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DOI: 10.2478/cmc-2023-0016

REVIEW

ON SLOVENIAN INDEPENDENCE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MILITARY STRATEGY

In 2023, the publishing house Defensor, based in Ljubljana (Slovenia), published a scientific monograph by Dr Branimir Furlan, a retired Brigadier General of the Slovenian Armed Forces and an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of State and European Studies of the New University. The work is entitled **Vojaška strategija osamosvojitve Slovenije (Military Strategy of Slovenia's Independence)**, and the monograph was reviewed by Dr Andrej Anžič and Dr Tomaž Kladnik.

In the introduction, the author explains the basic purpose of the monograph, namely “(in a general sense) to contribute a military perspective to the explanation of some of the circumstances and actions that made the establishment of an independent Slovenia possible, and (in a specific sense) to try to explain the military strategy that, in the last phase of its implementation, made possible the circumstances in which national interests were protected and the ultimate goal – an independent Slovenia – was achieved” (p 14).

Key terms such as strategy, grand or national strategy, national security strategy, defence strategy and military strategy are further explained. The latter is divided into developmental and operational military strategy, stressing that the latter was evolutionary (i.e. it was adapted according to the current situation) and then, in the final phase, it took on “the characteristics of a war (defence) strategy” (p 28). Finally, the author emphasizes that the departure of the last soldier of the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA) also marked the end of the military strategy, as “the Slovenian armed forces had accomplished their mission and supported the achievement of the desired end state – an independent and sovereign Slovenia” (p 32).

A separate chapter is devoted to the explanation of national interests and objectives. It uses the example of Slovenia's independence to show in a concise yet transparent

way the relationship between strategic national factors and vital strategic national objectives, and how they led to the desired end state. The key strategic factors are then explained in detail, as well as the strategic military objectives. The latter, which were always subordinate to the national objectives, are further defined as: consolidating military capability and readiness, effective leadership and command, deterring enemy's military intervention, protecting the functioning of the authorities and the key functions of the state, and disabling the YPA.

This is followed by an explanation of the strategic concept as the core of military strategy, which requires: 1) the definition of a purpose; 2) the definition of strategic military objectives; 3) the assessment of military requirements and circumstances; 4) the assessment of available capabilities; and 5) the formulation of models of action that lead to the achievement of the underlying purpose. The author identifies the building blocks of the Slovenian strategic concept as: total defence, deterrence posture, indirect approach, humanity, denial, and controlled gradual use of force (p 88). He analyses in detail the strategic military objectives on the basis of pre- and inter-war events. In doing so, he also provides an overview of the forces and means used to implement the military strategy, as well as which functions were carried out by the various actors.

In the chapter on war as a strategic concept, the author points out that “the military strategic concept did not create the circumstances for the war to take place” (p 142); it was imposed by the YPA. On the dilemma of whether the Slovenian War of Independence was a "real" war, he makes the following point: “in the case of the war in Slovenia, we can speak of a kind of phenomenon of transformation of an armed conflict into a war and vice versa, which gives arguments to those who argue that it was a war, as well as to others who argue for an armed conflict” (p 148). He also touches on the justification of war itself, based on the following points: 1) a just war; 2) legitimate decision; 3) a just intention; 4) proportionate cost; 5) war as a last resort; and 6) reasonable expectation and risk (p 151).

At the time of independence, already, and even more so during the war itself, the urgency and necessity of information operations as a supporting element of military strategy became apparent. The author points out that at the time of the preparations, information operations were not defined as part of the military strategy, which is why the author himself refers to them as “civilian activities in support of the implementation of the military strategy” (p 159). They consisted of three elements: psychological action, misleading the public, and informing the public.

The author also analyses the transformation of strategic theory into strategic practice, highlighting the importance of the comprehensive approach of the Republican Coordination Group, which took on “the coordination of the activities of state bodies, especially the armed forces, the militia [police] and civil defence personnel”. This “took place not only at the republican level, but also at lower levels” (p 169). Since the Slovenian side was inferior in material terms, much of the attention given to the

implementation of military strategy was directed towards weakening the enemy's combat power in the non-material sphere: "All activities indirectly weakened combat morale and led to the disintegration of units. It means that the activities of disabling the enemy established the circumstances on their greatest vulnerability – morale as a point of focus" (p 175).

Furlan goes on to point out that "military strategy is never entirely the product of the individual"; many people are involved. Nevertheless, he points out those who, by virtue of their office or position, had the greatest influence on the formulation and implementation of the military strategy: the Chief of National Defence, Tone Krkovič; the Chief of the Republican Territorial Defence Staff, Major Janez Slapar; the Secretary of Defence, Janez Janša; and their closest associates.

In the conclusion, the author writes: "In this century, Slovenia does not yet have a valid military strategy defining the role of the Slovenian Armed Forces in protecting or consolidating strategic national interests. It would be easy to conclude that the strategy has not been written and that it is a strategic idea that guides the development and operation of the Slovenian Armed Forces. However, the deviations in the direction of its development, which occur with almost every change of power, the obstacles in the way of its modernisation, and its poor readiness, which has been reported annually to the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Forces and the public for ten years, cannot convince us that there is a consistent strategic concept for the development and use of the SAF" (p 195).

This statement may be a reason for all those responsible for the defence system to read the monograph and take note of the key findings. Based on the analysis of documents, post-war works as well as contemporary military-strategic documents, the author has managed to produce a concise, lucid and interesting work analysing Slovenian independence and the War of Independence from the perspective of military strategy. Consequently, the book is recommended to all students, researchers and practitioners of (military) strategy, as well as historians studying Slovenian independence.