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SLOVAK STRATEGIC CULTURE IN THE CYCLES OF HISTORY

Jaroslav Ušiak*

ABSTRACT

The main aim of the article is to analyse strategic culture and security of Slovakia. We will try to analyse its linguistic, analytical and informative significance, and how its planning and operational capabilities are reflected in the practice of foreign and national security policy of state during the cycles of history. Our attention is to focus on early history of the Slovakian territory, period during Austro-Hungarian Empire, the decades during the two world wars. The attention is also focused on period during the Soviet domination over the central Europe till today. We will try to formulate what aspects of the strategic culture of Slovak Republic, particularly from the historical perspective, may also serve to enhance its current developments. However, despite its enhanced normative aspect the strategic culture will primarily always be a system of meanings and symbols, as well as system of resources, which to a large extent determine formulation of foreign policy doctrines and security policy.

Key words: strategic culture, security, military, history of Slovakian territory, Slovak Republic

Introduction

National security can only be formed on the basis of the existing political system due to the fact that the existing system creates specific security environment, causes its changes and conditions its development. When referring to the security environment we understand it as a set of phenomena and processes that surround an individual during his life and represent a special significance and value for him. (Hofreiter, 2006, p. 57) The security environment is a correlation entity that includes natural, cultural and social environment, and at the same time, expressed the impact of security entities in objective reality.

At the most basic level the security environment may be divided into external and internal, or more precisely into immediate security environment (state and

* Mgr. Jaroslav Ušiak, PhD. is Lecturer at the Department of Security Studies, Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovak Republic, e-mail: jaroslav.usiak@umb.sk.

neighbouring countries), close security environment (Europe – participation in organisations such as Warsaw Pact, Comecon, the EU, NATO, etc.), and remote security environment (areas of interest from the purview of great powers – membership in the UN and other international organisations). In both cases, the relations between the actors and the objective reality are channelled through the state and its political system. It does so not only as an organisational unit of a society at a particular time and place, but also as a particular set of institutions, bodies and rules designed to protect the state's own ideas, integrity, citizens, and to protect against specific external threats, determined by the values underpinning the political system of the state. This relationship also creates specific strategic culture which differs depending on the fact whether we analyse great powers or small states. In our analysis we focus the attention on one small state (Slovakia, Slovakia territory), which throughout the repeatedly lost its independence, and, therefore, formed its own strategic culture on other grounds compared to a great power. In many cases primary objectives of the small states were not only the defence of territory, but the very survival of the nation and the preservation of national identity. "Small nations that were once independent state entities survived thanks to the hope that the process of changing of their boundaries, names, and maps would eventually stop, and that their defence would go from purely emotional to actual. These nations in Central Europe, historically derived from an independent state, for centuries were subject to foreign invasions setting fires to their homes and changing their surroundings into the battlefields. They were blackmailed from three sides, and residents had only so much possession they could have saved with their own hands. They did not know the meaning of freedom and they were banned from using their own language. Foreign institutions and laws dictated survival – and the choice was to adapt or to perish. National sentiments were punishable by imprisonment or banishment. Therefore, those states are the most vulnerable, unable to choose their own development or direction; they had to join the others. It is this "joining the others" the terrible curse, creating the deep rift and division inside the nation, resulting in further weakening of internal forces. But the goal was very important, it was gaining autonomy and independence. There is no such monument, which would sufficiently commemorate those efforts." (Szabóová, 1983)

Those words can also be used to describe the strategic culture of Slovakia. Its specifics are historically different in time when this state was independent entities (Great Moravian Empire), later, when it formed parts of

other empires (Slovakia was integrated into Austro-Hungarian Empire), and when it eventually achieved independence after World War I (following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in common state with Czechs). After World War II, Czechoslovakia became part of the Soviet bloc, and since 1955 part of the Warsaw Pact. This process took more than three decades and ended after the dissolution of the USSR. His successor state Russia has abandoned any doctrinal – either political or strategic – dominance in Central Europe. After 1993, when Czechoslovakia peacefully split into the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic was established, the strategic culture of country gradually began to take shape.

Therefore, we have to responsibly analyse strategic culture and security of Slovakia. We will try to analyse its linguistic, analytical and informative significance, and how its planning and operational capabilities are reflected in the practice of foreign and national security policy of state during the cycles of history.

1 Early History

Any politico-military change that took place in Central Europe, influenced the development of Slovak security environment.¹ As the first politico-military event of importance that took place in this area might be considered the dominance of the Roman Empire, when the territory of Slovakia for the first time came into contact with military events. This period can be dated around the year 179 AD (at that time the Roman army defeated the barbarians) and afterwards the territory of Slovakia became for a long time a neighbour of the Roman Empire, at the so-called axis Limes Romanus.

Slavs living on the territory of today's Slovakia were particularly exposed to invasions of the Avars. This did not change until 623, when an open struggle broke out between Slavs and Avars. Under the leadership of the **Frankish merchant Samo** Slavs managed to defeat in an open battle Avars and the South-Western Slovakia, South Moravia and North-Eastern Austria created a tribal union. Later on a union has been forced on Western Slavic tribes – which led to creation of the first state organisation of Slavs – Great Moravia. Disintegration of the Great Moravian Empire has been caused by

¹ Under the term Slovak security environment we understand the security environment in Central Europe, which influenced Slovak (Slavic) tribes, and that during the historical development changed the borders of the empires and states (in particular rivalry of Germanic and Russian influence).

numerous military incursions of old Hungarian, until finally in 1018 the entire territory of today's Slovakia has been incorporated into Hungarian state. (Nižňanský, 1993)

Another important milestone was the 11th and 12th Century military clashes between the Hungarian, Czech and Polish State. Of course, we cannot forget the internal unrest in 14th Century caused by **Matúš Čák of Trenčín**, who rebelled against the central state power. At the end of the 14th Century the territory of the Hungarian has been subject to the incursions of the Ottoman Empire, expanding its power and territorial space. Ottoman advances instilled fear also in Western European countries, steering them to help Hungary by sending their troops. After this period, the Slovak territory came into the immediate neighbourhood with the Turks in the Balkans and under the influence of the Habsburgs as part of the Habsburg Empire.

In 1526 at the Battle of Mohacs Turkish Sultan **Suleiman the Magnificent** defeated Hungarian and Czech army led by King **Louis II.** of the reigning Jagellon dynasty. The king himself was killed in this battle, which meant that the Austrian Duke **Ferdinand Habsburg** claimed his entitlement to the Czech-Hungarian throne after the deceased king. In Slovakia, however, he had a strong opponent – **Ján Zápoľský**. Strong Habsburg monarchy, however, strategically exceeded Slovak influence in Hungary, especially after **Ferdinand Habsburg** led increasingly successful campaign against the Turks. Ferdinand Habsburg laid the foundations of future Austrian-Hungarian Empire. The situation got complicated by a number of partial Turkish victories as well as by war between the Habsburgs and the Turks in the Balkans in the years 1593-1606. Initially successful military and diplomatic strategy of the Viennese Court during the war with Turks had to face also internal security threats, most importantly numerous uprisings with anti-Austrian character (revolts of Transylvanian and Hungarian aristocracy, as well as Estates revolts combining Slovak and Hungarian demands). Formation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire had therefore also security connotations because the period of its inception overlapped with the Thirty Years War and numerous anti-Habsburg revolts. The centre of these revolts was the Slovak territory. In 1619 **Gabriel Bethlen** with the help of disgruntled members of the Hungarian Estates started his campaign to support the rebellion in Bohemia against the Habsburg monarchy. The rebellion in Bohemia began with the defenestration in Prague in 1618 and led to the Thirty Years' War. Only in 1622 **G. Bethlen** signed compromise peace with the Emperor **Ferdinand II.**

Resistance against the Turks in the territory of Hungary culminated during the years 1663-1664, after the German Empire provided military and material assistance and Emperor Leopold I. defeated the Turks. Liberation War against the Ottoman Empire, however, lasted until 1699, when joined forces of German, Polish and Austrian-Hungarian armies took over the territories in Hungary which were under the control of the Turkish pashaliks for previous 150 years. (Gonionskij, 1967) Strategic culture of Slovakia incorporated also the ideas of the Enlightenment, which has resonated during the anti-Turkish resistance, but always had also anti-Habsburg connotations (liberating people from the rule of absolutism, as one of the ideals of the Enlightenment). The last great anti-Habsburg revolt took place with the active support of France in the years 1703-1711 under the leadership of **František II. Rákoczi**. The revolt ended with the Szatmár peace in 1711 and the Habsburgs were confirmed as hereditary rulers of Hungary. (Gonionskij, 1967)

The very existence of the Slovak nation as part of the Hungarian state under the influence of the Habsburgs was marked by injustice and oppression - re-Catholicisation, Counter-Reformation measures and so forth. These efforts led to revolts and armed conflicts (1604-1867). These years have brought many changes to the organisation of military units as well – in 1715 joint standing army of Austria and Hungary was established. The actual Estates revolts culminated in the early revolutionary years of 1848-1849, during which the Slovaks **Hodža**, **Hurban**, **Štúr** created Slovak National Council in Vienna. Slovaks expected that in exchange for the assistance they provided to Vienna it would in turn fulfil given promises – providing solution to national oppression and social injustice. During this period, the Slovaks for the first time created their own armed troops. These promises, however, did not materialise, and a dual state of Austria – Hungary has been established, leaving Slovak territory under Hungarian administration. (Nižňanský, 1993)

Slovakia under both Hungarian Empire and Austro-Hungarian Empire remained only a minor enclave. Despite the fact that until the early modern period the working language of all scholars was Latin this area maintained its own language (the popular language). Ethnically, culturally and to some extent also religiously, it constituted a homogeneous unit resistant to attempts at assimilation into Hungary. Politically and administratively-wise it adapted to the situation in the empire, but at the same time it maintained the internal cultural identity. In many aspects its strategic culture was identical to the ones of Hungary, Czech Republic and Poland, in particular with regard to more than two

hundred years of Turkish threat, however, had its own historical symbols and myths as testimonies of the Slovak patriotism and national pride, always with an emphasis on national values.

It is a special ability of Slovak identity that from the 18th Century onwards Hungarian liberalism, Viennese conservatism and Slovak nationalism co-existed side by side. This inner identity was presented as a resistance current in both Vienna and Budapest, but not strong enough to cause internal security problems to the monarchy. (Rupnik, 1992) Until the revolutionary years of 1848-1849 Slovak question has been presented mainly as a cultural problem. In this respect, there were crucial differences between the national liberation movements in Slovakia, Hungary, Austria and the Czech Republic. In Hungary it was a matter of honour – Hungarian nobility could not bear the superiority of Vienna, thus revolts were always had anti-Habsburg character. In the Czech Republic and Poland, the national liberation movements were aiming at political independence. In Slovakia, however, the situation was different. Despite the wide agitation campaign national liberation never comprised the entire nation. Evangelical intelligentsia has been particularly active, fulfilling also the role at present provided by the mass-media. The autochthonous Slovak aristocracy, nobility, middle classes but also the peasantry were rather indifferent to the revolutionary efforts to liberate the nation. The idea of Pan-Slavism proved to be stronger than the national idea, emphasising the need to prevent the assimilation of the Slavic peoples in Germanic identity of the Habsburg Empire and its opposition to Pan-Germanism. The idea of Pan-Slavism was seen as an alternative, as a Slavic unity, not in the Habsburg Empire but under the protective aegis of Russia. Spiritually, Pan-Slavism stemmed from the ideology of Russian Slavophilism rejecting Western cultural model. Strategic connotations of Pan-Slavism were, however, contradictory. By putting Russia into the centre of attention of Slavs, **L. Štúr**, a member of the Hungarian parliament and a significant figure in Slovak national liberation movement in the first half of the 19th Century, paradoxically caused a split in the idea of “unity of all Slavic people”. Poland could not accept the concept due to its vassal status in Tsarist Russia. In the Czech Republic a tendency to Austro-Slavism prevailed and Hungarian intelligentsia also perceived Russia as an enemy (especially after the defeat at Világos in 1849), while it never belonged ethnically or shared sympathy for the Slavic tribes.

Štúr's concept of unification of Slavs, or more precisely of the nations of Central and wider Central Europe, which should be a guarantee of conflict-free

development of the territory under the motto: "it is time to reach the agreement, brothers!" has not been fulfilled. (Štúr, 1993)

The Štúr's heritage for future strategic orientation of Slovakia proved ambivalent. On one side it marked the beginning of an awareness of the possibility of creating an independent nation state, and it is worth asking a question whether without this epoch Slovak ethnic community would even survive. On the other hand, precisely at this stage de-linking with the West began which until then represented our historical, cultural and civilisational space, culminating in the aggressive and intolerant form of East-West relations after World War II. (Rupnik, 1992)

2 Two World Wars

The biggest impact on our military history had the World War I, which has been fought also on the territory of present-day Slovakia. During this period, the Slovaks participated in Austro-Hungarian army. This hectic period accelerated social change, raised awareness of the role of military force in social organisation and about the possibilities of its engagement in the struggle for national liberation – that initiated the creation of the Czechoslovak Legions. National resistance movement was in many cases a prerequisite for declaring the attempts to form a new nation-state. This joint Czechoslovak effort culminated in the signing of the Versailles Peace Treaty and the establishment of an independent Czechoslovak state. After the war, the newly independent Czechoslovakia began to build its own army and its National Assembly enacted the Defence Act in 1920.

Versailles system newly shaped the international security environment; however, by its very character it also established the elements of inequality between states. Although League of Nations has been created, it lacked tools for peacekeeping; consequently, it lacked the mechanism by means of which the states could create their own security policies so as to not contradict the common interest. In practice, these shortcomings were revealed in the national interests of several states (USSR, China, and Germany). Since the Versailles system was built on the power and strength of the victorious powers which decided to apply their will regardless of the defeated powers. Later on, when the victorious powers began to disagree – development supported by their increasingly differing power potentials – the system started to gradually break down and paved way for the emergence of a new conflict. Another failure of this

system was the weakness of the League of Nations, which failed to prevent the encroachments of the Nazi regime in Germany, leading to the World War II.

World War II brought to the military history of Czechoslovakia strong ideological and political orientation. Marked by a long-standing oppression of nations, especially Slovaks began to resist harsh Czechoslovakism leading to the unbridled nationalism. Under the influence of war events the independent Slovak State has been created, with its political leaders leaning strongly towards the Nazi Germany. The change of political course has been brought about by the popular resistance movements and Slovak National Uprising, thanks to which Slovakia emerged among the victorious powers after the end of war. The World War II and its aftermath newly revived “big themes” of international relations – the question of sovereignty of states and the question of division of spheres of influence in the global environment. Efforts to create the United Nations reflected the real situation in the international environment, characterised by efforts to preserve world peace after overcoming two world wars. The United Nations was established as “an international organisation to protect the peace, to guarantee social progress and human rights, as well as to increase welfare of the states.” (Bělina, 1995, p. 237) In this regard, the emergence of the United Nations denotes the beginning of era of delegating portions of state sovereignty on transnational actors – on a higher authority, which should ensure the protection of national security. This process continued with the emergence of two regional security organisations. Already at Potsdam Conference initial discrepancies between the United States and the USSR started to show off, eventually ending up in the bipolar division of the world with two regional security organisations - NATO (US block) and the Warsaw Pact (Soviet bloc). Czechoslovakia came under the influence of the Soviet bloc for a long time, and this affected her not only in its ideological, but also economic and security aspects.

3 The Period after World War II

After World War II Czechoslovakia has been twice included in the agenda of the UN (Security Council). First time it was in 1948, after Communist takeover in February, which was presented in the West as a coup d'état. In fact, it consisted of the resignations of twelve non-communist ministers due to personal changes in the security forces. Then President **E. Beneš** accepted the resignations and entrusted the Prime Minister **K. Gottwald** (CPC) to form a new

government. This meant the victory of the Communist Party in all aspects of horizontal and vertical power-sharing. (Michálek, 1997, p 28). Except the Western press, which considered these events to be result of USSR's meddling in internal development of Czechoslovakia, several personalities refused to accept the new status. Diplomat **Ján Papánek**, Czechoslovak ambassador to the UN handed a protest note to the Secretary General **Trygve Lieh** regarding a breach of internal security of the state by annulling the democratic elections of 1946. Communist Party was promised assistance from the USSR, including the use of armed force if necessary, to preserve the system established by February 1948. After several meetings at the United Nations **Ján Papánek** summed up the situation as follows: seizure of power in Czechoslovakia by the Communist Party with the help of the Soviet Union constituted a threat to international peace and security. Therefore, he requested to submit the issue to the UN Security Council meeting. (Michálek, 1997, p. 29) Czechoslovakia question was discussed by the UNSC on March 17 at its 268th session, but it was discussed also in the coming days. The negotiations were very dramatic, the USSR has been represented its Minister of Foreign Affairs **Andrei A. Gromyko**, who defended the position of the Soviet Union by stating that the USSR only respected the will of the Czechoslovak people. Furthermore, he asserted that in the event of the vote on this issue in the UN Security Council, he would vote against the resolution condemning the events in Czechoslovakia because it would represent an interference with the sovereignty of the Czechoslovak state. (Michálek, 1997, p. 35) When voting on this issue the Soviet Union used its veto power. The inquiry into the events in Czechoslovakia which took place in 1948 was attempted once again in 1955, when the Secretary-General **Dag Hammarskjold** recommended to the UN Security Council members to exclude the Czechoslovak question from the agenda.

The second time the Czechoslovak question has been raised in the UN Security Council on August 23, 1968, after the intervention of Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia. (Hájek, 1970) The Soviet Union, France, Great Britain as well as the United States voted against the recognition of intervention as an act of aggression. Particularly from the perspective of the United State this intervention has been considered as an exclusively Soviet issue. In this period the United States dealt with its own foreign policy priority, i.e. negotiations on the limitation and reduction of strategic arms (SALT), which was not feasible without the positive attitude of the USSR. The question of

Czechoslovakia was withdrawn from UNSC session, which de facto legalised intervention of the USSR and the four countries of the Warsaw Pact in terms of compliance with international law. (Pástor, 2004, p. 23)

There were, however, more reasons for the withdrawal of the intervention of the UN Security Council meeting, not only SALT negotiations. This was mainly European détente period, which was between 1960-1970 considered to be an essential pillar of both European and Euro-Atlantic security strategy. There were also events and internal political crisis in the context of student riots in several countries of Western Europe. The most important reason, however, were preparations for future Helsinki Conference and the reorientation of U.S. foreign policy "from confrontation to negotiation". (Davies, 2000, p. 137) Strategic culture Czechoslovakia has been affected in two ways by these attitudes of UN Security Council and the international community generally. They confirmed the wisdom of politicians and the leadership of the armed forces of the state to protect primarily the internal security and not to intervene at times of social unrest. In 1968, neutrality and passivity of the army was purposeful and pragmatic, in order to avoid the possibility of bloodshed and breakout of civil war. On the other hand, it confirmed the historical experience that the problems of small states in the international environment are addressed only if it is in the interests of the great powers. Small state has almost limitless possibilities to become part of mainstream security currents and thus also its strategic culture has to be seen as such, i.e. focused more on soft security and cultivating tools that prefer this type of security.

The inception of modern Slovak history has been brought about only with the dissolution of the bipolar division of the world. An important role has been played by economic integration and transformation. All these factors have gradually eroded the existing bipolar structures and blurred the lines between block antagonisms. (Horemuž, 2009) Solving problems in the security environment though power mechanisms has become intolerable both in the Euro-Atlantic and the post-Soviet space. However, new security challenges have appeared, and a newly formed state – the Czechoslovak Federative Republic – had to address them.

Paradoxically, change of the strategic culture of Czechoslovakia in this direction occurred only after the split in 1993, when two independent states have been established – the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic. The division took place without disrupting the internal security of the old state and also without endangering the security of the newly formed states, which in broader

Central Europe in the period of 1990s represents one of the rare cases. It also shows the orientation of the former Czechoslovakia on soft security.

Conclusion

The strategies of opposition forces employed against the Soviet strategy of strengthening of communism in the satellite states varied. Its forms were declarative (charters, declarations, participation in international fora, such as the CSCE), ideational (the action of literary and artistic groups, art unions), political (the formation of political movements on the platform of dissent), civic (civic initiatives such as twin cities), professional (loosening of strict rules for international cooperation between the Eastern and Western bloc in industry, agriculture, construction, etc.). In Hungary mainly civic and professional forms were applied, which ultimately led to the strengthening of relations with Austria, Yugoslavia and to providing help to the citizens of GDR in the years before the fall of Berlin Wall. In Poland ideational, political (Solidarity) and civic forms (religious movements) were used, and, last but not least, in Czechoslovakia professional (contacts with foreign companies), ideational and declaratory (Charter 77) forms were most commonly applied.

The period of 1990s was for Slovakia characterised by seeking its own identity in the new international environment shaping after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. We now know that Slovakia has become member of NATO and European Union in 2004. Internal political reasons, in particular the lack of fulfilment of democratic criteria, are generally considered to be the most important causes for Slovakia's belated accession. (Asmus, 2002) Today, we know that the road to democracy is not easy, that democracy and liberal system are threatened by crises as well as other systems. That is why it is necessary to deepen and enhance the strategic culture of the state to become a pillar of state power, serving at the same time to peaceful development and national defence.

Therefore, we will try to formulate what aspects of the strategic culture of Slovak Republic, particularly from the historical perspective, may also serve to enhance its current developments. In particular, we refer to these traditions:

- respect for authorities that show humanistic and patriotic thinking;
- ability to select leaders not on the basis of their political status and populist rhetoric, but based on their responsibilities and

- respect for morals in politics (L. Štúr, A. Dubček and others) – leaders who did not strive to maximize their power but to maximize moral standards (although political developments in the Slovakia during the last two decades point to the opposite effect);
- ability to survive while preserving the national culture, language, religious belief, and expand their aspirations in spite of forced assimilation and acculturation lasting several centuries;
 - ability to perceive their own security environment as an integral part of national and civic identity, without necessity to threaten it by dominating the lower structures (ethnic, cultural and religious minorities within the state), although the strategic culture of Slovakia still bears residual traits and consequences of the Versailles system (relationship of Hungarians and Slovaks). Today, however, these tensions are particularly of cultural and psychological nature and in any case do not a security threat. Strategic culture of the states can help to achieve a reconciliation between them;
 - tradition not to perceive the power as the basis for the functioning of the relations between states.

The strategic culture of Slovak republic, therefore, is at present directed towards normative political, army, civil, and hopefully also moral quality. This can be seen in the changing proportions of the national security and defence strategies of Slovakia, shifting from military to non-military security as the critical role of strategic culture of the future. Strategic culture, however, despite its enhanced normative aspect will always be first and foremost a system of meanings and symbols, as well as system of resources, which to a large extent determine compiling of foreign policy doctrines and security policy.

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