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NATO DEFENCE PLANNING CAPABILITY REVIEW 2021/2022

THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

OVERVIEW

1. Between January and July 2021, the Government of the Slovak Republic approved the updates of the series of national strategic-level documents, including security, defence and military strategies that together continue to direct and guide the transformation of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic (AFSR). The strategic-level direction was translated into future military activity through the update of the Long-Term Capability Development Plan (LTCDP), which was approved by the National Council in June 2022, and which now has an outlook to 2035. The aim continues to be: to enhance the AFSR's readiness and combat potential; to provide sufficient personnel and infrastructure for equipment that has been delivered or is in the process of delivery; and to increase regular contributions to NATO and EU high-readiness forces. The Slovak Republic reports that the LTCDP 35 will cover the development and implementation of national objectives and the 2021 NATO Capability Targets, and that its highest priority is the delivery of a heavy infantry brigade and, by 2035, an increase in regular military personnel to 22,000.

2. In June 2022, in its most recent official statement, the Slovak Republic indicated that it aimed to spend 2.0% of GDP on defence in 2022, and more beyond this level of spending in the coming years. However, as yet, there are no further details, hence the financial figures given in this document are based on the latest detailed data provided and are subject to change. Given the years of underfunding, which has left the Slovak Republic with a huge challenge to modernise its armed forces and to deliver its full set of NATO Capability Targets, such an increase is both very welcome and essential.

3. At the end of 2021, the AFSR consisted of 13,058 regular military personnel, a modest increase of approximately 3% since 2019, supported by 3,864 civilians. The Slovak Republic plans to increase the number of full-time military personnel to about 22,000 by 2035, with the aim to bring the overall strength levels of its high-readiness forces, in particular the heavy infantry brigade, up to at least 90% by 2025. In 2020, in order to meet the goal of a gradual increase in personnel, and in a more competitive approach in the labour market, military salaries underwent reform resulting in significantly increased salaries. Moreover, changes to the recruitment system are currently ongoing to move away from a centralised approach to a mix of centralised and localised. At this time, it is too early to assess whether such plans will help the AFSR to meet its challenging planned personnel

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increases. Moreover, areas of acute personnel shortages remain and include logistics drivers, air traffic controllers, aviation technicians, information technology specialists and medical staff.

4. At the end of 2021, there were 135 trained reserves. The Active Reserves scheme, brought into effect in 2016 has not been a success with a very low take-up rate. As a result, the Ministry of Defence is currently considering a new model for reserve service.

5. The proportion of GDP devoted to defence increased from 0.98% in 2013 to an estimated 1.95% in 2020, and is projected to be 1.73% in 2021, 1.76% in 2022 and 1.69% in 2023. In 2024, it is expected to be 1.68%, which is below the NATO guideline of 2%. In 2020, expenditure on major equipment and associated research and development was 31.84% of total defence expenditure and is estimated to be 27.44% in 2021, 29.96% in 2022 and 25.42% in 2023 exceeding the NATO guideline of 20%. In 2024 however, it is expected to drop to 18%, below the guideline.

6. The Slovak Republic continues to contribute to operations, missions and engagements outside its national territory commensurate with the size of its armed forces and in comparison with other Allies. During the reporting period, it also contributed to an enhanced Forward Presence battle group and to the NATO Response Force.

7. In 2021, Allied Defence Ministers agreed that the Slovak Republic should give priority to the development of a heavy infantry brigade, including the associated combat support (CS) and combat service support (CSS) elements. While it is acknowledged that the Slovak Republic has capability development plans to deliver 155 mm self-propelled wheeled howitzers and to maintain its current T-72 main battle tanks (MBTs), the programme to provide fully the requisite modern tracked infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) by 2035, although government approved, is still to be negotiated and signed with industry. Plans to procure modern MBTs are still in the research phase with no capability likely before 2029. Both are critical to establishing an effective heavy infantry brigade. Moreover, while the Slovak Republic reports that it plans the delivery of up to 48 IFVs per infantry battalion, its plans for 40 MBTs for the armoured battalion would fall short of the NATO qualitative requirements. Based on current plans and ongoing acquisitions, it is assessed that until the new MBTs and IFVs are fielded in an adequate number for the combat battalions, capability shortfalls will remain in the heavy infantry brigade, particularly in effective firepower, protection, and cross-country mobility, thereby leaving the Slovak Republic without a fully-capable heavy infantry brigade until at least 2035, a delay of a further three years from the previous Capability Report. Moreover, there are continued key qualitative shortfalls in ground-based air defence (GBAD), intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR), military engineering (MILENG) and communication and information systems (CIS) capabilities that will remain for over a decade or so.

8. Currently, across both of its land brigades, the Slovak Republic's land capabilities remain obsolete with substantial qualitative shortfalls in its combat, CS, and CSS elements. As a result, what is currently available has limited sustainability and interoperability with other Allied forces, and is unlikely to meet the required readiness. In order to meet the

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NATO and national capability requirements, the Slovak Republic plans the fielding of 25 modern Zuzana 2 self-propelled artillery systems by mid-2024, 40 new MBTs by 2029, 500 8x8 IFVs (Patria) by 2032, and 224 tracked IFVs (CV90) in two phases by 2035. If implemented, this will help to address most of the combat and CS shortfalls, albeit considerably later than sought by the Alliance. Moreover, in order to deliver a fully-capable, deployable heavy infantry brigade as an effective combat formation, the structure of the brigade has to be brought closer to the NATO-generic organisation in terms of numbers of combat platforms, and more effort and resources must be dedicated to CS, such as ISTAR, GBAD, and MILENG, and CSS capabilities. In support of national requirements, an intergovernmental agreement between the Slovak Republic and Finland for the first 76 Patria 8x8 IFVs was signed on 30 August 2022.

9. The implementation of procurement plans to transform the Slovak Republic's air force into a small, but capable and NATO-interoperable force, continues, with the recent introduction of UH-60M Blackhawk helicopters, and the acquisition of F-16 modern combat aircraft and multi-mission radars, which are expected to increase considerably the national air surveillance and defence capabilities. These major investment efforts are absorbing a large part of the procurement budget until at least 2023. Until it is equipped with new and modern equipment, the air force will continue to face major readiness issues for NATO-declared assets and others. The level of aircrew training remains generally insufficient to meet NATO requirements, mainly due to the obsolescence of Soviet-era platforms and the subsequent lack of spare parts, the latter of which is expected to worsen after the Russian invasion of Ukraine; most current flying and ground-based assets lack NATO-interoperable identification and communication equipment, such as mode 5 identification friend or foe (IFF) and, when appropriate, Link 16; and no air platform is equipped with an adequate self-protection system, including the recent UH-60Ms and C-27Js.

10. The Slovak Republic meets both of its NATO special operations forces (SOF) Capability Targets in quantitative terms, albeit with some qualitative limitations. Modest improvements in personnel levels have not been sufficient to sustain the planned level of growth and resulted in a concerning tooth-to-tail ratio. Despite these personnel challenges, the Slovak Republic's SOF are able to generate its requested SOF land task group (SOLTG). However, limitations in training facilities, ammunition, and supplies hamper the readiness of deployable SOLTG personnel. The Slovak Republic's SOF fulfil their command and control target in full with a 0.1 staff contribution to a SOF component command (SOCC) HQ, to include its participation in the regional-SOCC.

11. The Slovak Republic is able to provide a significant number of the requested joint enabling-related NATO Capability Targets in quantitative terms, albeit in several cases with limitations and delays. With regards to the qualitative requirements, shortfalls persist in almost all areas, which is particularly concerning regarding chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) defence, CIS security, technical-level cyber defence and joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (JISR). The lack of funding for the modernisation of CBRN defence equipment and the current staffing level of the CBRN defence battalion are a concern, as CBRN defence capabilities make up an important part of the Slovak Republic's overall contribution to NATO. Moreover, the apparent lack of

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progress in the JISR domain is disappointing and will leave the Slovak Republic unable to significantly contribute to the NATO intelligence community for years to come.

12. The Slovak Republic is fully implementing its stabilisation and reconstruction (S&R) NATO Capability Targets in quantitative terms. However, due to limited personnel and training opportunities, it does not have the full range of expertise required. To improve its S&R-related capabilities further, the Slovak Republic would benefit from more training opportunities for its own personnel.

13. Since the 2018 and 2020 assessments, the Slovak Republic continues to improve its resilience and civil preparedness across most of the baseline requirements. The Slovak Republic could further improve its resilience and civil preparedness by providing guidance to the population on expected levels of resilience in the food and water sectors.

14. In sum, in early 2022, the Slovak Republic indicated that it aimed to spend 1.8% of GDP on defence in 2023 and 2024, and would move towards 2% of GDP beyond 2024. More recently, and in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Slovak Republic's Government has announced an increase in defence spending to 2% of GDP and beyond from 2022. However, as yet, there are no further details. Given the years of underfunding, which has left the Slovak Republic with a huge challenge to modernise its armed forces and to deliver its full set of NATO Capability Targets, such an increase is both very welcome and essential.

15. In terms of delivering a fully-capable heavy infantry brigade, the Slovak Republic's only prioritised capability agreed by Allied Defence Ministers, it has funded capability development plans and signed contracts with industry to deliver appropriate levels of IFS and CS and CSS vehicles, but the contracts for the IFVs are still to be negotiated and signed. The plan to procure modern MBTs is still at the research phase. Both the IFVs and MBTs are critical to establishing an effective heavy infantry brigade. Based on current plans and ongoing acquisitions, it is assessed that until the new MBTs and IFVs are fielded in an adequate number for the combat battalions, capability shortfalls will remain in the heavy infantry brigade, particularly in effective firepower, protection, and cross-country mobility, thereby leaving the Slovak Republic without a fully-capable heavy infantry brigade until at least 2035, a three-year delay beyond the delay reported in the last Capability Review.

16. In addition, there are continued key qualitative shortfalls in GBAD, ISTAR, MILENG and CIS capabilities that will remain for over a decade or so. Of equal concern, especially given the Slovak Republic's status as a potential front-line state, are the shortfalls in interoperability such as the lack of mode 5 IFF and Link 16 across most of its air assets. At the same time, the Slovak Republic continues with its national plans to purchase expensive modern combat aircraft, to introduce SOF-capable helicopters, as well as to expand some of its land forces' structure at a time when personnel are spread thinly across its current force, little of which is requested by NATO.

17. While acknowledging some recent progress, it is clear that the Slovak Republic and the NATO defence planning priorities remain, in practice, not particularly well aligned, primarily due to the continued delays and past underfunding. As a result, other Allies may

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potentially have to shoulder part of the Slovak burden. By means of its LTCDP, the Slovak Republic needs to devote much greater priority, effort and resources to meet the full set of 2021 NATO Capability Targets it adopted in quantity, in quality, and in time.

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