungarian military lacked the capability (including special operations forces) to perform expeditionary operations thousands of kilometres from the country's territory. In the past, the Hungarian People's Army was geared to conduct military operations in Central and Western Europe in a conventional conflict between NATO forces and the Warsaw Pact. The entire organization, its command and control, its armament and its equipment reflected these constraints and to some extent they still do, even today. On the other hand, the Hungarian political elite worried about the reaction by the public to the potential exposure of the Hungarian Defence Forces' soldiers to danger in a faraway country - to such an extent that even if it had had a capable unit it likely would have been disinclined to deploy it, with a view to not risk casualties.

At the same time, in the course of 2000 - 2001, there were certain changes on the regional level that prompted Hungary to launch yet another round of defence reviews. Romania and Slovakia's (then) prospective membership in NATO meant that the two neighbours which traditionally played a role in Hungary's threat perceptions were able to become formal allies of the country. This change was compounded by the fall of the regime of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia in October 2000, and the start of the democratic transition there along with a very different relationship between Serbia and NATO in general compared to the antagonistic relationship in the past. In a sense, ironically, NATO was too successful, and Hungary's sensitivity to the competitive pressure to perform well within the alliance decreased as a result of the NATO enlargement process actually providing it with security.

Thus, Hungary's participation in Afghanistan came only in the phase of stabilization operations, and even then only grudgingly, gradually, and with an awareness of the contributions other Allies were making. The alliance's mobilization left Hungary in a position in which it could not afford to stay away from involvement in Afghanistan. Belatedly, it thus, in other words, acted under the competitive pressure of institutional isomorphism.

Hungary's first military contributions in Afghanistan were in the form of staff officers deployed to the International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF) Kabul HQ, and a few medical officers, in the course of 2003. It was only as a result of the transforming international security landscape that certain required tasks came to be identified related to which work on a new round of modernization began.

The Hungarian defence review⁷ prepared for 2003 specified in 10 points the Hungarian military's key tasks for the years ahead. One of these was tasks related to the war on terrorism, and another listed peace enforcement-related tasks in the framework of international crisis management and peace support operations. Doctrinally, and in terms of its existing level of preparedness, these two sets of tasks posed a new challenge for the Hungarian armed forces even with the Hungarian Defence Forces' past experience in stabilization operations in Bosnia. The 10 points mentioned above subsequently also appeared in Act CV (2004) of the Hungarian military which, in Section 1 of Paragraph 70, under point "c", specifically says that the Hungarian Defence Forces can participate in counter-terrorism operations, with units that are assigned and trained for that specific purpose.⁸

As a result of the 2001-2003 review, one of the new capabilities that Hungary thus committed to create was a special operations capability. From the start, in the operations that began in Afghanistan post-2001 a chief role was played by US special forces units. The ability to catch up with those countries that were able to participate in such operations, alongside the United States, was thus, effectively, a crucial dimension of intra-alliance adaptation.

Among the Hungarian Defence Forces' active manoeuvre units, the 34th Bercsényi László Reconnaissance Battalion was selected to be the new special operations unit through reorganization and additional training. As a result of the transformation, it had to become capable of direct action (including seek and destroy, and snatch operations), and special reconnaissance and military assistance missions in support of national and multinational military operations. The operational training and mentoring of foreign military forces, as part of so-called Foreign Internal Defence (FID) tasks, was, however, an immediate item on the agenda, given the need for this in the then active Iraqi and Afghan theatres of operations. This proved somewhat convenient in terms of politics, too, as the political elite was not entirely enthusiastic about the prospect of operations involving direct action and always favoured restricting the use of any special forces capability to the area of FID.

The manpower needs for the first rotations of the different Hungarian mission elements in Afghanistan were usually provided by the 34th Bercsényi Battalion. The most recent mission of the Special Operations Battalion was the one that

⁷ *Shaping the Armed Forces for the 21st Century*, Ministry of Defence, Hungary 2003.

⁸ Colonel L. Forray, *A Különleges Műveleti Zászlóalj kiképzésének, felkészítésének és felszerelésének fejlesztési lehetőségei* [Opportunities to develop the training, preparation and equipment of the Special Operations Battalion], doctoral dissertation, Zrínyi Miklós Nemzetvédelmi Egyetem, Budapest 2009., pp. 13-14.

most closely reflected its core (new) capability set - in Eastern Afghanistan, in Wardak province. In 2009, a 12-man strong Special Operations Task Unit's (SOTU) was deployed there by Hungary with the task of training a special unit of the provincial police force (the so-called Provincial Response Company, or PRC) and to execute tasks jointly together with them. In an unprecedented manner, the HDF SOTU was provided to NATO without national caveats restricting their activity.

The role of US assistance

As can be noted on the basis of the above, to get to where it was by the last years of ISAF operations, Hungary received significant assistance from the United States throughout the post-2001 period in its foreign missions. Hungary has been a recipient of US Military Grant programmes since 1993, but never before focused to this extent on one particular area, as in the case of the post-2001 build-up of special forces.

A less spectacular factor but one that also played an important role in the modernization of the Hungarian military were studies Hungarian soldiers had the chance to conduct in US military education institutions over the last 20 years. By 2013, over 2,600 officers and NCOs (Non-Commissioned Officers) had received some kind of training or education overseas and in US institutions worldwide over a period of 23 years.⁹ Beyond these forms of assistance, the US provided much direct assistance in areas of operations, including MRAP (Mine Resistant, Ambush Protected) vehicles when the situation in Afghanistan deteriorated.

In return for this, even as the country's GDP-proportionate defence spending remained well below the required 2%, Hungary was, most importantly, able to offer to the Alliance its readiness for an active participation in the alliance's foreign missions. In these missions its contribution was marginally very useful to both NATO in general and the United States in particular (i.e., its context-specific value may have been higher than that of Hungary's general defence spending in the alliance). Hungary, in the decade after 2004, consistently kept to its declared ambition level according to which its capacity was to be able to be present with up to 1,000 troops in international missions at any given time.

⁹ Interview with a Ministry of Defense official, 13 December 2013. To get a sense of the proportions of this, please refer to the section of the chapter on force levels.

What drastically changed in the meantime, however, questioning the sustainability of this ambition level, was the overall personnel numbers of the Hungarian Defence Forces. By 2010, there remained only 26,000 personnel in the field of defence altogether (of these about 3,500 worked in the MoD and its background institutions).¹⁰ Only half the HDF's 22,500-strong personnel is made up of active duty ground forces, and 3,000 positions are not actually filled. This means that precisely in the segment of the Hungarian Defence Forces (in its seven infantry battalions) from the ranks of which the 1,000 soldiers making up Hungary's contribution to international missions can be deployed there is an absence of personnel.

The lack of a sufficient number of soldiers volunteering to participate in international operations proved to be a very hard problem to overcome. The solution to the problem had to lie in financial incentives: the monthly allowance in a foreign mission is now four to five times more than the national minimal wage and some additional benefits are provided as well. One implication of this is that today the average soldier in his/her years of service typically serves in more than one foreign mission. The soldiers who served in these missions have typically, more often than not, been exposed to some kind of combat experience.

Yet in the HDF's case, initially even the combat use of live ammunition posed a peculiar problem, which for years went unresolved. In peacetime (from which what was officially designated as "peace-keeping" in a country with which Hungary was not at war could constitute no deviation in a formal sense) troops could only use live ammunition for the purposes of shooting practice. In Afghanistan, in various engagements a large amount of ammunition was used, however, and thus, initially, whenever Hungarian troops exchanged fire with insurgent forces they had to report on the spent ammunition as they would have had to in a live fire exercise.¹¹ The example may show that to certain challenges the Hungarian Defence Forces reacted only in a very cumbersome manner. A positive aspect of this case is that a nagging bureaucratic challenge has nevertheless been overcome.

Furthermore, Afghanistan lies more than 4,000 kilometres from Hungary. To resupply and help more than 550 troops operate there (the peak number of personnel in the case of the Hungarian contingent) was no small task, and it paved the way for important innovations. Hungary cooperated with 11 other nations in creating the Strategic Airlift Capability to make up for the collective shortfall of required long-range logistical capacities, and importantly became a main base

¹⁰ *Tények és adatok a Magyar Honvédségről - 2011*, Ministry of Defence, Zrínyi Média: Budapest 2010.

¹¹ B. Szlankó, *Maximum nulla áldozattal*, Atheneum: Budapest 2011.

of the consortium, with the multi-national Heavy Airlift Wing using Pápa airport for its operations. An important organizational innovation was the creation for the first time of a National Support Element (NSE) based in-theatre (in Mazar-i-Sharif in this case) for the better coordination of logistical support to the different elements of the Hungarian contingent and, related to this, the setting up of armoured intra-theatre transport capabilities. Initially, some complaints arose about the NSE suffering from red tape,¹² but at the end of the day it once again represents a form of organizational learning which may be sustained for improved use in the future. Notably, the creation of the NSE came again as a part of learning from others, i.e., as a part of an imitation or institutional isomorphism in a context where strengths and weaknesses were meaningfully imposed, with meaningful consequences.

The main source of concern may be not so much the performance of the Hungarian military. Instead, the problem lies in the broader institutional context in which the Hungarian Defence Forces has to function. Inasmuch as a specific Hungarian strategic culture may be said to exist, it is one of avoiding critical political debates, and keeping to a “follower” role vis-à-vis other actors in the country’s strategic environment (such as the US in the case of Afghanistan and also within NATO in general).

The Ministry of Defence may itself carry a part of the blame for this in the specific case of the mission in Afghanistan, in that it was happy to “own” the Afghan mission, i.e., take it away from others as its very own. This was apparent in the domination by the MoD of the domestic communication of the Baghlan Provincial Reconstruction Team’s (PRT) activities and in its less than pro-active liaising with the other ministries that were involved in the PRT’s work. In the MoD’s defence, however, it may be said that these other institutions were not very receptive to the idea of working in Afghanistan themselves. They only briefly came to be involved in projects in Afghanistan, doing so more out of a nominal commitment to the “whole-of-government” approach propagated within the alliance as a key to success on the ground, and not out of a genuine interest in putting means and ends together there. Inasmuch as that is the case, it shows how the institutional imitation of others may be hollow in terms of strategic implications: if it does not constitute more than going through the motions or an attempt to be accepted by minimum standards.

By 2010, the human and technical resources of the military were so depleted, as a result of the lack of resources for new acquisitions and the maintenance of exist-

¹² *Beszélgetés a PRT-ről [A conversation about the PRT], interview with former Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) commander Col. Péter Lippai (commander of PRT-9), “Seregszemle” Vol. 9, No. 3-4, July/December 2011, pp. 23-27.*

ing assets and capabilities, that even the fundamental role of defending the territorial integrity of Hungary could not have been satisfactorily performed.

The going-through-the-motions approach mentioned above in the context of Afghanistan may thus also hold for the way Hungary relates to NATO and the issue of defence overall. To determine the reasons for this strategic disconnect, and its extent, the following section seeks to contextualize the problems identified here.

The human terrain of Hungary's participation in NATO: the political elite and the public

The central, historically informed consideration in Hungary's foreign policy is the need to take into account Hungary's security interests as those of a small country which has in the past and now again found maintaining its autonomy, at times even its independence, difficult. At the same time, Hungary is relatively poor compared to Western European countries, and this informs its calculations, too. The monthly net average wage in Hungary amounted to \$683 (nominal value) at the end of 2013.¹³ Given a need for cost-efficiency as well as the country's small power status, Hungary's obvious choice to provide for its basic security needs is NATO membership. Credible neutrality, seen as requiring full-spectrum military capabilities, has long been regarded as cost-prohibitive, if not impossible.¹⁴

For over a decade, the public consistently, albeit rather half-heartedly, supported NATO membership (see poll data from TÁRKI; Szonda - Ipsos; and HABE (the latter showing a mere 47% relative majority considering NATO membership "advantageous" and 47% being indifferent),¹⁵ and from NOL [non-representative data]).¹⁶ Notably, even Hungary's NATO accession was able to go ahead only as a result of a referendum with relaxed validity criteria.¹⁷

¹³ *Average gross earnings amounted to HUF 227,800 - Earnings, January - October 2013*, Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 19 December 2013, [www.ksh.hu, access: 10 January 2014].

¹⁴ Z. Szenes, P. Tálás, *Tíz éve a NATO-ban - "Biztonságpolitikai opciók*, Zrínyi Kiadó: Budapest, 2009, p. 11-12.

¹⁵ *Közép-európai közvélemény: Lakossági vélemények a NATO-tagsággal kapcsolatban három visegrádi országban. Magyarország, Csehország és Lengyelország*, TÁRKI, February 2000, [www.tarki.hu, access: 18 May 2013]; *Közvélekedés biztonsági kérdésekről*, a presentation at the international conference "Biztonságtudat és közvélekedések: A biztonsági fenyegetésekről Magyarországon", 1 - 2 February 2008, Budapest, by Szonda - Ipsos; Interview with dr. Zoltán Vámosi, President of the association HABE, date not indicated, [www.honvedelem.hu, access: 2 September 2014].

¹⁶ *A magyarok többsége kivonulna Afganisztánból*, "NOL" 18 September 2010, [www.nol.hu, access: 10 January 2014].

¹⁷ The referendum took place in November 1997. Prior to this, in summer 1997, a new referendum law was accepted by the Hungarian Parliament which specified that for a referendum's results to be valid it requires only a minimum of 25% of the electorate to vote in favour of one or another of the available options.

Given Hungary's generally policy-taking (as opposed to policy-making) approach to international affairs, governments tend to approach policy issues in an elitist manner, and the public does not easily become directly relevant in the field of foreign policy.

As to the public's preferences, there is generally little interest in foreign policy. In one relatively recent poll, 36% declared that they are not interested in foreign and security policy matters. While this may not be particularly remarkable in a comparative perspective, more telling of an inward-looking mentality is how in the same poll 92% rated domestic flood protection and disaster relief to be an important task of the Hungarian military as opposed to (only) 72% rating Hungary's participation in NATO-related peace support operations as important.¹⁸ That there is a lack of deep interest in foreign policy may be true even for polling agencies, judging by how rarely they carry out polling relevant to foreign policy issues.

In Hungary, there is no ambiguous inter-institutional balance of power (as in the case of the United States, between the president and congress) or a regular pattern of fragile coalitions and vulnerable minority governments (unlike a number of parliamentary democracies, Hungary's political and electoral system tends to produce governments that fully serve their mandate). These factors further limit the day-to-day significance of the popularity of individual politicians, governments, governing parties and specific policies. Typically, civil society organization is weak, and cannot plausibly be expected to launch movements capable of re-setting the foreign policy agenda and/or the most important foreign policy preferences of a government.

The reason why the public may still have an effect on foreign policy, and why communicating with citizens remains - in a strategic sense - relevant, specifically in the context of foreign military operations, is the public's sensitivity to military casualties abroad. This is capable of evoking a strong historical sense of vulnerability in society. The loss of up to 100,000 Hungarian troops in operations in and around the Bend of the river Don, in the course of 1942 - 1943 in World War II, is a problematic memory in the context of contemporary foreign military missions which are widely framed as similar undertakings in favour of foreign powers and their, as opposed to Hungary's own, interests. This reinforces the idea of Hungary as a powerless entity caught in the drift of irresistible currents, as a toy of the great powers.

This sentiment makes adapting to the needs of an alliance such as NATO, including burden-sharing therein, challenging.¹⁹ Especially given a generally domes-

¹⁸ Szonda - Ipsos, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ P. Marton, *Hungary's Post-2001 Ratification Challenges: Lessons Concerning the V4 - Nato Relationship*, "CEJISS" Vol. 6, No. 2 (2012), pp. 187-208.

tically focused public that regards its welfare needs as largely unfulfilled.²⁰ With respect to this, in a 2008 survey, the majority declared “existential security” to be their most important security-related concern, as compared to military and other aspects of security.²¹

This can turn foreign military missions, strategically necessary as part of Hungary’s alliance policy, into hostages of partisan politics.

To get a sense of where public opinion generally stands on the issue of foreign military missions, one may refer to the consistently strong Hungarian opposition to involvement in Iraq from January 2003 to April 2004, in a 2004 poll by Gallup,²² and (only) weak relative majority support (at 50%) for Hungary’s involvement in peacekeeping in Bosnia in the 1990s and for Hungary’s involvement in Afghanistan in 2003 in various polls by Gallup (in 1997 and 2003, respectively).²³ Notably, as early as in 2003, 73% thought that Hungary did not have to be in Afghanistan - neither in a combat nor in a non-combat role.²⁴ Unfortunately, similar poll results related to Afghanistan are not available post-2003. However, in a 2010 non-representative internet-based poll 52% opposed involvement in Afghanistan, 43% thought that the mission was endangering Hungary’s security, and 66% deemed the government’s efforts to inform the public about it insufficient.²⁵ Paraphrasing Jentleson, the Hungarian public may thus well qualify as a “Particularly Prudent Public”, in light of the above.²⁶ Hence there was always a preference on the part of successive governments to avoid a deep and especially a more persistent discussion of the reasons for Hungary’s involvement in Afghanistan.

This policy or governmental attitude seems to have affected successive governments’ lack of desire to publicize poll results about support levels. Internal polls were not shared in a forthcoming manner with researchers and are almost never referenced in public discourse. An exceptional occasion was when Minister of Defence Imre Szekeres referred to support for “participation in NATO operations” standing at 69% (Szonda - Ipsos was commissioned to carry out the poll

²⁰ *Hivatalosan is a magyar a legboldogtalanabb nemzet*, “!!444!!!,” 6 August 2013, [www.444.hu, access: 10 January 2014].

²¹ *Interview with dr. Zoltán Vámosi...*

²² *A magyarok háromnegyede visszahívna a katonákat Irakból*, Magyar Gallup Intézet, 11 May 2004, [www.gallup.hu, access: 19 May 2013].

²³ *A közvélemény a Magyarországon állomásozó IFOR csapatokról és a boszniai békefenntartásban való magyar részvételről 1996. decemberében*, Magyar Gallup Intézet, Hírlevél - No. 6, 28 February 1997, [www.parlament.hu, access: 19 May 2013]; *Kis többségben vannak a katonai orvoscsoport kiküldését támogatók*, Magyar Gallup Intézet, 31 January 2003, [www.gallup.hu, access: 19 May 2013].

²⁴ Gallup, 2003, *op. cit.*

²⁵ NOL, 2010, *op. cit.*

²⁶ B. Jentleson, *The Pretty Prudent Public: Post Post-Vietnam Public Opinion on the Use of Military Force*, “International Studies Quarterly”, Vol. 36, 1992, pp. 49-74.

referenced on the occasion; it is unclear, however, whether respondents supported the Afghanistan mission in specific, rather than only NATO operations in general).²⁷

This approach may have been warranted if public opinion data are anything to go by. In 2006, 82% thought it is a “legitimate” demand from Hungary’s NATO partners that the country partake in NATO’s foreign operations, showing little change by 2007 when this ratio stood at 81%.²⁸ This indirectly supportive attitude may have made the avoidance of directly discussing the Afghanistan mission feasible.

Beyond this, decision-makers themselves were never particularly intrigued by the details of how the West may win in Afghanistan. This was seen as removed from the direct Hungarian interest, and therefore received wisdom in this respect sufficed for those involved in policy matters. The key aim in Afghanistan, openly stated by various political figures in Hungary in the past, was to be there for the Alliance when (and as long as) it needed this. As former Minister of Defence Ferenc Juhász (Socialist) opined in an interview, “This is about NATO, not Afghanistan. What else would we have to do there other than taking responsibility together with our allies?”²⁹

That NATO provides for Hungary’s security itself has not been questioned in official government discourse and it has only been questioned, or denied rather, by the far right Jobbik party. The overall public discourse at times does reflect less than a genuine conviction of Hungary’s being a part of the West, or even the strategic importance of the relationship with the West. Inasmuch as governments shy away from a higher defence spending or from supporting alliance undertakings (such as was the case in Libya), it may be seen as a result of compensating for these public sentiments (even if governments do not openly accommodate these sentiments). Thus, the inhibiting role of said public attitudes can be observed to have importance.

A key part of the ongoing defence modernization, the European Union’s concept of the Visegrád Battle Group (BG), is a case in point in this respect. The vision behind the BG is to create a joint, on-call crisis management force with Hungary’s Visegrád partners (Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia) that would be operational by 2016, for use in European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) missions. With each of the participating countries offering different contributions, the main force component is set to be provided by Poland, whereas

²⁷ *A magyarok szeretik a véres afgán missziót*, “Index,” 1 July 2008, [www.index.hu, access: 11 December 2013].

²⁸ Szonda - Ipsos, *op. cit.*

²⁹ B. Szlankó, *op. cit.*

Hungary offered primarily combat engineers in support of the BG. In principle, that the BG may serve in the framework of a NATO operation cannot be ruled out, given the existing NATO - ESDP framework of cooperation.

Whilst this goal seems realistic, and the Battle Group may have been formed by this date, its functionality (and hence its strategic value) may be questioned. Moreover, many in Hungary see the BG as the kind of cooperative effort that fulfils even NATO's call for Smart Defence, i.e., for pooling and sharing, and spending on defence collectively. Smart Defence in fact may call for much more, and if the BG is not really functional, it would in fact not represent any improvement in this respect. Hungarian decision-makers seem to have spent some thought on this in light of the Ukraine - Russia conflict, and in the spring of 2014 it was announced that Hungary would be looking to make use of its JAS 39 *Gripen* aircraft in a Close Air Support (CAS) role, going beyond the original concept of a Hungarian BG contribution which was intended to be limited to combat engineering and logistics. It is exactly the Ukrainian crisis, however, where differences in Visegrád countries' positions make actual utilization of the BG in a strategic context highly unlikely, given the diverse, even divergent, trajectories these countries have taken in response to Russia's foreign policy behaviour - differing even on how they interpret said behaviour.

Alliance exploitation and soft subversion in response to soft imposition

In interpreting how Hungary, once a prominent vanguard state in search of being accepted to join NATO, ended up consistently underperforming in the alliance in terms of its defence budget, and its defence-related research and development and acquisitions spending, as well as, to some extent, in terms of its strategic adaptation to the alliance's future needs, we posit a simple, two-fold explanation. A part of this explanation pertains to general intra-alliance dynamics as they can be observed from the now long-time record within NATO, whilst the second part of the argument concerns factors peculiar to Hungary's case in recent times.

The literature specifically on coalition and alliance burden-sharing may offer some basic clues as to why Hungary, along with many other NATO countries, behaves as it does. This field of the literature was profoundly informed by Olson and Zeckhauser's classic 1966 study of burden-sharing within NATO,³⁰ for its part influenced by a realist perspective of international relations, i.e., one emphasizing states' need to rely primarily on self-help, requiring from them selfishness and utility maximization for the sake of survival. From this perspective, Olson and

³⁰ M. Olson, Jr., R. Zeckhauser, *An Economic Theory of Alliances*, RAND Corporation: Santa Monica 1966.

Zeckhauser asked why Allies spent a different percentage of their GDP on defence, and why collectively the Alliance was regularly falling short of what it itself deemed necessary in terms of defence expenditure, at various points during the Cold War. In their assessment, a consideration of different countries' peculiar marginal utility curves was included, and the significance of this in shaping countries' indifference curves was pointed out (for defence spending vs. other spending, or "guns vs. butter").

Somewhat disconnected to this, there developed, within the long-term discourse generated by Olson and Zeckhauser's study, an understanding of smaller Alliance member countries' behaviour in the framework of what is often referred to as the "exploitation" hypothesis. Ringsmose's work on Denmark's long-term performance within NATO is a good example of this,³¹ as it points out how it is sometimes useful but generally rather difficult to exclude an under-performing country from the consumption of Alliance public goods (as is the nature of public goods per definition) and how consequently it is hard to pressure it to perform on par with other contributors. Kimball's abstract analysis of the guns vs. butter dilemma in terms of a production possibilities frontier³² similarly leads to the conclusion that certain countries may exploit alliances by outsourcing or "contracting out" defence to them, thus allowing them a higher level of welfare (higher at least than what they enjoyed prior to the Alliance, even if the country in question is comparatively poor). Even the paradoxically (if only nominally) high contributions of countries such as Denmark or Hungary to operations in Afghanistan can be explained in this framework, as Marton and Hynek and Marton and Wagner show: outstanding nominal contributions (in terms of troop numbers compared to GDP and population data) in the Alliance's foreign missions may in many cases be marginal compensation for what is under-performing by the more general standard of defence budget size.³³

At the same time, there also seem to be factors specific to Hungary playing a role in determining the country's approach to defence matters, as may transpire from the previous section dealing with the human terrain (i.e., the elite and the public) in this respect. Whereas NATO is only capable of soft-imposing its

³¹ J. Ringsmose, *Paying for Protection: Denmark's Military Expenditure during the Cold War*, "Cooperation and Conflict," Vol. 44, No. 1 (2009), pp. 73-97.

³² A. L. Kimball, *Political survival, policy distribution, and alliance formation*. "Journal of Peace Research," Vol. 47, No. 4 (2010), pp. 407-419.

³³ P. Marton, N. Hynek, *Introduction: What Makes Coalitions Stick?*, [in:] P. Marton, N. Hynek (eds.) *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational Contributions to Reconstruction*, Routledge: London - New York 2011, pp. 1-26; P. Marton, P. Wagner, *Hungary's Involvement in Afghanistan: Proudly Going Through the Motions?*, [in:] P. Marton, N. Hynek (eds.) *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational Contributions to Reconstruction*, Routledge: London - New York, pp. 192-211.

requirements on member states (as Ringsmose, cited above, concludes, too), a country such as Hungary utilizes what in many of its manifestations may be referred to as an approach of soft subversion. Hungary does participate in NATO's foreign missions when perceived as a must³⁴ and does spend on maintaining a military force but does not do more than that. At the same time, it cannot be easily pressured into doing more given the disinclination of the Hungarian public, and to some extent its elite, too, to see specific demands to do more as illegitimate.

This may be indicative of a generally rather shallow vision as to NATO's role. Hungary's political elite takes the security guarantee provided by the Alliance seriously but does not ponder the implications of this in depth. Hungary's basic preference is to have a peaceful milieu in its region, including a none-too-confrontative relationship with Russia. As Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán stated, his understanding of the imperatives evolved in the Ukrainian context: "we will be doves in the field of the economy [i.e., on the issue of economic sanctions vis-à-vis Russia] but we will be hawks when it comes to security policy [i.e., on the issue of reinforcing NATO's commitment to providing for the collective security of its members]".³⁵

It remains to be seen as to whether the public's attitudes and threat perceptions have transformed as a result of events in Ukraine - and it will be equally interesting to see *how* they may have changed. The government has at least, in the present context, reaffirmed its commitment to start spending more on defence, with a view to the aforementioned developments.

Conclusion

A preliminary conclusion is that NATO membership (and already the prospect thereof) fundamentally contributed to defence modernization and structured capability development according to the Alliance's needs. In the post-2001 setting, institutional imitation went further, and, largely reflecting the needs of US-led operations in Afghanistan and with major US assistance, Hungary built up its own special operations forces.

However, whereas Hungary's adaptation in this respect is noteworthy, in other areas there is a more mixed record, as detailed in this study. Defence spending is remarkably low and this is as much an indication of the importance of cognitive aspects of the way key actors and the public relate to NATO membership in Hun-

³⁴ P. Marton, J. Eichler, *Between willing and reluctant entrapment: CEE countries in NATO's non-European missions*, "Journal of Communist and Post-Communist Studies," Vol. 46, No. 3 (2013), pp. 351-362.

³⁵ J. Spirk, *Szokatlanul keveset beszélt Orbán a zárt Fidesz-ülésein*, "Index", 11 September 2014, [www.index.hu, access: 14 September 2014].

gary as much as it is a reflection of general trends within military alliances, predicted by the theory of alliance burden-sharing. Related to this, we conclude that Hungary has a rather shallow vision of what the fundamental role of the Alliance is. The Hungarian political elite sees the security guarantee of NATO membership as important but does not ponder the implications of this in depth.

Overall, we thus find that whilst NATO membership “soft-imposed” certain normative constraints on Hungarian foreign policy, the country’s elite has been, at the same time, “soft-challenging” these constraints through their practice, due to rather persistent attitudes and beliefs on the part of both governing elites and the public.