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## Transforming Slovenia's Military: Moving Toward NATO Membership

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*At NATO's Prague Summit, the alliance agreed to expand its membership by seven states. One state, Slovenia, has received considerably less analysis of its military and defense capabilities as compared to the other newly invited members. This article examines Slovenia's efforts to modernize its Armed Forces, its defensive and weapons' capabilities, and Slovenian public opinion on NATO and the global 'war on terrorism'. Although Slovenia's military is quite small and still needs important reforms, this analysis suggests that it is making the necessary adjustments to provide useful 'niche' contributions to the alliance.*

At the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) Prague Summit in November 2002, the alliance took the monumental step of extending membership invitations to seven Central and Eastern European states. Among these states was Slovenia, a country of approximately two million people, and a former republic of the wider Yugoslavia. On 8 May 2003 the US Senate accepted through treaty ratification President George W. Bush's request to expand NATO's membership, which now virtually ensures that Slovenia will join six other states as full members of NATO in May 2004.

Excellent research exists already on the political and military attributes of the seven newly invited states. The most comprehensive study of these states is Thomas S. Szayna's, *NATO Enlargement, 2000-2015*, who concludes that as a member, Slovenia will impose the fewest costs on the alliance. Its progress toward and maintenance of democracy, as well as its high gross national product relative to the other states seeking admission made Slovenia one of the most attractive applicants.<sup>1</sup> Most of the research on the applicant states, however, focuses on the other six 'winners' at Prague: the Baltic states, Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia.<sup>2</sup>

By comparison, Slovenia has received much less academic scrutiny, especially of its military capabilities, even though legitimate questions may still be raised regarding how it will contribute to the alliance. Moreover,

rapidly changing events in global security affairs in 2002 and 2003, and Slovenia's reactions to the ongoing war on terrorism merit continued analysis and oversight. Analysts do not doubt Slovenia's democratic transition, however, questions may be raised on its military and defense capabilities since NATO demands its members be security producers – not consumers.<sup>3</sup>

This article examines four military/security aspects of Slovenia's future membership in the alliance. These factors include analysis of Slovenia's efforts to modernize and professionalize its Armed Forces; its military evolution in equipment purchases and weapons' upgrades; Slovenian public support for NATO membership; and its foreign policy position(s) toward the war on terrorism and Operation 'Iraqi Freedom'. The evidence demonstrates that Slovenia has taken important steps in transforming its Armed Forces and its military/defense capabilities, but some uncertainties remain regarding public support for American leadership in NATO and for its ability to address international terrorism. Yet despite its relative small size, good prospects exist that upon full NATO membership, Slovenia will be a valued and contributing member of the alliance.

#### Evolution of the Slovenian Armed Forces

Although limited in size, the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) have undertaken reforms in 2002 and 2003 that have moved it closer toward NATO's military recommendations, which will allow the SAF to make small, but meaningful contributions to NATO as a full member of the alliance.

The SAF is organized into three operational commands: the air force/air defense units, seven regional commands, and several independent brigades. The two basic types in the Slovenian Army are the mobile and territorial units. The purpose of the mobile units is to have the capability to conduct conflict under any condition across the entire country. These units are the focal points for the Slovenian military. These units contrast with the territorial units which are assigned a wider variety of responsibilities. They are charged with securing state borders, safeguarding special purpose facilities, conducting interdiction and counterterrorist activities, intelligence gathering, POW monitoring, and they perform special logistic support missions as well.<sup>4</sup>

The SAF also has three premier units, which are increasing relative to NATO. One of these units is the 1st Brigade, which is comprised entirely of professional soldiers and is being trained for rapid reaction capabilities. The SAF also has its 32nd Mountain Brigade, which is trained in mountaineering, off-piste skiing, reconnoitering, and mountain combat.

Like the 1st Brigade, these troops are also being trained for cooperation for NATO's Partnership for Peace activities and other NATO operations. Moreover, the SAF has the 10th Battalion for International Cooperation, which is used for international peacekeeping operations and is being trained for rapid reaction capabilities.<sup>5</sup> All of these developments suggest that Slovenia is evolving with NATO and the SAF is preparing for a role in NATO's broader security objectives.

Presently, the SAF consists of 7,800 troops (4,640 professionals and 3,160 seven-month conscripts).<sup>6</sup> Conscriptio has been a controversial policy within Slovenia – and without surprise – NATO prefers professional and career soldiers. The present plan is to completely abolish conscription by the end of 2004, yet many details regarding how to meet this goal remain in flux.<sup>7</sup> Despite the remaining debates over conscription, the government has generally been consistent in stating that it plans to have 8,000 professional soldiers and a voluntary reserve force of 10,000 troops by 2010.<sup>8</sup>

Since gaining independence in June 1991, Slovenia and the SAF have also been committed to helping the United Nations maintain peace and order. NATO candidate states are expected to have peacekeeping experience: recent progress with the SAF has also been witnessed on this front. Slovenian troops have participated or are presently participating in several peacekeeping operations.<sup>9</sup> In 1997, Slovenia sent peacekeepers to Albania and to Cyprus. Slovenia also has two observers in the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in the Middle East, and participated in the peacekeeping operation in East Timor. More recently, Slovenia signed an agreement to send troops to the multinational Stand-by High Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG), which is a UN high-readiness peacekeeping force established in 2000.<sup>10</sup>

Other good indications of Slovenia's cooperation with NATO and additional experience in peacekeeping are the government's recent decision(s) to expand the SAF's presence in Bosnia and to have a presence in Kosovo as well. In January 2003, 86 SAF troops were sent to participate in the NATO's Stabilization Force (SFOR), where they are working primarily with NATO allies, Poland and Portugal, to secure the peace in northern Bosnia.<sup>11</sup> Slovenia is also involved with NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR), where it has six troops participating.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, the Slovenian government is actively involved in mineclearing as one facet of its contribution to peacekeeping, which it demonstrated in Bosnia, as well as in Albania, Croatia, and Yugoslavia.<sup>13</sup> Such skills allow Slovenia to provide a 'niche' contribution to NATO.

In terms of regional security and cooperation, the SAF can also be given high marks. The SAF has worked with Hungary and Italy to create a

multinational brigade to promote regional stability. This brigade has conducted joint missions, but it will not be fully compatible for two to three years due to technical equipment problems.<sup>14</sup> In 2003, Slovenia and Croatia also signed an agreement for cooperation on regional defense.<sup>15</sup> Additional progress with the SAF and regional integration was witnessed with Slovenia's support for a pan-Balkans military force in December 2002.<sup>16</sup> Although the prospects for a substantial joint military activities are small in the near future, Slovenia's military outreach does indicate an awareness of regional integration and security.

In sum, the evidence indicates that the SAF is moving in the direction that NATO desires: the SAF plans to professionalize, its efforts to gain rapid reaction training and capabilities, and its experience in peacekeeping and regional military cooperation are all good indicators and excellent indications that the SAF is preparing well for full NATO membership.

### Military Equipment and Weapons Upgrades

Although small in size, the analysis above demonstrates that the SAF has moved to professionalize its armed forces, which will eventually allow Slovenia to make limited but potentially useful contributions to NATO. In general, the same argument can be applied regarding its weapons' capabilities and recent upgrades. In 2002, Slovenian Defense Minister Anton Grizold noted about his goals for the military:

...we want them to be mobile, efficient, and deployable military capabilities that will contribute to crisis management and collective defense. Membership in the Alliance is the goal of our reform, and the threats of terrorism have only confirmed our goal.<sup>17</sup>

In 2002 and 2003, Slovenia made good progress in this direction through important military equipment purchases – keeping it on track to allow for wider force projection capabilities and improved defenses.

In 2002 and 2003, Slovenia made military purchases that improved its defenses considerably. The SAF has two groups of tanks; the T-55 and the M-84. The T-55 model was used extensively during the Cold War by the Soviet Union, and was the main tank used by the Arab states during the 1967 and 1973 wars in the Middle East.<sup>18</sup> Thirty of Slovenia's T-55s have been upgraded to allow for faster mobility, improved firing and enhanced night vision capabilities. One notable weakness of the T-55 is its relatively weak armour: the SAF has addressed this concern as well with enhanced external armour on the upgraded models.<sup>19</sup>

Slovenia also has 46 M-84s, which is a Yugoslav produced tank, modeled after the Soviet Union's T-72. While the tank has some computer

ability to project force outside of its borders. In an era when NATO forces need to be mobile, fast and ready to respond to quickly emerging threats, these weaknesses are noteworthy. At the same time, Slovenia has taken some small but initial steps that allow it to contribute to regional peacekeeping and peace-enforcement exercises. Instability remains throughout the region in places such as Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia. The March 2003 assassination of Yugoslav Prime Minister, Zoran Djindjic, is a reminder that the democratic transition in the Balkans is a work in progress, which may necessitate future military interventions or crisis management operations. Slovenia needs to make improvements in force projection and rapid response capabilities, which is critical for a new NATO ally in the Balkans.

In sum, Slovenia's military equipment purchases demonstrate a genuine effort to modernize. Its new military equipment unquestionably gives Slovenia enhanced defensive capabilities, with some limited regional deployment potential. Its primary need – like some current NATO allies and all of the newly invited member states – is in the area of force projection. With the heightened challenge of terrorism, and NATO's recognized need for rapid deployment capabilities, Slovenia joins several states who need to improve in this area. Otherwise, Slovenia's improvements have been notable and again suggest that it is taking the right steps to be a security producer for the alliance.

**Public Support for NATO**

As NATO's 1999 war in Kosovo demonstrated, having the domestic public's backing for NATO's out-of-area missions is an important element of being a contributing member to the alliance. In the Czech Republic, and to a lesser extent, in Hungary, major public protests were witnessed during Operation 'Allied Force' only days after these states formally joined the alliance. In response, their governments supported NATO only halfheartedly and after considerable pressure [and embarrassment] from the allies.<sup>29</sup> Thus, public backing for NATO is an important element of membership.

Slovenia's support for NATO has varied. In 1997, prior to NATO's Madrid Summit when NATO was going to issue invitations for new members, support for alliance membership peaked at 60 per cent. At Madrid, France, with backing from primarily Italy and others, pushed aggressively for Slovenia's membership, but failed to generate enough support to challenge the favored American position of only three new members: the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. Analysts also contend that Slovenia suffered from poor diplomatic efforts with the United States to build greater American interest in its membership case.<sup>30</sup>

technology for firing and vehicle optics, in general this tank is outdated vis-à-vis most tanks in NATO, especially the United States.<sup>20</sup>

Given Slovenia's small size, however, small advancements with the T-55s, coupled with the remaining capabilities of the M-84s allow for Slovenia to defend itself if ever needed. At this time and in the foreseeable future, Slovenia faces no security threat from its immediate neighbors, but these upgrades illustrate that Slovenia is taking the appropriate steps to defend itself – as is required by NATO.<sup>21</sup>

In the area of armored personnel carriers, in 2002 Slovenia purchased 30 Hummers and added two 'Valuks' to its stock of ten. Valuks are Slovenian-produced light armored military vehicles that can serve in a combat capacity, for platforms for anti-aircraft or anti-tank missiles, or as ambulance vehicles. Another 36 Valuks will arrive gradually by 2005.<sup>22</sup> Additional purchases have been made for military vehicles with platforms that allow for mobile communication systems, mobile artillery capabilities, and additional transportation and logistical resources.<sup>23</sup>

These upgrades have occurred alongside the purchase of more artillery, including 18 TN-90 guns of 155mm caliber.<sup>24</sup>

Slovenia has also purchased a Roland II short-range air defense system from the German Navy, as well as additional equipment to improve its efficiency. These equipment upgrades all suggest a real effort to meet NATO's military requirements.<sup>25</sup>

In terms of Slovenia's ability to address terrorism, the government also purchased 10,000 gas masks, which is a starting point in upgrading its ability to respond to chemical and biological weapon attacks.<sup>26</sup>

The weakest area of the Slovenian military is its force projection capability, that is, its ability to deploy troops abroad. Upon Slovenia's independence and after the successful Ten Day War in June 1991, Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic maintained control over all Yugoslav military aircraft, leaving Slovenia with virtually nothing in terms of air capabilities. Since that time, only minimal advancement has been witnessed in this area. Slovenia now has two multipurpose transport helicopters: these 'Cougars' can carry up to 25 soldiers, have an operational range of 1,100 kilometers, and could assist in regional crisis management operations. Two more Cougars have been ordered, and the SAF plans to have the necessary NATO inter-operable communication capabilities installed on these aircraft. These two new aircraft join eight additional Bell helicopters, which were purchased in 2001.<sup>27</sup> Slovenia also has 12 Pilatus PC-9m jet aircraft, which have been upgraded with supersonic military technology that allows for training in air warfare.<sup>28</sup>

As is evident, these improvements in no way indicate that Slovenia will become a regional military power. The SAF still has severe limits on its

After losing in its bid at Madrid, support declined steadily over the next five years, reaching only 48.3 per cent in 2002 who favored NATO membership. Vigorous opposition came from the Slovenian political party, the United List of Social Democrats, and domestic nongovernmental organizations. In 2003, however, support for NATO membership rose after the invitation at Prague, and in the weeks before the 23 March 2003 national referendum on NATO and EU membership, support grew considerably.

It has been surmised that the assassination of Zoran Djindjic, former Prime Minister of Serbia and Montenegro, was the catalyst for renewed interest in NATO membership. Serbia's elite police force, which was formed to assist Slobodan Milosevic in maintaining order, as well as Yugoslavs working in organized crime, have been implicated in the assassination, and perhaps reminded Slovenes of the vulnerable democratic institutions that exist in the region.<sup>31</sup>

On the day of the national referendum day, 66 per cent of the public – even higher numbers than polls taken before Madrid – voted in favor of NATO membership. The Slovenia government also waged an aggressive public campaign to boost support for membership. Such strong support was an excellent show of popular backing for NATO in 2003, which overcame considerable domestic opposition that existed only months before.<sup>32</sup>

An *ideal* new NATO ally would have had higher support for NATO membership. In contrast, Slovenia's support for NATO has been fluid, but in the aftermath Djindjic's murder, support for NATO is strong. Slovenes also voted in favor of NATO membership only three days after the start of the American-led Operation 'Iraqi Freedom', which also suggests that Slovenians were willing to join an alliance with aggressive and sometimes controversial US leadership. Under these political circumstances, the vote of 66 per cent suggests good support for joining NATO.

### The War on Terrorism and Operation 'Iraqi Freedom'

As is clear in so many ways, the terror attacks on September 11 changed the world. At NATO's Prague Summit, the alliance adapted to the heightened challenge of terrorism by calling for a transformation, such that it could respond and rapidly deploy troops to face international terrorism.<sup>33</sup> Slovenia has responded as well.

After September 11, Slovenia extended full diplomatic support to the Bush administration, which was openly appreciated by Bush administration officials.<sup>34</sup> Slovenia did not, however, contribute any combat troops to Afghanistan, which remained the case in 2002 and 2003. Slovenia has provided humanitarian and some monetary assistance, and has shipped older military weapons to the Afghanistan military to assist in its reforms.

In the autumn of 2002, 900 Slovenian Kalashnikov assault rifles were sent to Afghanistan. In January 2003, mortars, anti-tank launchers and missiles, and more assault rifles and ammunition were also shipped to Afghanistan. These weapons were all no longer needed by the SAF, and should be considered 'surplus' gifts from Slovenia. Yet these steps demonstrate that Slovenia wants to play a role in Afghanistan's reconstruction and a minimum suggest that it recognizes the political and diplomatic importance of doing so.<sup>35</sup>

In contrast to its policies on Afghanistan, Slovenia's stance toward the war on terrorism and its position on Iraq is more difficult to decipher, making it difficult to project broader predictions about its future membership in the alliance. While Iraq is far out of NATO's traditional areas of concern, this issue generated profound policy differences in the alliance. Due to the transatlantic schism on this issue, Slovenia's view on Iraq merits some attention.

Unlike all the other Prague invitees, Slovenia aligned itself more closely with France and Germany during Operation 'Iraqi Freedom'. On 5 February 2003, Slovene Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel signed the 'Statement of the Vilnius Group Countries'. The statement, which was signed by ten Central and East European states, essentially expressed support for the American position: if Iraq did not comply fully with UN Security Council Resolution 1441, these states were 'prepared to contribute to an international coalition to enforce its provisions and the disarmament of Iraq'.<sup>36</sup>

This view, however, was *not* shared by the Slovenian Prime Minister, Anton Rop. When the war began, the Rop government indicated its regret that the military force was being used, and went to considerable lengths to state that the Slovenian government was not helping the United States. Rop also corrected inaccurate statements made by the Chairman of the House International Relations Committee, US Congressman Henry Hyde (Republican-Illinois), who indicated that Slovenia was in the 'coalition of the willing'. Rop reiterated that he did not wish to be associated with the United States, but rather with the NATO countries of France and Germany. The Prime Minister did indicate that Slovenia would assist the United States in a humanitarian capacity for the Iraqi people, but deliberately distanced his government from any military cooperation with the United States.<sup>37</sup>

Slovenia distinguished itself from all its fellow Prague invitees in its open opposition to the United States. Only three days after the conflict began, however, Slovenia faced a national referendum on whether to join NATO and the EU. Although it cannot be proven with documented evidence, it seems likely that the upcoming vote was a factor in shaping Slovenia's position on Iraq. Given the precarious public support for NATO

membership in 2002, and the sometimes visceral opposition many Europeans have for President George W. Bush, Rop may have found it in his government's interest to criticize Operation 'Iraqi Freedom', while simultaneously calling for NATO membership. Rop had actively campaigned for Slovenian membership in NATO, but with the widespread opposition in Europe to the Bush administration, Rop would likely reap political gain from his political assaults on George Bush.

Moreover, since its creation, NATO has been a military alliance that, in reality, is led by the United States. In 2003, however, the absence of consensus within NATO may have actually helped the Slovenian government make its case more successfully to its constituents. Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Turkey, and to a lesser extent, Luxembourg (all NATO allies) showed their independence from the United States. They demonstrated that they could prevent (or at least threaten) NATO from endorsing what the United States wanted. Thus, NATO's inability to act in Iraq, coupled with the assassination of Zoran Djindjic, probably demonstrated to Slovenes that NATO membership could provide security in the precarious region of the Balkans, but also that NATO (and by implication – the United States) could not pull Slovenia into conflicts unwillingly.

Slovenia's position on Iraq suggests that it is willing to exercise independence from the United States, and take political gambles. No other Prague invitee took a similar stand, and Slovenia made these decisions before the US Senate voted on NATO expansion – potentially risking a backlash from the American Congress. At the same time, to suggest that Slovenia will be more closely aligned with France and Germany as a full NATO member oversimplifies Slovenian foreign policy. Given that Operation 'Iraqi Freedom' occurred so closely to the national referendum, it is difficult to separate Rop's strategic views on Iraq from the political benefit he likely received from criticizing President Bush before the vote. Foreign Minister Rupel's signing of the Vilnius statement also suggests policy differences *within* the Slovenian government, or perhaps a concerted effort to 'stride the fence' on Iraq by forwarding different policy positions from key leaders. At the same time, Rop sided more closely with France and Germany, who essentially argued that that they would never support military action against Iraq.

In short, the presence of multiple political factors during Operation 'Iraqi Freedom' makes it difficult to predict how supportive Slovenia will be of American leadership in NATO.

### Conclusion

In 2004, Slovenia will join six other states to enlarge NATO to 26 members – an alliance size that never could have been imagined by its creators. Overall, the evidence on Slovenia's military and foreign policy evolution in 2002 and 2003 indicates that it is taking the appropriate steps to become a contributing member of NATO. The Slovenian Armed Forces are being professionalized and modernized in accordance with NATO's transformation. Although few in number, its troops are being trained for rapid deployment operations, and are increasingly gaining peacekeeping experience. Its permanent forces are being downsized and professionalized as well.

In terms of its military modernization, Slovenia is again taking the appropriate steps to improve its defenses. Most notably, Slovenia has modernized its T-55 tanks, is implementing an air defense system, has improved artillery, and is making advancements in its regional mobilization capabilities. Its wider force projection capability remains the weakest component of its military, and is where advancements should occur.

Regarding public support for NATO, the 66 per cent approval vote for NATO membership is the best sign since 1997 that Slovenes overwhelmingly want to be in NATO. The murder of Zoran Djindjic, and perhaps NATO's inability to act cooperatively on 'Iraqi Freedom', in all likelihood boosted public support for NATO, which had dipped below 50 per cent approval in 2002. In the limited way that it can, Slovenia has assisted Afghanistan in its democratic reconstruction, and has provided humanitarian assistance to Iraq.

Some uncertainties remain on Slovenia's broader views on international terrorism as linked to the Bush doctrine of 'preemptive strikes'. What is much clearer is Slovenia's support for NATO peacekeeping activities, its support of the Partnership for Peace Program, and its efforts to cooperate regionally to advance NATO's interest in Balkan stability. The vast majority of evidence suggests that Slovenia will not be a 'free-rider' in NATO, and will potentially make small but useful contributions as a full member of the alliance.

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## Repression in the Red Army in the Far East, 1936-1939

V. S. MIL' BAKH

(translated by Dr Harold S. Orenstein)

*Following on from his article 'Repression in 57th Special Corps (Mongolian People's Republic)' covering the same period in JSMS 15/1 (March 2002), Dr Mil' bakh analyses with awesome detail (from Russian archival sources) Stalin's devastating purge of the Red Army across the whole Far East. This occurred at the very time Japan, the aggressive occupier of Manchuria, engineered increasing numbers of border incidents leading to large-scale fighting in 1938 and 1939. Of particular interest is the role of Marshal of the Soviet Union V. K. Bliukher, the region's top commander, among the many individuals documented here.*

### Japan Seizes Manchuria

At the beginning of the 1930s the military-political and international situation on the eastern borders of the USSR had fundamentally changed. On 18 September 1931 Japanese forces had begun to occupy China's northeastern province (Manchuria), and by March 1932 the puppet state of Manchukuo had been set up on Tokyo's initiative. In accordance with the 15 September 1932 protocol between Manchukuo and Japan, Japan received practically unlimited rights on the territory of this state. The invasion of Manchuria by Japanese forces (the Manchurian Incident) and the further development of events caused the Soviet Union, which directly bordered Manchuria, to have serious concerns regarding a possible attack by Japan.

The absence of a clear legal basis regulating territorial relations between the Soviet Union and Manchukuo inevitably resulted in an increase in border violations. The increase in border incidents is attested by documents for 1933-38 from the Narodny Kommissariat Vnutrennikh Del's (NKVD's) Main Directorate of Border and Internal Troops, the NKVD's Directorate of