

Analysis of the Draft Defence Strategy of the Slovak Republic 2017

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Goals

The main goal of this study consists of three intermediate objectives. The main goal is to analyze the draft of Defence Strategy of Slovak Republic (DSSR). The first objective is to characterize the role of the document in the security policy of the Slovak Republic (SR). The second objective is to identify strong and weak points of the document in relation to the security environment and security needs of SR. The third objective is to formulate recommendations to rectify the weak points of the document.

Key Points

- DSSR is a fundamental document related to the defence of the state. It builds upon the Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic and determines the political-strategic framework for the Military Strategy of Slovak Republic.
- Among the strong points of the document are the analysis of various kinds of threats, the adherence to the basic logic of the strategy and the identification of lacking resources in the defence department.
- Among the weak points of the documents is the absence of priorities related to threats, political objectives and to the development of armed forces. The document also suffers from its fuzzy terminology. Other weak points are the absence of acknowledgment of the possibility of failure of the strategy and the lack of rigor regarding the concept of force employment.
- We recommend selection of particular priorities with regard to threats, political objectives and the development of armed forces as well as a more rigorous concept of employment. We also recommend acknowledging the possibility of failure of the strategy as a consequence of chance, uncertainty and the actions of intelligent adversaries. Lastly, we recommend slight terminological changes.

The role of the document

As the official definition says:

„DSSR is a fundamental strategic document on the defence of the state. It builds upon the Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic and determines the political-strategic framework for the Military Strategy of the Slovak Republic. DSSR defines the basic approaches of Slovak Republic to ensuring its defence in a long-term outlook while taking into account the real current status of the state's defence, the changing security environment and the experience from building up the system of state's defence and from the use of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic in its territory and abroad. DSSR formulates the strategic context of the country's defence, political-military outcomes from assessing the security environment and pillars, goals, areas and policies of strategic adaptation of the state's defence.“ (Ministry of Defence 2017a: 1-4)

DSSR is, therefore, a basic conceptual document and it serves to connect the political dimension of security with the military one. It builds upon the Security Strategy of Slovak Republic and provides a framework for the Military Strategy. The Security Strategy provides it with definitions and identification of basic principles, values, security interests, security environment and security policy of Slovak Republic. From them, the main value of the Defence Strategy is derived, namely early identification and prevention of high risk or crisis situations at home and abroad, which could threaten the existence, sovereignty or prosperity of the Slovak Republic and its citizens. The context in which these threats are present and their identification is then a basis for the Military Strategy, which begins where the Defence Strategy ends and „specifies the military strategic goals and the duties of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic for the development of abilities and capacities of the Armed Forces, required to ensure the defence of the Slovak Republic and the fulfilment of its international obligations.“ (Ministry of Defence 2017b: 2)

The previous version of the DSSR was adopted in 2005. Back then it reflected the ongoing changes in the security environment of the Slovak Republic, namely accession to the European Union and NATO and in general the change of its orientation towards the West. Its drawbacks were influenced by the absence of direct threats to the Slovak Republic in a relatively politically peaceful time. The main goal of the previous version was to provide direction and support the development of the armed forces and defence infrastructure in a way that these could be connected to the systems used by NATO.

However, after twelve years the last version of the Defence Strategy is no longer adequate because it does not reflect the existence of threats that came up recently, for example, the „growth of military power of non-state actors, proliferation

of weapons of mass destruction and their carriers, together with hybrid threats that can be adjoined by attacks in the cybernetic sphere, harmful strategic propaganda and other non-military threats.” (Ministry of Defence 2017a: 13) The value of updating this document, therefore, lies in the recognition of the newest threats in the security environment of the Slovak Republic and also in updating the methodology of the document's creation. Despite its positive points, it still contains several drawbacks that will be described in the following chapters.

Evaluation of the document

Evaluation of the document was conducted from the perspective of strategic theory. This theory identifies the fundamental concepts of strategy and relations between them. The theory is derived from the works of classical and modern strategic thinkers.

1. The primary function of a strategy is to rightly identify the character of possible conflicts (Strachan: 2013: 14).
2. The secondary function of strategy is the employment of armed forces for the fulfilment of political purpose (Gray 1999: 17).
3. A strategy consists of goals, ways, and means, all of which should be in balance in order for a strategy to be effective (Freedman 2013: 10).
4. A strategy always contains the possibility of failure (Yarger 2006:15)
5. A strategy is based on the selection of priorities (Cohen 2009).
6. A strategy contains the theory of victory (Cohen 2009).
7. A strategy is necessary only in the conflict with an intelligent adversary and changing security environment. Without these two variables, a plan or a policy is sufficient (Freedman 2013:11).
8. A strategy should shed light on the understanding of the conversion of military effects into political consequences (Strachan 2005: 49-50).

On the following lines, we use these observations to analyze strong and weak points of the document.

Strong points

The strongest point of the document is the description of a broad spectrum of threats. Authors evaluate a range of issues, from conventional attacks, through disruptive activity to cyber-attacks. The document therefore accurately describes the possible character of future conflicts (Ministry of Defence 2017a: 13-19).

The second strong point is the identification of lacking resources in the defence department. The lack of resources is the consequence of the over-assurance of the population of SR, which is related to the membership of the country in strong alliance structures. Authors of the document accurately describe that our membership in NATO has ensured higher level of country's security, but that it has also led to the lack of attention devoted to our own defence capabilities (Ministry of Defence 2017a: 10-12) The strong point of the document is the appreciation of lacking resources with regard to the political objective of security and its insistence on the balance of resources for this purpose.

The third strong point of the document is the right combination of basic components of the strategy. The identified political objectives are the territorial defence and the security of Slovak citizens. The means to accomplish these objectives are the membership in NATO and EU and modern armed forces. The way to bridge the means and objectives is the concept of deterrence (Ministry of Defence 2017a: 6-8).

Weak points

One of the weak points of the document is too broad understanding of the concept of security, which is related to the absence of priorities regarding threats. It is not enough to characterize all the possible threats, it is necessary to identify, which of them are the most important to focus on. Not all threats are equally dangerous and there is a great difference between those based on the application of violence and others, non-military ones. Unfortunately, this distinction is not emphasized in the document.

The second weak point is related to the absence of priorities regarding the identified political objectives. A situation may come up in which it is necessary to decide which of the political objectives to pursue. This point is even more important because political objectives directly determine the concept of employment of armed forces. If the primary political objective is to be the defence of territory, armed forces cannot be used for defence in depth, because this approach presupposes trading space for time.

If the primary political objective is the security of citizens, concept utilizing guerrilla warfare is out of the picture because this approach is based on forfeiting the defence of places with higher densities of population. The weak point is more relevant because the authors themselves draw attention to the possibility of an emergence of armed conflict in the proximity of SR (Ministry of Defence 2017a: 13-21).

The third weak point is the absence of priorities regarding the development of armed forces. It is evident that the strategy was developed through consensus rather than compromise and this consensus eliminated the possibility for priorities selection related to armed forces. This absence of priorities is clearly visible regarding functions, for which the armed forces ought to be developed. Authors claim that mobility, resistance, firepower, utility, sustainability, flexibility, interoperability and the capacity to operate in various geographic conditions will all be pursued as a valid function (Ministry of Defence 2017a: 60). However, these functions are often not compatible with each other. Mobility and firepower are negatively correlated and so is mobility and resistance. But the absence of priorities is also related to the importance of various kinds of forces. Are land forces and air forces equally important? There is no indication which one should receive more financial resources.

The fourth weak point of the document is its loose identification of the concept for the employment of armed forces. The only concept mentioned in the document is deterrence. (Ministry of defence 2017a: 7). There is no indication as to whether it is supposed to be deterrence based on the threat of punishment or deterrence based on denial of access. Each of these requires a completely different character of armed forces. Furthermore, the deterrence itself is hardly sufficient concept of employment, as it is much more the desired effect, dependent upon the perception of an adversary. Without a clearly stated concept of employment, it is impossible to formulate a valid theory of victory in future conflicts.

The fifth weak point of the document is the missing acknowledgment of the possibility of failure. A strategy can fail for many reasons such as an imbalance between its fundamental components, actions of adversaries or changes in security environments. Authors of the document plan for certainty and they avoid discussing the possibilities for failure as well as alternatives in case of failure. This is especially surprising since the authors claim that the current security environment is characterized by instability and uncertainty (Ministry of Defence 2017a: 20).

The sixth weak point is the perception of adversaries as targets and not as intelligent enemies. The enemy is absolutely crucial to a strategy, it is necessary for a strategy to exist in the first place. Authors of the document disregard the role of the

enemy and, consequently, the whole document looks like a unilateral policy, which will face no resistance.

The last two weaknesses are related to the terminological issues. The first flawed terminological term is the concept of a hybrid threat (Ministry of Defence 2017a: 13). The concept does not have universally accepted meaning, which leads to the confusion about the character of the threats and about the role violence plays in future conflicts. Armed forces understand the concept to mean a tactical combination of regular and irregular forces, politicians understand it to mean a combination of various instruments of national power, media understand it to mean simple propaganda, the states of Northern Europe understand it to mean cross-border operations conducted by Special Forces, the states of Southern Europe understand it to mean organized crime and terrorism (Strachan 2017). This can lead to serious misunderstandings between civilian and military actors and between allies within the alliance. This, in turn, can cause major problems in preparing for the future threats on both national and collective level.

The other terminological problem is the adjective strategic, which is over-used in the document. Among the examples are strategic document (Ministry of Defence 2017a: 1), strategic context (ibid: 4), strategic adaptation (ibid: 4), strategic propaganda (ibid: 13), strategic partnership (ibid: 37) and strategic communication (ibid: 38). The over-use of the adjective has rendered the term meaningless. Without a clear understanding of this crucial term, the military instrument seems to be perceived as only one of the many instruments of state, rather than a very exceptional one. This confusion makes it hard to understand the conversion of military effects into political consequences.

Recommendations

First, we recommend clear selection of priorities in the areas of threats, political objectives and the development of armed forces. The threats containing the use of violence should be emphasized as more important than non-military ones because violent threats have the capacity to cause immense levels of destruction and loss of lives.

It is necessary to pick one political objective as more important than the other one. Since lost territory can be regained, but the dead cannot be brought back to life, the security of Slovak citizens should be the primary political objective.

Regarding the development of armed forces, the emphasis should be put on land forces. We recommend using financial resources to develop light land forces

capable of operating in difficult environments. There are three reasons for this. First, SR has historical experience with the employment of land forces in an insurgency, which can serve as a source of military culture for current development. Second, the geography of SR clearly favours land forces rather than air forces, because the deep forests and mountains present great obstacles to any effective use of air power, while they enable decent employment of land power. Third, land forces are capable of controlling territory, air forces are not. Air forces are only capable of destruction and although this may in some cases ensure control, Slovak air forces will hardly ever be in sufficient condition to cause enough destruction against qualitatively superior adversaries. Land forces can serve to control the territory of SR and of its allies and thus contribute more its political objectives and to the objectives of the alliance.

The strategy also must contain a theory of victory. This means a logical chain of argumentation, which describes the utilization of military means for the fulfilment of a political goal. Since the concept of employment for armed forces mentioned in the document is inadequate, it is impossible to formulate a valid theory of victory. The document should clearly state whether the armed forces are to be used to exhaust or to annihilate an adversary.

Every strategy contains the seeds of failure. The document should include a detailed description of conditions, which can lead to its failure and it should also contain countermeasures to eliminate the possibilities of failure. One particular example can be the critical evaluation of the basic assumptions of the document. What if the defence budget is reduced? What if changes occur in the security environment? Planning for more alternatives is not that hard, planning for certainty invites catastrophe.

It is necessary to pay more attention to the presence of intelligent enemies. The strategy will be implemented against real, thinking enemy, not against a set target. These enemies will strive to counter Slovak defence capabilities and to pursue their own goals. It is necessary to evaluate their possible courses of action and reactions, and the consequences of these on the defence of SR.

Lastly, we recommend reducing the use of the adjective strategic and to not use the term hybrid threat in the document. The word strategic should be only used in relation to the conversion of military effects into political consequences. Any other use of the word devalues its importance.

Limits of the study and other notes by the authors

The analysis was conducted utilizing the comparison of the document to the ideal type of strategy. It is therefore understandable that some of the aspects of the document do not fulfil the expectations. This, however, does not mean that the authors of the document should not strive to the greatest possible approximation to the ideal. If this study motivates them to seek these objectives, its purpose will be fulfilled.

Some of the weak points have their cause in the documents from which the strategy is derived. This is especially the case with the lack of priorities related to political objectives and threats as well as to the terminological issues. These documents are higher in the hierarchy and thus the authors of the strategy should not be held responsible for this weakness. ●

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