A Quarter Century in the Hungarian Defense Forces: A military in transition (1989–2014)



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The period 1989-2014 was a time of major transformation and transition for the Hungarian Defense Forces (HDF). The following article provides the insider view of a participant-eyewitness of the transformation and turmoil in the HDF during the change in political regimes from communist totalitarianism to participative democracy.

Introduction

The signs of change in Hungary, a nation of some significance in Central-Eastern Europe and at that time part of the Soviet dominated eastern bloc, were already apparent prior to 1989-1990, just prior to the earthquake-like political and economic collapse of the entire area then under the influence of Moscow. Within that context, and although of limited overall political importance, it was still a massive shock to the Hungarian populace in 1985, when in addition to the usual international-socialist icons (portraits of Lenin, Marx, Engels, etc.), the historic flags of the thousand-year old Hungary were also paraded under distinctly ceremonial circumstances, during the communist regime's last grand military parade.

At the same time, the Hungarian military underwent an important reorganization in the mid-1980s that transformed the Soviet-style (Front-Army-Division-Regiment) military structure into the Corps-system , a step that greatly reduced the command and control overhead. The restructuring also resulted in savings in manpower and the removal of significant amounts of equipment into so-called „long-term storage". All of this reflected the deteriorating economic situation of the nation. However, at the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century, at the time of the cataclysmic change in political regimes, the Hungarian military structure still included some 150 thousand active-duty peacetime, and approximately twice that many wartime reserve soldiers and airmen.

As an eyewitness I can state that the fundamental organizational changes did not have a dramatic impact upon the active-duty officer and the non-commissioned officer corps that formed the backbone of the military. Living through interesting times with the rest of the populace, military members had until 23 October 1989, the day the democratic Hungarian Republic was proclaimed, to decide whether to swear a new oath of loyalty to defend the now democratic nation. The alternative of course was to

depart from the armed forces. It is a fact that only a negligibly small group opted to refuse to take the new oath. This unequivocally shows that the Hungarian generals, officers and non-commissioned officers of the 1990s, who had grown up after the 1956 anti-soviet revolution, who had lived through the post-revolution period of strict rigor, and who in certain respects were members of the so-called „beat generation", and who had matured during the gradually easing politically less stringent decades of „goulash communism", remained willing to satisfy the defense requirements of the newly formed democratic system.

Naturally, many individuals did leave the military, including first and foremost the highest ranking, and increasingly elderly military leadership. Supported by the emerging democratic political system, the retirement of these individuals provided a dynamic opportunity for the follow-on generations to step forward. Thus, the then just fifty-year old General Kálmán Lőrincz, appointed to the top military leadership position, was optimistically able to declare that "The HDF is on the March!" into a new future. The trouble however is that the march continues to this day. It is this long and at times equivocal process of change that forms the basis of the analysis enumerated in the following paragraphs.

Fundamental post-regime changes

After the chaotic fall of the communist political system the peace of Europe and indeed of the entire world was no longer threatened by the decades-long confrontation of the „Cold War". This historic and most importantly bloodless achievement is first and foremost to the merit of the USA-led western alliance. However, it must not be forgotten that the leadership of the eastern bloc, with Mihail Gorbachov at its head, was willingly or unwillingly, also a partner in making the decision that the eastern-bloc political-economic system, and with it the military Warsaw Pact, could no longer be sustained.

With this tremendous political change it became clear that Hungary no longer needed the communist-era mass army. The same was true with regard to the soviet occupation troops that had been „temporarily" stationed in Hungary since the end of WWII. Most of us stayed in the HDF after the regime change because, from the moment the new political system was proclaimed, we believed in the defensive nature of the national armed forces. Even under the previous political regime the defense of our nation was the focus of the innermost motivation of the military. Once the occupying Russian forces were gone, and as repeatedly proclaimed since then, the HDF organizational goal became the development of a numerically „smaller, but more modern and effective" armed forces.

Of course, means to accomplish this goal became the key operative issue, and unfortunately remains so to this day. A great many faulty steps were taken throughout the last quarter-century, while continuous, dynamic changes, including significant changes to warfighting, take place within a progressively more globalized world. Such

changes are often very hard to predict and exert unforeseen pressures not only upon the nation of Hungary but on the security of the entire region.

Beginning in the 1960s, the rapidly expanding spread and influence of the electronic media made the world outside the Iron Curtain ever more accessible to Hungarians. It became increasingly harder for the communist regime to tell people that due to unfortunate historical reasons the problems of the bipolar world could only be solved through the application of force. Although communist ideology was present throughout the armed forces, when faced with myriad fully apparent facts, it became increasingly harder for the political commissars operating within the forces to explain away and to overcome the nearly universal systemic contradictions.

The disappearance of the political handlers from the armed forces within the first few moments following the change in regimes, with the Hungarian initiative to dissolve the soviet-based Warsaw Pact, and with the departure of the Soviet occupation troops from the territory of Hungary, national defense finally became a truly national issue. Thus, it was not an accident that the first Hungarian military doctrine developed after the change in regimes was referred to by the government, as „Round About Defense". This, afterwards often and to my mind erroneously denigrated doctrinal principle, reflected the actual national security situation in which newly democratic Hungary found itself.

Disappearance of the „enemy"; the status of the neighborhood

From a threat standpoint there was clearly no question of attack from Austria, our neighbor to the West. Austria had been a neutral country since 1955. (*Relying on false premises, we had drawn the avenues of attack toward the West through Austria on the Warsaw Pact maps*). With the dissolution of Czechoslovakia into two nations the situation toward the north had also changed. The new nation of Slovakia, a nation half the size of Hungary, did not pose a realistic military threat. Now in existence for over twenty years, it has never aspired to do so.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union our third neighbor to the north-east was also a newly independent nation: the Ukraine. Hungary welcomed this turn of events, and was the first to officially recognize the nation that is in both size and population many times larger. From a military standpoint the new, independent nation is a „buffer" between Hungary and the still globally important Russia. Thus, from the first moment, Hungary's relations with Ukraine were normalized.

At the same time, Hungary has a complicated relationship with neighboring Romania to the southeast. Due to new international agreements, relations with Romania remain on generally a settled basis. (Hungarian membership and participation in NATO and European Union demands, first and foremost, that relations with neighbors be managed in a mutually cordial atmosphere, that new fundamental agreements strengthen the relationship). However, the status and treatment afforded to the approximately 1.24 million member Hungarian minority in Romania has repeatedly created conflicts between the two countries. While these have been manageable to

date, there appears little possibility of a fundamental breakthrough with regard to this issue.

Finally, after the Balkan wars resulting in the breakup of Yugoslavia, Hungary's relations with neighbors to the south also remain variable. Following a historic early recognition as an independent nation by the Antall government (*first democratically elected Hungarian government after the fall of communism*), and the willingness to assist a nation struggling for total independence from Yugoslavia, created a new basis for the close to a thousand year old relationship between Croatia and Hungary. Slovenia also appeared as a new, independent neighbor to the south-west. As the most developed of all former Yugoslav member states, Hungarian relations with Slovenia remain settled and cordial. It also helps that along with Austria, Slovenia has the smallest Hungarian minority and thus issues relating to ethnicity remain negligible.

Among Hungary's neighbors this leaves Serbia to the south. Having lost nearly all of its former ties to other members of the Yugoslav confederation, the nation is striving for integration into the European community. There is a long road ahead, but we can only hope that Serbia can overcome its traditionally strong nationalism as it works for European integration. Despite some positive signs, nationalism continues to create conflict with regard to the treatment of the Hungarian minority in the country.

Force restructuring and reductions

Earlier I mentioned the appearance of new doctrine resulting from the revised political situation. Let me now turn to an examination of how the HDF was transformed due to a variety of political decisions. Since it was clear that there was no serious military threat to Hungary, after the first democratic elections in 1990, the reduction in force of the armed forces began almost immediately. There were a variety of reasons for this. First and foremost of course was the disappearance of the decades-long „western enemy" of the communist era, which had required the maintenance of large military forces. At the same time, it was an unwritten expectation that the region formerly under soviet domination eliminate its strategic offensive capability not only toward the West, but toward each other as well. Finally, it was unreasonable, especially when faced with the quality of western arsenals, to continue to maintain the large amounts of soviet-era „iron", which posed such a continuous heavy economic burden for the nation.

Nothing demonstrated the superiority of western arms than the first Gulf War in 1991, and the western lead following conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. With minimal western losses, immense enemy forces were eliminated seemingly within days. Thus, the radical reduction of the HDF began a process that lasted until the 2010 election of the conservative government.

Reductions in Hungarian Military Forces
(Hungarian Defense Forces 1990–2012)*

From the change in regimes to accession into NATO. Annual end-strength:

1990: 117,500
1991: 109,450
1992: 104,350
1993: 103,000
1994: 100,000
1995: 81,000
1996: 68,000
1997: 61,400
1998: 61,250
1999: 61,150

Since membership in NATO. Annual end-strength:

2000: 48,750
2001: 48,750
2002: 45,000
2003: 43,500
2004: 37,200
2005: 34,400
2006: 29,000
2007: 26,150
2008: 28,900
2009: 29,050
2010: 29,800
2011: 29,700
2012: 29,500

* These numbers are taken from Statistical Yearsbooks of Hungary (1990-2012). Annual personnel ceilings approved by Parliament. During the last ten years the actual number on-hand was always slightly lower in the Armed Forces.

Figure 1. Reductions in Force Structure. Note the significant reduction following accession into NATO.

Entire branches of the HDF disappeared, or became virtually irrelevant. The consecutive, ideologically variable governments decreed a series of military reforms, all of which resulted in a reduction of previous cold-war peacetime forces to the 30,000 of today.

As a result of the various governmental concepts, garrisons were disestablished or dislocated, so that frequently masses of families were displaced. I know of units which, within a short period of time, virtually circumnavigated the country. Traditional and historic garrisons (Szombathely, Zalaegerszeg, Eger, Miskolc, Pécs) were disestablished, often after the previous government had spent vast sums in modernizing and renovating these facilities. The associated costs of these perambulations can only be calculated in the hundreds of millions, all of which were taken from the already limited defense budget.

A significant result was a drastic reduction in active duty personnel. Heretofore unfamiliar social circumstances of limited, or totally lacking military housing, employment for spouses, schooling for children, etc., had a dire effect. Even without political inducement, a large segment of the long-serving and highly professional active duty complement voluntarily left the armed forces. It is possible that this was one of the unstated objectives of the political force reduction initiatives especially in the period after the change in regimes. It was also an element of force reduction, that despite the lack of any international pressure to do so, Hungary progressively reduced its armaments below the levels set by international agreement (CFE).

Changes to HDF Military Technology
(1990–2012)

Withdrawn from Service: T-55 tanks; BM-21 rockets; tactical and operational ground-to-ground rocket systems; "Gvozgyika" self-propelled artillery; BMP-1-2; PSZH; FUG armored army vehicles; MiG-21, MiG-23, and Su-22 military aircraft; AMD-65 (Kaloshnikov) automatic weapons.
(*All of the above Soviet military technology serving as basic armament of the Hungarian Armed Forces until 1990*)

Upgraded/Modernized: KUB anti-aircraft rocket system; P-18M, SZT-68U radars; Fagott, Concurs anti-tank weapons; BTR armored army vehicles; Mi-17 military helicopters, Mi-24 attack helicopters rovided by Germany from former East German stocks; AN-26 transport aircraft.
(*All of the above Soviet-type military technology remaining in service with the HDF*)

ModernizationProcurements:
1993: MiG-29 (Paid by Russian debt to Hungary)
1996-1997: BTR-80 armored vehicles; "Mistral" anti-aircraft rocket system (France)
2001-2003: Gripen JAG-29 interceptor aircraft from Sweded (licensed)
2003: Transportation vehicles (German military aid)
2004: NSIP radars
2007: Skylark I.; UAV telemax miner robots; MRAP, HUMWEE uparmored army vehicles (for HDF participation in NATO coalition oprations, paid for by HDF budget and US aid)

Figure 2. Reduction in the armament of the Hungarian military. *Source: Honvédségi Szemle (Defense Review, Hungary), 2012/6, page 9*.

Accession into NATO

Despite the continuous reductions in force, the consecutively appointed and politically variable defense leadership in Hungary remained relatively homogeneous. Through 1998, when the third democratic government after the change of regimes was elected, every government had the goal of entering the world's most successful political-military alliance, NATO. Serving at SACLANT in Norfolk, Virginia, I too was part of the historic event when Hungary joined NATO in March 1999.

The road to membership had been a long one. Interestingly, it was Gyula Horn, formerly a socialist politician under the old regime, later Hungarian prime minister (1994-1998), who first proposed the idea of joining the Euro-Atlantic alliance. The actual steps toward this goal were taken by the first democratically elected government after the regime change. As the first representative of a former Warsaw Pact nation, Foreign Minister Géza Jeszenszky paid an official visit to NATO Headquarters in Brussels to begin the process of joining the alliance.

Consequently, the pace of events accelerated. The desire and intent to join the West was demonstrated by Hungarian military participation in various NATO-supported missions. Colonel (Dr.) László Svéd, a brilliant young medical officer, led the first, until then unprecedented participation in a foreign mission with a more than thirty-man medical group dispatched to successfully support coalition forces in the first Gulf War.

The next major step, within the NATO sponsored Partnership for Peace (PfP) program created to support those nations aspiring to membership, took place during the Balkan wars, when Hungary dispatched an Engineer battalion to support alliance operations. For several years the Hungarian contingent performed prodigious work, not least its participation in the rebuilding of the historic Mostar Bridge in Bosnia. As is well known, this world heritage site had been destroyed during the bitter fighting between the various factions of the Balkan conflict.

At the same time, the diplomatic and military preparations for membership continued. A national mission was established at the NATO headquarters in Brussels, and at SHAPE in Mons. Our future alliance partners provided us with assistance. A large number of officers were afforded the opportunity to study English, and the most deserving were given a chance to attend allied schools to the highest levels. At the same time, under the leadership of young and dynamic General Ferenc Végh, who had just finished the US Command and General Staff Academy, the HDF formed a NATO Working Group to obtain and absorb all of the necessary information required for alliance membership. The working group reorganized the General Staff according to the western model, and the new organizational structure was put into effect after General Végh was appointed Chief of Staff.

The last decade of the twentieth century, and especially the last five years resulted in a tremendous amount of work. This was perhaps the most effective, the most productive period in preparing for alliance membership. As with other NATO aspirant nations, in 1992 the now after twenty years no longer relevant Hungarian Atlantic

Council was formed, and became a magnet for the political and societal elite regardless of political affiliation. The apex of effort took place in November 1997, when, following the invitation to join issued to Hungary at the NATO summit in Madrid, 85% of the nation voted to join the alliance.

Hungarian-American relations; American support

It is necessary to mention the support provided by our western partners, and especially the US during the period leading up to Hungarian accession into NATO. The progressive, freedom loving Hungarian nation has been in close contact with the US from the first. We need only think of hussar Colonel Mihály Kováts, a founding father of the American cavalry, who gave his live for American freedom at Charleston during the Revolutionary War. Those who leaf through the memorial books at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC will find quite a number of popular Hungarian names, such as „Szabo", „Kovats" and others, of Hungarian émigrés who have died for American freedom.

At the same time, the US has always been positive toward Hungarians desiring freedom. After the failure of the Hungarian fight for freedom from Austrian domination in 1848-1849, the American public idolized Lajos Kossuth, leader of the Hungarians during his triumphant tour of America in 1851-1852. In 1990, the US was the first, who provided both intellectual and material aid to Hungary in the transition from communism. It was not a coincidence, that America sent Army MG Roberth Ivany, a Hungarian émigré with a highly successful career in the U.S. armed forces as a liaison to Hungary. I had the good fortune to meet MG Ivany when he was the commander of the Washington Military District.

Countless other, high ranking soldiers of Hungarian extraction also provided selfless service in the reorganization of the HDF. Several names can be mentioned without in any way denigrating the contribution of others: There was COL Arpad Szurgyi, US Army who, in company with another Hungarian-American, Col Frank Farkas supported Hungary as part of the Military Liaison Team, and who as military attaché, later supported to start my service at SACLANT. Then there was Col Lou Boros, USMC, who, as part of the MLT, and later as a Cubic (military contractor) advisory team member and later team leader, ably supported the military transformation of the HDF. I am confident that after years of "to and fro-ing", the experiences of that transformation have been embedded in the Hungarian military ideology.

In addition to the intellectual support, it is also very important to remember the continuing material support amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars worth of support provided to Hungary by the US. That is why it was a surprise that instead of choosing the US F-16 fighter planes, the government decided upon the Swedish Gripen as the modern new fighter for of the HDF. It is my personal view that it was a transparent obligation on our part to decide in favor of the F-16. The detailed reasons for the government decision and the related mistakes that were committed, and it is

possible that mistakes were made on both sides, remains to be uncovered by future historical researchers.

Hungary as a member of NATO

It is a fact, that with acceptance of Hungary into the alliance on 12 March 1999, the contribution of the previous years by the Hungarian nation diminished with regard to NATO. We were safe; we had reached a safe haven. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán himself declared to all and sundry, that should events involve an armed conflict, "the armed forces of NATO (sic) will come defend us". With that security our previous activity decreased into a degree of idleness.

Indeed, Article V of the Washington Treaty of the NATO Alliance, celebrating its 50th anniversary in 1999, does state that than any member threatened by, or suffering a military attack would be assisted by all other members, but there is nothing in the treaty that says that such support is unconditional. Indeed, based on historical examples, members of the alliance closely examine when, and how, and to what degree they will interject themselves, especially in a conflict between two neighboring, and possibly NATO member nations. The most suitable example of this is the decades long and continuing set of disagreements between Greece and Turkey regarding the separation of Cyprus. Even there it is the UN, rather than NATO that provides oversight to prevent an escalation of the conflict.

The case of Macedonia provides a grotesque example. The country is not part of the NATO alliance because to this date it officially carries the name of the „Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (FYROM), because Greece, based on fundamentally faulty historical reasoning, refuses to allow the name „Macedonia" to this independent political entity.

What would happen if a similar event, similarly resulting from so-called historical reasons should occur in our region? Implementation of Article V of the Washington (NATO) Treaty is not automatic. Based on the situation, and prior to the employment of forces, a NATO force generation conference would take place to determine which of the alliance members, and to what degree, was willing to participate in a military intervention.

Clearly an element of hesitation by our alliance partners to support Hungary would involve evaluation of how well our nation has contributed to the alliance. I was present at various high-level international discussions, wherein high ranking members of NATO clearly spelled out that „NATO is an expensive club". They made it clear that it is possible to join, but membership has obligations. It is true that Hungary provides upwards of 1000 soldiers for various international missions, which represents a significant investment when compared to the entire armed forces. It can also be said, tongue in cheek, that a further reduction in forces might even increase the percentage of overall contribution to NATO. However, for a variety of reasons, the modernization of the HDF has faltered.

This is justified by a variety of means, including the ongoing world economic slowdown, and the various burdens placed upon Hungary by the events of the 20th century, but this can only marginally be of interest to our western partners. It is consensus within the members of NATO, that each member should devote 2% of the GDP to defense. Clearly Hungary also voted for and accepted this concept. However, subsequent actions made it clear that this was meant to be binding for other nations, and year by year Hungary has progressively reduced funds for defense, so that today the HDF has fought its way down to some 0.8% of GDP.

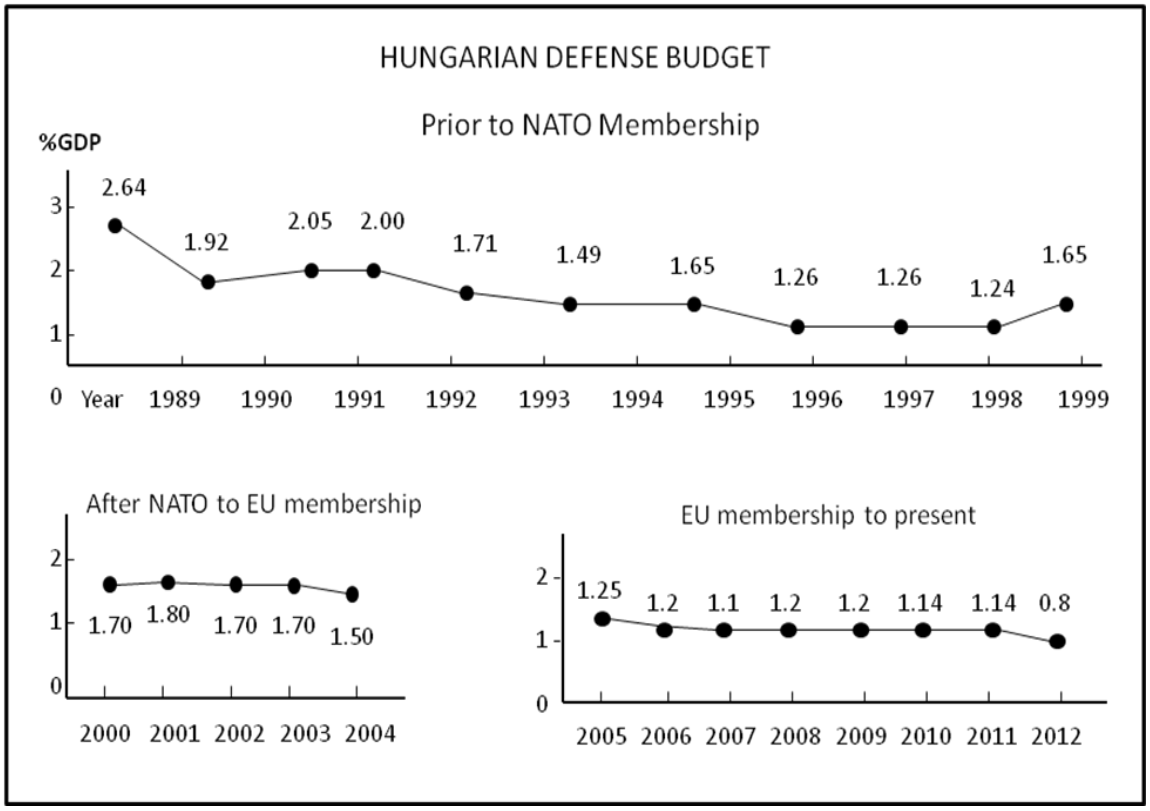

Figure 3. Evolution of the Hungarian defense budget (1999-2012) *Source: Honvédségi Szemle (Defense Review, Hungary), 2012/6, page 8*.

Of course if we consider the facts, even 2% of GDP is basically insufficient to sustain well- equipped armed forces, and that the goal does not refer to the maintenance of armed forces relying generally on obsolete soviet-era weaponry and capability. Those of us in the HDF could sense that the importance of the armed forces diminished due to the „security euphoria" emanating from acceptance into NATO. It is ironic that the cataclysmic dictate ending WWI in 1920, which disassembled historic Hungary while awarding two-thirds of its territory to its neighbors decreed, that the Hungarian armed forces could not exceed 30,000 in number. Today, the HDF is smaller in size. There are plans, sometime after 2016 to improve this situation, but that is a long way off.

It has to be said, and as the situation reflects, our economically more developed friends expected Hungary to participate as full partners in the accomplishment of

common goals. That partnership also involved an expectation that we would be buying capability from our partners. However this also is poses difficulties. With thanks for the assistance provided prior to, and since accession into NATO by our partners, the truth is that materially we are rapidly approaching the state wherein we will be unable fulfill expected tasks.

Let us look for example at the case of joint exercises. At the time of the confrontation between east and west it was easier for NATO to determine its planning parameters. Individual nations had well-developed plans for deploying their armed forces, to include the necessary logistics support. Thus, it posed no problem that the various partners, based on their own economic interests, developed their own military capabilities. Even today, with the inclusion of new eastern-European and Balkan members, the alliance still relies on the individual national defense budgets to fund its collective capabilities. It is clear that this method is difficult to sustain. The varying economic capabilities of the various members represent a significant deviation in the ability to meet collective expectations.

It has been bruited before. What would happen if selected collective missions were funded by combining individual national contributions, based on the economic capabilities of each member? I accept the fact that this requires a greater level of commitment from the more developed nations, who, as experience have shown, are also more likely to initiate allied action. These nations would still have to commit fewer soldiers than would be necessary if they had to go it alone.

Faulty Human Resources Strategy

The last nearly quarter of a century also included several delayed possibilities. Here I am not referring only to those excellent soldiers who left the military before time due to the repeated dislocation of the various units. I have mentioned this before. However, it was a big mistake to permit those to leave who were educated, trained and prepared, at sometimes considerable cost to the host countries, at international schools. It appears, with obvious exceptions, that while our soldiers studied in foreign schools, or participated in foreign missions out of the country, those remaining behind ensconced in their command and ministerial offices, gained preferment with their enthusiastic acceptance of the various structural reorganizations.

The force reductions reached their zenith at the end of 2004, when the government of the left bending to aggressive liberal pressure sent home the last conscripted soldier. I can state that the Medgyessy-Gyurcsány, Bajnai government that ruled during eight of ten years of the first decade of the 21st century represented a period of stagnation from the standpoint of national defense.

The transition to an all-volunteer armed forces was not, in and of itself, a bad thing, had it not been executed in „quick time”, and had taken into account the development of the necessary human reserves. The Chief of the General Staff of that era, in concert with the liberal political leadership, eagerly awaited the approaching date for introduction of the all-volunteer force. Several months before, our neighbor Austria, a

more developed and geographically more secure nation, had rejected the elimination of conscription by national plebiscite. This decision undoubtedly had an element of patriotism among the Austrians.

However, the general peace which had existed for 70 years, and the nearly fifteen years of shelter provided by NATO membership („NATO will defend us") dampened the healthy desire amongst Hungarians for national security. Austria, and the even more secure and developed Switzerland, which since its founding has never had to go to war, both continue, even if not as intensively as they did during the cold war, to be concerned with their own security and with the patriotic education of their populations.

How did we get to this point? During the time of the Kádár regime (post 1956-mid 1980s), there existed a system of reserves assigning officers and men within a general process of mobilization. Each unit of the armed forces had its complement of reserves and related equipment to enable quick expansion to wartime strength. During times of peace, there were selected, non-essential units that during peacetime had only one active duty officer and one supply sergeant assigned, and all of the equipment was in storage. The reserve soldiers, in the interest of quick reaction times, were permitted to take their uniforms home. As a result, half the population went hunting, fishing, and did its chores in camouflaged clothing. The system remained in place until the nation began to experience increasing economic difficulties. After the change in regimes, the entire system of reserves was over time allowed to disintegrate.

With the elimination of conscription in 2004, the rosters of the previous reserve system were destroyed. The reasoning, based on some liberal thinking, was to eliminate "unnecessary gathering of personal data". In one stroke, the system of recently trained but discharged soldiers, who were capable of manning the ranks in case of need, was erased. In 2010, with the election of a conservative government, we found ourselves in a situation, wherein during a period of spring floods, the following discussion took place between Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and the Minister of Defense:

> PM: Mr. Minister, should the situation worsen, how many reserves can we commit?
> MoD: A total of 17, Prime Minister!
> PM: Surely you mean 17,000?
> MoD: No Prime Minister, a total of 17."

New Volunteer Reserve Training Methodology – Hungarian style

As indicated above it was understandable, that the issue of reserve forces became a key part of the Government Program for 2010. Finding means to solve the problem however, was another question. By early 2011, the issue of creating „Defensive Reserves" became an urgent issue within the government.

Even the chosen name is curious. A reserve soldier, taking the oath to defend the nation is inherently defensive. Why the extra emphasis? The reason for this became

obvious, when this 2,000 man force, capable of instantly reacting to any emergency, was organized from those assigned guard duty at the various installations of the armed forces. The government eliminated the civilian organizations that had been formed of former soldiers during the previous left-wing governments to guard assorted military bases. They then put these people back into military uniform, with increased tasks but nearly the same pay, and the government was quickly able to demonstrate to the media the establishment of the defensive reserve. A great political success!

Hungary also established the „Operational Reserve". This organization was however not destined to provide installation guard services. All reserve forces, including those of the US, have issues in balancing and satisfying the military-civilian occupational needs of the individual reserve soldier. The Hungarian defense leadership solved this problem at a single stroke, by reintegrating some of those who were forced out of military service earlier.

These generally well trained, well prepared officers and NCOs had their careers truncated, and had been sent/forced into premature retirement with an adequate pension. The government decided to withhold one-sixth of this pension from each individual, but then generously offered to restore these sums if the individual volunteered for operational reserve military duty. Naturally there were a lot of takers, most of whom also had to accept a much lower rank than that they had previously held.

> *Based on information provided, 67% of those returning were officers, of whom 31% had been Colonels, Lieutenant Colonels. Of these, 7% now wear the rank of Lieutenant or below. Some 92% of these individuals are older than 51, and 91% qualified for a national pension by the time they returned to the colors.*

We cannot question the motives of the individuals who accepted these positions and thereby found a solution to serious personal economic problems by entering the ranks of the military reserve. The creation of reserves has a degree of propaganda value. Hungary remains far from being able to declare that it has a valid military reserve force that represents and extends throughout Hungarian society.

The upside down rank pyramid and the rehabilitation of retired persons

During the communist era it was common to assign individuals with relatively low ranks to high positions. In my case, as a 37-year old, I was assigned to a one-star general deputy Corps commander position as a lieutenant colonel. I was promoted to colonel at a considerably later date. However, with the change in regimes this situation fundamentally changed. Similar to the western model, it became common to promote prior to assignment to a higher organizational position. This in turn created another problem, in that with time, the rank pyramid was slowly turned on its head.

The number of generals grew like mushrooms. Within an active duty force that was one-half, to one-third of its former size due to the continuous force reductions, the number of active duty general officers remained the same as before. The number of

colonels also grew to unprecedented levels. Thus, based on the periodically differing political winds, there were also plenty of opportunities to send selected individuals into early retirement. Despite repeated attempts at reform, to this day there is no sustainable and predictable officer rank structure model in the HDF.

During the previous political era, when there were innumerable instances when the regime, on the basis of false political premises, deprived individuals of their ranks and forced them from the armed forces. Beginning with the first democratically elected governments, there was an attempt to do right by these individuals, and to rehabilitate them into the armed forces.

Thus it was one of the highlights of my life as a soldier, when, based on the application submitted by me, the Minister of Defense rehabilitated by uncle and godfather, and posthumously promoted him from Major to Colonel. It gave me great pleasure that his wife still lived to see that day. It was an element of justice that even former lieutenants instantly became retired generals as part of the rehabilitation program. The thinking was that they could have attained those ranks had they been allowed to stay in the armed forces during the era of repression.

The problem is of course, that this belated rehabilitative promotion process, which in the beginning was for historical reasons both acceptable and necessary, continues to this day. Thus, many of those who were dismissed due to the political convulsions of an earlier day, are, in the name of „belated justice" granted ranks and privileges that they would never had attained, that they would never have been trained for, had things progressed in the normal way.

NATO, the EU, and the Visegrád Four

I now turn to our other military relationships beyond but in concert with NATO, and specifically with the European Union (EU). In comparison with NATO, this relationship is generally indicative of how the EU operates internally. The Lord save us from an EU Only large military operation. This is true in my opinion even though the US not only supports, but justly expects that the EU take action with regard to European and EU security concerns. I don't think it likely, that the US, some quarter of a century after the dissolution of the Cold War front lines, remains as committed as before to our regional security.

Thus, in the interest of strengthening security, there is in our region a dynamic, sub-regional organization called the Visegrád Four (The Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary). Even within NATO the idea of a sub-regional organization is not unknown. Look at the close cooperation between the US and Canada, or the cooperation that takes place within the BENELUX countries with regard to common weaponry. These cooperative arranges do not reduce, but rather enhance the cooperation that takes place within the larger family of nations.

Indeed, the very idea of the Visegrád cooperation is not new. In the 14th century the concept of cooperation from the Adriatic to the Baltic was a topic of discussion. Today,

in the interest of improving overall security, the idea of mutual cooperation remains a regional issue. It is hoped, that sooner or later, new NATO and EU member Croatia will also join this regional group. That would recreate the 700 year old historic European security corridor in the region.

HDF participation in military missions throughout the last decade

In this analysis I earlier alluded to the period of enthusiasm that preceded Hungarian entry into NATO. That period saw Hungarian participation in coalition operations as a sign of suitability for membership. In the post-millennium period the HDF took part in a number of international coalition operations, generally with about 1000 individuals deployed at the same time. Arbitrarily I can point to HDF participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom during 2003-2004, and in the Afghanistan war during 2006-2013. In doing so I do not ignore the important work performed in the Balkans, the nearly 20-year old peacekeeping presence on Cyprus, or a variety of important tasks performed in the Sinai and Africa.

I concentrate on our participation in Iraq and Afghanistan partially for personal reasons. During 2003-2004 I served as G-4 and the Senior National Representative (SNR) within the MND CS (Polish) division. Additionally, after WWII, these two missions were the first wherein Hungarian soldiers participated and suffered losses in the new, so-called low intensity conflicts of the 21st century.

Participation in foreign coalition operations was extraordinarily interesting for members of the HDF, since despite the sometimes acute conflicts between the two major political blocks of the Cold War era, (Korea, Vietnam, or the Russian entry into Afghanistan), the soviet-leadership of the previous Warsaw Pact never called upon the Hungarian People's Army for active participation. I suppose there was never any confidence in the staying power of the various communist member nations. Additionally, no one wanted to disturb the tranquility of the public in the „most peaceful nations of the world" with returning coffins containing the bodies of those who were engaged in peaceful „socialist constructive" endeavors in these trouble spots.

The situation fundamentally changed at moment Hungary entered NATO. The occasion was planned for NATO's 50th anniversary. By that time I had been serving at SACLANT for nearly a year, and I was a witness to the fact that the ceremony was planned for 4 April 1999. However, the increasingly intense Balkan conflict between the Truncated-Yugoslavia of Milosevich and the separatist Kosovo intervened, and ultimately forced NATO intervention. Thus, the situation forced a postponement and the accession ceremony was finally held on 12 March 1999, just a day before my 50th birthday.

We had hardly recovered from the accession celebrations when NATO bombs began dropping only a few kilometers from our southern border. NATO required use of several of our military and air bases in support of the Kosovo operation. Hungary provided concrete material aid to the transshipment of NATO forces, but at this point there was only a limited request for the active operational participation of the HDF.

Perhaps our new partners believed that there was need for a short introductory period.

We did not have to wait long for employment however. There was a new Iraqi conflict, the second Gulf War. Our contribution consisted of a transportation battalion, with assorted staff officers assigned at various leadership echelons. If one can call any military mission counterintuitive, this was it. Like the apocryphal veterinary's horse, it suffered every variable remedy that our variable epoch could expect of our variable alliance.

A few months ago on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of our accession into the Operation Iraqi Freedom, I gave an interview to Hungarian media. I noted that after a year and a half of deployments, of the often highly commended former communist member states Hungary was the first to withdraw its forces from the coalition. Perhaps this is the reason why in 2006, Hungary received an unavoidable request to provide a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) for one of Afghanistan's provinces. The idea, now more than several decades old, of reconstruction in a war zone is in and of itself a good one, but only with the participation of nations that have the necessary material and financial resources. Hungary is not one of these nations.

Thus, although our soldiers have performed selfless service during the last nearly seven years throughout the province of Baghlan, with the limitations on the availability of resources, in both materiel and in trained civilian expertise, the work has barely exceeded CIMIC related endeavors. Can our principal western allies be fully satisfied with the assistance that we, along with the other „new democracies" provide as part of this armed conflict? The US, UK, France and others have taken part in a number of significant armed conflicts since the end of WWII. We on the other hand during the Warsaw Pact, as noted earlier, probably due to a lack of trust never were asked to participate in Soviet adventures outside of Europe. As a result, the average Hungarian citizen is unfamiliar with the concept of wartime casualties. How long will our major partners continue to tolerate that they must bear the major burden in mutually agreed upon coalition operations? And, that only they need to counter public opinion when casualties occur. I don't wish to give the impression that I am looking to incur casualties, but these are questions we as coalition partners need to consider.

Relations between the HDF and our Presidents

Having discussed the attitude of Hungary's democratically elected governments, the various ministers of defense, and the positive and negative activities of the various Chiefs of General Staff, we need to discuss the part played by the presidents of the republic in their roles as constitutional commanders in chief. Following the change in regimes, Hungary adopted the German model of governance, within which the Prime Minister conducts the day to day business of government. In such a system, the President has limited powers, including those that pertain to defense. Even the constitutional designation as „commander in chief", in contrast with the presidential system of the US for example, implies mainly a protocol role.

As Military Aid to the President for a short period of time, and at his request, I prepared an analysis of the president's rights and obligations as defined in the constitution and other laws and regulations. Even I was surprised after finishing the study to find how many both direct and indirect means the president has to influence matters. During the last quarter century, each of the five presidents of the republic exerted influence on defense in a different manner.

After the change in regimes the first president elected by the parliament, Árpád Göncz, served for two terms (1990-2000). As a result of the still developing, newly established democratic processes, he was perhaps the one who, especially in his first term of office, exercised his prerogatives, as he perceived them, the most often. In this his opponent was László Sólyom, the then president of the Constitutional Court, who later succeeded him as the third president of the republic. The Constitutional Court tried to limit the scope of the presidential sphere of influence through a whole series of legal opinions. Interestingly, and perhaps reflective of Mr. Sólyom's personal ambitions, later he was the most active in trying to expand presidential prerogatives.

Contrary to his successors, Árpád Göncz was a popular president with members of the military. He met with the military on frequent occasions and it was evident that the soldier who had served in WWII, and who had been an active member of the democratic opposition during the communist era, had a human dimension. His successor, President Ferenc Mádl was more of a legal scholar, rather than an active commander in chief of the armed forces. Of course it is possible, that the conservative politician sensed that the first Viktor Orbán-lead conservative government, which succeed elected him as president, expected him to limit his involvement in defense matters.

In the next election cycle, perhaps as a result of the ineptness of the then governing left wing socialist government, László Sólyom, the former leader of the Constitutional Court was elected head of state. His tenure as commander in chief was irrevocably stamped with his first post-election intervention. Responding to the needs of the „Greens" who had been instrumental in his appointment as president, he created the era's most significant scandal by openly opposing the carefully considered defense plan to emplace NATO surveillance radar on a prominent peak in the Mecsek Mountains. In his role as commander in chief, he marched in opposition to the defense needs of the nation and of the Alliance.

Due to his short tenure, Hungary's fourth president of the republic left little mark on the Hungarian defense community. Concentrating mainly on protocol activities, history will have little to say about Pál Schmitt's term of office. His successor, János Áder, shows positive signs, but has been at the helm for only a short period of time to enable a comprehensive view of his performance of office as of yet.

Equipment Modernization

I earlier made brief mention of Hungarian military equipment throughout the last quarter century. Although there were equipment purchases from the West, these

were not nearly enough, in amount or scope, to support armed forces in transition. The HDF still uses soviet-era weapons. As an example, during the Iraq mission, both the HDF and the enemy carried the Kalashnikov assault rifle. During the last decades the most effective „method" of equipment modernization was to remove some Soviet-type weapons from the inventory.

Naturally, despite the always limited availability of defense funding there were procurements. As part of the agreement for the departure of Soviet occupying forces from Hungary, the Soviet Union, and later the Russian Republic paid off a majority of its debts to Hungary with military equipment. Thus, in addition to MiG-29 pursuit aircraft, BTR armored vehicles, and Mi-24 helicopters, in the 1990s Hungary began the multi-year purchase of the Mistral anti-aircraft missile system. Why Mistral instead of a more common NATO-standard system, despite various references to economic reasons, we shall probably never know.

The same question arises with regard to the licensing of the Saab JAS-39 Gripen fighter aircraft. Rumor in both instances alludes to a suspicion of corruption, which of course is always denied. In the case of the Gripen, the incoming center-left liberal government insisted upon including a heretofore never used aerial refueling capability for a single squadron sized force.

A larger, more extensive political scandal erupted from the installation of the most modern, 3-D NATO financed surveillance radars. Of the three, the first two created no public controversy and their installation was a smooth, eventless process. However, the third, the above mentioned Zengő radar, looking south down the Danube valley, became a major issue. Enthusiastic environmentalists (accompanied on a defensive trek to the mountaintop by the president of the republic), decided that the installation of the radar on the mountain threatened a rare type of rose with extinction. The local authorities did everything possible to demonstrate the contrary, and indeed it became evident that this plant, which has existed on the mountain since the last ice age, actually grew more lush and prominent when it was regularly cut back. The parties remained intransigent.

In response, the Ministry of Defense turned to Plan 2, the emplacement of the NATO radar on an alternate mountain top (the Tubes) near the southern city of Pécs. Although providing a more limited coverage, this new location would have satisfied NATO and equally important national surveillance requirements. A new controversy arose, as several enthusiastic members of the hastily organized „Civilians for the Zengő" group worked to defeat the new plan. A referendum on the issue, despite an immense campaign to mobilize public opinion against the plan failed due to lack of adequate participation by the public. Nevertheless, the government decided not to go forward with the radar project.

These examples show, that Hungarian democracy, and indeed community related efforts in Hungary remain sadly inadequate. And what is the situation today? After long years of acrimonious debate, the government decided upon the least advantageous, but at the same time least controversial site for the third NATO radar. It is true that the site meets basic NATO needs, but is far from also satisfying national security requirements. As a result, Hungary must maintain so-called gap-filler radar

units, which as time goes by represents many-many hundreds of millions of forints in defense expenditure. This of course is lost in the explanation provided by the orators of the government, that the gap-fillers are needed should an enemy fire on the fixed radar installations.

The HDF and corruption

It is impossible to complete this analysis without making mention of the various rumors and rarely sometimes proven acts of corruption which have been bruited about during the last quarter-century with regard to Hungarian defense. It has to be said, that the entire organizational structure of defense during the time of the communist dictatorship made opportunities for corruption highly limited. The introduction of market economics into defense procurements, despite many benefits, also opened heretofore non-existent doors.

The first such corruption scandal involved the affair of the so-called „oil-colonels", when former experts in the fuel management branch exploited certain opportunities to open wide the possibility of individual aggrandizement. As the then logistics chief of the air force, I came into serious conflict with my boss after I had the temerity to question the validity of the order to rent air force fuel tanker trucks to some sort of a civilian firm. Partly reflecting my upcoming performance evaluation report, my boss roared at me across the telephone:

„Hautzinger, can't you understand that the military is now a commercial firm?"

To this day I am unable to understand why an organization designated and sworn to defend the nation needs to be a commercial concern. Similar assorted stories of corruption accompanied most of the procurement programs of the HDF. Of course it proved impossible to fully prove any of these incidents. At the same time, no one investigated seriously how selected ministerial and military leaders gained a sudden, new found affluence.

In addition to issues with equipment, the baggage of the previous socialist-liberal government involved the still continuing series of the so-called „case of the generals". These corruption cases extended to even the more mundane procurement programs, when individuals who had quickly attained high ranks without having the necessary technical experience, (wonder why) became mired in serious legal difficulties.

I am not optimistic that the situation is improving. Today, when the operative legal slogan remains „not justice, but legality", well-prepared lawyers are capable of accomplishing and hiding a great many things without a trace. The stamp of corruption is not just on this era, but in general has also besmirched the integrity of the entire defense establishment. How does the phrase made popular in the 1990s go? „It is not enough to be honest; one must also seem to be honest".

The Preparedness of the Hungarian soldier

We must also talk about the readiness of the Hungarian soldier. There was in truth never any problem with this issue. History remembers the world-famous Hungarian light cavalry, the hussars. Hungarian soldiers also held their own in the great battles of the 20th century. It was not the fault of the soldiers that politically Hungary emerged on the losing side in two cataclysmic world wars.

There was no problem with the conscription-based post WWII Hungarian military either. The earlier Prussian drill was followed by the not too different Russian training methodology, which, although at times substituting blind obedience for iron discipline, produced readiness results that were not so very different from those of other countries.

Transition to an entirely all-voluntary format resulted in a qualitative improvement in the training of those who now chose to become soldiers. The performance requirement remains the expert management of military technology. Additionally, it became an important element of preparation to be ready to participate in missions conducted in significantly distant geographical eras, with attendant meteorological and other stress factors. In this, Hungarian soldiers have shown that they are not less able than those of other nations.

At the same time, to what degree can we leverage the lessons learned from what is now the key mission of rotation-based participation in distant coalition operations when potentially faced with defensive operations at home. As a soldier, and as a veteran of OIF with experience in such operations, I can state that this is totally possible. Those who, under difficult conditions far from the national borders remain capable of performing assigned missions and tasks will be more willing and able to defend the more familiar, sweeter territory of the homeland.

It is an important task for us to prepare our non-commissioned officers. The transition to the all-volunteer force structure reinforces this requirement. As with the US pattern, who if not the long-serving experience soldier makes the best NCO? In Hungary, this important work is being performed by the now sadly only NCO training school at Szentendre.

Throughout the last decades the training and preparation of officers has had a variable history. Under the previous regime, for decades, officer training was done in a two-tier process in various military high schools and colleges. After 1967, these institutions also provided a dual, both civilian and military diploma. After several years of service with the troops, this was followed by a three-year university equivalent military academy education and training process in accordance with the Soviet model. The top level of training that was afforded to only a few select officers was participation in the Academy of the General Staff of the Soviet Union. The bottom level of officer training was accomplished in national schools, the higher levels in the military academy of Ministry of Defense and the academies of the Soviet Union. From the 1970-s onward, the preparation of the so-called military scholars included the introduction of military PhD programs.

The change in regimes resulted in a slow transformation to joint training programs. Politically, perhaps driven by economic considerations, joint training became more and more important. The faculties of the various military educational and training institutions engaged in the layered training of officers increasing felt pressure the pressure to integrate „voluntarily and cheerfully". (As a department head in the 1990s I was personally aware of this pressure). Naturally the various military colleges resisted.

The well-established officer training process was also complicated by inclusion of the Bologna Agreement process, which defined an educational system that included all elements and echelons of education. The resulting universal administrative requirements, (accreditation, creation of professors, structural reorganization, etc.) became subjective drivers, and also produced some questionable results. Thus, individuals having no practical or technical field experience, no mission experience, but with years of time behind the ivied halls of academia as military educators, broke to the forefront of the educational institutions of the military. Given highly suspect interpretations of the traditional self-governing autonomy afforded educational institutions (throughout Europe), these individuals and many of their mentored subordinates with similar backgrounds remain in place. This singular situation had and continues to have a detrimental effect on the educational/scientific work of the Hungarian military.

For the present it is impossible to define the consequences of the bold innovation taken in 2012, to combine military officer, police officer and the administrative civil service educational systems within the Institute of Public Administration. The same is true with regard to the consequences of equating the military and police retirement age with that of all civilians, a step that was accomplished with the stroke of a pen. At any rate, it is an interesting idea that those who are no longer suitable for military service should be elevated into the civil service. When making the decisions no consideration was given to experiences gained in similar situations in western countries.

The integration of military-police high-level education within a single institution has proven to be a long process. Earlier, I too tried to develop an informed opinion regarding the merits of the idea, particularly with a view toward the creation of separate educational tracks within the same institution. In 2006, there was a definite trend in this direction within the government. The prevailing view however was, that at the highest military educational levels the work is more „scientific" than in police institutions, and this justified the not always fully rational idea of integration. Thus, it was not a surprise that the seemingly rational idea of separate educational tracks was refuted. The second Orbán government, coming into power in 2010, quickly made the final decision to integrate, with an absolutely different concept for civil service education. The long-term effect of the work done by the integrated University is still to be determined

Patriotism and the HDF

Finally, I would like to turn to a continuing important theme, that of patriotism. Clearly, to be a patriot was not advantageous during the communist era. The official doctrine emphasized „internationalism" to the detriment of national patriotism. Naturally, love of one's country cannot be fully exterminated by even a decade's long effort to do so. Patriotism continued to flourish in families, and the large and small communities. This was also true within the Hungarian armed forces.

I remember well, that when marching as an officer cadet, we sang the revolutionary songs of 1848-1849, as learned from our ancestors who fought against the Habsburgs. Of course we also sang about all the girls left behind.

Though we did not of course pound our chests to show our love of country, our sense of patriotism was not wiped away by the regime. For this reason perhaps, the change in regimes in 1989 was an easier process among my peers. And of course, we never believed that those living in the western half of Europe, or across on the other side of the ocean were our enemies. It was great good fortune that during the years of ideological separation we never had to fight each other; and that we do not have the burden of the noble dead to overcome. This too supported the quick development of cordial relations between east and west. Today, the nurturing of patriotism remains a key task in our country. We also know that there is a lot we need to accomplish together. In this too the US can provide a good example, as I reaffirmed during my stay in the country.

Unusual Summary

In conclusion, at the end of a lengthy study like this it behooves me to summaries and to provide certain conclusions. However, the summary of the "hither and yon" path followed by the Hungarian armed forces I leave in the hands of the reader. We Hungarians are fortunate that due to favorable international events the military defense of our country did not become necessary. I fully trust that this will be the case for the next twenty-five years as well.

About the author: COL (R) Gyula Hautzinger, PhD. As a young officer had the unusual opportunity of serving on high-level operational staffs of the Hungarian People's Army. After the change in regimes he studied English, and as a colonel was among the first to represent his country within the organizations of NATO. Toward the end of his military career he spent the majority of his time in academic studies, and also served on the NATO SACLANT staff, and as logistics officer of the Multinational Division ("Polish") Central-South during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Since retirement he has served two terms as vice-chairman of the Hungarian Atlantic Council, and is the author of three books and countless articles dealing with issues of defense, integration into NATO, and the problems associated with organizational cultural change.