

Slovenia's Contemporary Defense Framework: What Implications for Theory?

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The newly-independent Slovenia faced an array of policy choices, particularly in the security realm. Whether Slovenia had real domestic choices or was constrained by external factors remains a poignant test for competing theoretical models. This paper discusses in the broadest terms the defense choices that Slovenia has made in recent years, and then offers some conceptual orientations to what those choices may imply for international relations theory.

Thesis

Contrary to variants of neorealist theories, NATO persists, thrives and continues to grow as the 2004 accessions attest. NATO's actions, especially toward new members (promoting liberal democracy and economics, and military specialization) indicate that the alliance is morphing into a collective security organization. Of greatest interest to me is NATO's and the EU's potential impact on the smaller members states like Slovenia. This paper forwards that NATO and the developing European security structures allow (or maybe force) states to forgo all forms of self-defense and concentrate on the alliances' needs. In other words, Slovenia's defense policies reflect its true adoption of the alliance's promises.

The questions that this paper begins to address are: What do Slovenia's choices in the defense realm mean (if anything) to theory? What forced Slovenia to adopt significant internal changes? Did external forces (such as perceptions of the security environment or institutions) or internal dynamics such as political culture/pragmatism predominate in Slovenia's decision-making processes?

Rationalism and Slovenia

The rapid demise of the Soviet-dominated system in the early 1990s threw the decades-long Western defense structure into flux, as the bipolar environment that dominated all major defense choices no longer

existed. Many policy analysts of the period argued that for the first time in decades, the US could seriously reexamine its material commitment to European security, allowing a “peace dividend” to extend over the North Atlantic region. Of course, this dividend did not occur nor did the US substantially depart from Europe. Though neorealism, especially offensive realism as Layne (2000) advances, might explain why the US remains entrenched militarily in Europe, rationalism may not in whole explain the defense choices that small states make.

Realist theory (both classical and “neo”) concerns itself foremost with the unitary state as the principal actor in a more-or-less Hobbesian environment in which that state must compete for survival. Any form of cooperation among unitary states is in the context of alliance-building and balancing (and possibly, “bandwagoning”) against other states that may threaten territorial sovereignty and independence (Walt 1987). A fundamental element of the realist orientation, then, is a concept of viewing the “other.” In the multinational context, regional cooperation is driven by processes of “othering” and excluding certain states. Browning and Joenniemi (2004: 236) argue that in the small-state context of the Baltics, “Thus, while realist security discourse encourages cooperation and community-building with some, it hinders it with others.” Slovenia’s joining NATO does not contradict neorealist theory; in fact it supports Walt’s version that “weak states” bandwagon with powerful states in an effort to “choose the winning side” (1987: 29). Slovenia’s intentional choices to forgo complete military defenses enhance the idea of Slovenia’s perception of NATO as a security system that can be relied upon. The neorealist orientation forwards that a state must ensure survival by adopting a defense structure to cover all potential threats, potentially weakening the neorealists’ argument.

Background

Slovenia is a small state in a world of small states. Of the over 190 members of the United Nations, 130 have populations of less than ten million. But whereas small states enjoy a numerical majority in a state-centered world based in the Westphalian system of international politics, practically speaking a small state has a comparatively small voice in the world. Slovenia, with its population of fewer than two million is, frankly, a very small voice. In this context of a weak state, Slovenia recognized its comparative advantages and inherent strengths. One

consistent strain in Slovenia's external policy is recognition that it can have a voice on the international scene, but Slovenia's maximum strength can only come through participation in the strongest and most vibrant intergovernmental organizations. The modern global system and Slovenia's place in that system makes the wisdom of this orientation clear.

In the ten years since Slovenia gained independence, and the demise of strategic bipolarity, Slovenia moved forward economically and politically. Although Slovenia's overall future appears bright, there are three overriding concerns to its continued security: economic stagnation; continued instability in the Balkan Peninsula; and transnational threats, particularly those threats from terrorism, organized crime and population migration.¹ The European Union provided the most effective vehicle to tangible, long-term economic benefits, in the security realm Slovenia made membership in NATO a goal as far back as 1989, years before independence.

Slovene Defense policy

In the European framework in general, and the Slovene case in particular, individual state concepts of security have changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War, encompassing more than just individual survival but rather a holistic concept of "human security."² The violence associated with Slovenia's disassociation from Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) ended rapidly. This relatively pacific international environment allowed Slovenia to focus on development and maturation of domestic policy instead of the lower-order survival actions that ongoing military violence forced on its Southern Slav neighbors.

¹ See Republic of Slovenia Ministry of Defense, "Strategic Defence Review: Comprehensive Summary," Ljubljana, May 2004. This work discussed that the general nature of threats to the Republic of Slovenia are transnational, and are not necessarily state-centric.

² Actually, with the maturation of the bi-polar global security structure, ideas of national security were already less focused solely on state survival. For an early example of the broadening idea of national security, see J.A. Tapia-Valdes, "A Typology of National Security Policies," *Yale Journal of World Public Order* 9.10 (1982): 10–39.

Even before its violent independence from the FRY in 1991, Slovenia began to develop some military independence, all but removing itself from mandatory contributions to the Yugoslav federal army. Though not a member, of course, along with other East European states, it found itself in security limbo after the March 1991 dissolution of the Warsaw Pact (Barany 2004). Despite its short war of independence, the conflicts in Croatia and Serbia forced Slovene recognition of persistent “hard” security threats, though it was also susceptible to the “softer” threats facing European states. Slovenia was among the first ECE states to realize there was no real alternative to NATO.

The 1990s were a decade of tumult in defense policy, especially after Slovenia failed in 1997 to receive an invitation to join NATO. Lack of funds, low esteem for the military as a profession, a lack of mission and a series of difficulties in the office of the defense ministry did little to foster the development of sound policy as well. Despite all these, Slovenia developed a reasonable military for a country its size. The focus remained making itself attractive to the Alliance. Public speeches by Slovene officials and sympathetic analyses by Western observers touted Slovenia’s comparative advantages. What seemed to be lacking (at least in public) was planning for what would happen if the Alliance again closed its rolls.

With its small and mal-equipped Territorial Defense forces at the onset of statehood in 1991, Slovenia was certainly at a disadvantage militarily vis-à-vis other post-communist states of the region. The inception of the *Slovenska Vojska*, the Slovene Armed Forces, is in itself notable, for it *began* in 1991 and was not just *reformed*, as were the armed forces of the other newly-independent East European states. Recognizing that Slovenia could not afford the luxury of vigorous parallel systems, the Slovene defense planning calls for a two-facet approach, encompassing a military component and civil defense. In the Slovene context, military defense represents the means to ensure Slovenia’s physical safety and security, encompassing military, technological, organizational, technical, normative, material and other defense preparations. Civil defense assists the governmental continuity in cases of emergency, with survival of the nation the chief concern (Vlada Republike Slovenije 2002). Achieving those aims, the Slovene MoD (2004, 18) forwards that its defense policy is a net result of three factors:

- the multinational integration and cooperation of the SAF in Euro-Atlantic security integrations;
- the increased scale of participation in international operations;
- defense planning in line with available defense resources.

Slovene Armed Forces

Reflective of the struggles of militaries of most developed countries, Slovenia faced a variety of initial hurdles, with staffing one of the most contentious issues. Because of the low number of professional cadre at independence, throughout most of the 1990s Slovenia filled its armed services through conscription. The gradual elimination of conscription³ and the raising of education requirements appear to be implemented successfully, with all military officers required to have an undergraduate degree before receiving a commission. A Slovene defense official emphasized that the Slovene armed forces' goal is a fully professional armed force by 2010, to encompass 8,500 professional soldiers, including officers, noncommissioned officers and enlisted, as well as 4,500 reservists.⁴ These figures are reflected in Slovenia's most recent Strategic Defense Review, which emphasizes a future alignment three motorized battalions and one light mountain battalion.

The intent of these combat units are national protection, as well as in NATO and EU-sponsored operations. Support to these main combat units will be provided by a variety of specialized functions: artillery, engineer, air-defense, nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) and military police battalions. All forces are supported by a mobile and fixed logistics units, as well as medical support. A small maritime unit provides some sea-going capability (MoD 2004, 40). Replete throughout the latest *Defense Review* is that contribution to multinational organizations is a primary mission goal

Since independence, the Slovene armed forces have participated in over 50 joint military events, and organized several major joint military exercises (i.e., with over 1,000 total military personnel participating). Most recently, Slovenia agreed to contribute a very small cadre of

³ "No More Conscripts," *Slovenia Times* 10 (November 2003).

⁴ Interview with Jazbec, 17 June 2004.

instructors for the Iraqi armed forces, though with the explicit condition they not be physically stationed in Iraq.

*NATO*⁵

The Alliance has fostered significant changes within the structures of the Slovene Armed Forces. Shortly after NATO accession, Chief of Staff Ladislav Lipič demonstrated the give and take of NATO membership:

The defense system will take on a whole new form, as we are making the transition from total to collective defense. We will be recipients of collective security, but we are also aware of the obligations that this advantage imposes upon us. In planning organizational structure, we are taking into account a new profile of capabilities, which is based on modified missions and tasks of the Slovenian army. These tasks make it possible to upgrade and maintain all key operational capabilities that support the implementation of the fundamental national and security defense tasks.⁶

Since accession to the Alliance, NATO has forced Slovenia into adopting internal legislative changes. Among the most important legislation include laws to allow Slovene forces to be deployed abroad, and for Slovenia to host NATO troops on its soil. Planning strategies, particularly budgetary and strategic, are now consistent with NATO's baseline.⁷ Slovenia plans to contribute an NBC unit to the rapid reaction forces in 2006–2007. Moreover, the Slovene Armed Forces have committed a motorized infantry capability, though with shortfalls in

⁵ Several excellent works give detailed analyses of Slovenia's accession process, to include Zlatko Šabič and Ljubica Jelušić, "Slovenia and NATO Enlargement: Twists, Turns, and Endless Frustrations," Charles Krupnick, ed., *Almost NATO: Partners and Players in Central and Eastern European Security* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003) 83–118; Zlatko Šabič and Charles Bukowski, *Small States in the Post-Cold War World* (Westport: Praeger, 2002); and Chapter 6, "Security," (esp. pp 191–203) in James Gow and Cathy Carmichael, *Slovenia and the Slovenes: A Small State and the New Europe* (London: Hurst and Company, 2000).

⁶ "What They Think About NATO" *Slovenia News* 13 (31 March 2004).

⁷ Ten years after independence, Slovenia was just beginning to adopt NATO-style budget and planning processes to project expenses and long-term expenditures into a three to five year horizon.

communications and air defense. NATO's impact on the tangible structure and composition is particularly notable, paradoxically, in some of Slovenia's numerically smaller units and capabilities.

Slovenia's military is able to provide a wide-range of support services predominantly to its indigenous ground forces, though aviation, training and support niches to support NATO structures are developing. Slovenia's aviation unit is staffed by 400 personnel, organized into three battalions, with rotary wing (i.e., helicopters) the primary service craft.⁸ Though its recent changes may be due in part to concerns for greater efficiency, General Lipič recently said that the reorganization of the aviation unit was a direct consequence of NATO accession.⁹ Moreover, NATO's Admiral Edmund Giambastiani praised Slovene military developing, expressing that Slovenia's most important contribution to the Alliance is the establishment of the NBC battalion and the intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) unit. Adding to this, Slovenia particular, though certainly distinct, specialties of mountain and foreign language training, will affect positively the alliance's capabilities.¹⁰ In sum, Slovenia has made significant real changes to its legislation, procedures, capabilities and force structures as a direct result of NATO accession, changes that in all likelihood would not have been as extensive without Alliance membership.

ESDP

Emphasizing that Slovenia does not plan to duplicate military capabilities, defense planning or costs between its commitment to NATO and the EU, Slovenia has agreed, along with Hungary and Italy, to form one the European Union's thirteen tactical battle groups as part of the Union's European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). One motorized unit of 128 Slovene military personnel will form this tri-state contribu-

⁸ For a period of five years, the Slovene Armed Forces are to lease its unused Dassault Falcon 2000EX for US \$125,000 per month. "The Disputed Jet Takes Off," *Slovenia Times* 14 (14 March 2004).

⁹ "Slovene army's aviation brigade to be reorganized into three battalions," Radio Slovenia 8 November 2004.

¹⁰ "NATO chief praises Slovenia's 'impressive' progress, army professionalization," Radio Slovenia 15 October 2004.

tion to the emerging European security architecture.¹¹ Adopting this extra-NATO commitment to European security certainly implies that Slovenia, along with essentially all other European states, seeks to tie its domestic security to the parallel structures while attempting not to alienate its unilateral relations with the US.

Shortfalls and Implications

In a comparative analysis of the military forces of the recent NATO accession countries, including the three Višegrad states that entered the Alliance in 1999 (with the obvious exception of Poland), Slovenia has developed a strong and capable military. Despite these capabilities, the Slovene defense structure is remarkable for what it does not have.

The clearest example of Slovenia's reliance on NATO capabilities is its lack of a robust indigenous air defense system controlled solely by Slovenia, and not merely integrated into NATO's existing defense system (the NATINEADS). Moreover, Slovenia does not have tactical jet aircraft for interception and air superiority, nor serious anti-aircraft armaments, despite the recent purchase of portable, short-range SAMs. Italy has agreed to scramble its intercept aircraft to protect Slovenia's airspace.¹² Slovenia has opted to forgo substantial naval forces, though its twenty-four miles of coastline requires fewer maritime resources. Last, Slovenia remains a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and no nuclear weapons capabilities.

Summary and Conclusions

Slovenia has taken pragmatic steps to ensure its national security by integrating into European structures as quickly as those organizations would allow. In the sphere of physical security, several overall observations merit summation. First, Slovenia has made no major distinction between combat and civil defense assets. Internal constraints

¹¹ See 24 November 2004, press release issued by the EU Council in Brussels, "Military Capability Commitment Conference, Brussels, 22 November 2004: Declaration on European Military Capabilities" for summation of the ESDP timelines and participant responsibilities.

¹² "Italian Aircraft to Protect Slovenian Skies," *Slovenia News* 13 (31 March 2004).

pushed Slovenia to adopt most units for dual military and for civilian emergency use. Second, Slovenia has adopted alliance structures and procedures, but, instead of countering full-spectrum threats, Slovenia seeks a combat and support niche. Its unique mountain forces and NBC capabilities are the most promising niche contributions. Third, Slovenia especially is willing to aid in non-hostile action, i.e., peacekeeping, as testified deployment of Slovene military forces in peacekeeping missions worldwide. The implications of Slovenia's defense actions to theory will remain a potential source of debate (for those interested, of course) in perpetuity. The right direction, though, is most likely away from the neorealist orientation and toward other branches of international relations theory.

The world's economic and military hegemon, the US, is no threat to Europe or Slovenia. Taking this a bit further, there is no serious threat to the very survival of Slovenia. The proximate environment that makes the Baltic states nervous and force them to seek NATO's protection is understandable, but Slovenia is in a widely different security context. So why should any state, especially a relatively prosperous state with no history of militarism endure all that membership in an organization such as NATO entails, especially when it forces serious changes in policy, structure and funding? The answer lies in some ideational construct in which the smaller states desire inclusion—culturally and politically—in the West.¹³

Slovene defense policies since independence suggest, that at least for a small state, a movement away from full-spectrum defenses that neorealism dictates. Rather, in a real loss of autonomy for these small states, the European security and alliance structures that Slovenia so willingly adopted force military specializations and a serious reliance on others to fulfill their security commitments.

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¹³ For the most thorough review of pre-accession theoretical perspectives relating to NATO and Slovenia, see Milan Brglez, "NATO Enlargement and Slovenia: Interpreting, Mapping and Constructing International Relations Perspectives."

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