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AN OUTPOST ON THE TROUBLED PERIPHERY

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NATO membership has been the quintessential foreign policy goal of Hungarian governments since 1990. Seven years after Gyula Horn—then foreign minister of the last communist government—publicly speculated about the plausibility of his country's future membership in the alliance, NATO selected Hungary as one of its first new entrants. In Budapest, the invitation to join NATO has been widely considered a prize for Hungary's democratic consolidation, successful economic transformation, and political stability.

In this chapter I examine Hungary as a new NATO member from four perspectives: the country's regional security at the end of the Cold War, its campaign for accession to NATO, the successes and shortcomings of civil-military relations and especially civilian oversight of the armed forces, and the strengths and weaknesses of the Hungarian military establishment. The chapter is not a polemic concerning support for or objection to NATO expansion. Arguments for and against have been adumbrated by many policymakers and commentators.[1] My task is to examine Hungarian security and military affairs since the fall of communism. What we learn will help us determine what Hungary brings to the table in Brussels as a new member of the NATO alliance.

Hungarian Security after the Cold War

The collapse of European communism and the end of the Cold War brought dramatic changes to Hungarian security. Although Hungary had remained a member of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) until its official dissolution in July 1991, the possibility of Hungarian neutrality was first mentioned in February 1989 by an unlikely source, the Soviet

academician Oleg Bogomolov, a close advisor to President Mikhail Gorbachev.[2] Bogomolov himself may have been surprised by the avalanche of discussion generated by his remarks. Scholars and military experts published hundreds of articles on the subject, debating the merits and demerits, the rationality and feasibility of Hungarian neutrality.

The reason for the intense debate over Hungarian security was the growing recognition by politicians, the military elite, national security experts, and the informed public that the country would find itself in a security limbo following the end of the WTO. They realized that from a low risk–high stability situation, Hungary was about to enter an era marked by new security challenges and potential instability. The withdrawal of the seventy-eight thousand Soviet occupation troops enjoyed unanimous popular endorsement, but few understood that once the troops were gone, Hungary would be left without such fundamental defensive capabilities as protection of its air space. The general population was unaware that the country's military doctrine was practically the same as that of the USSR, which fully disregarded Hungarian security imperatives, and that Hungary's preparation for its defense was woefully inadequate.[3] In short, the defensive potential the emerging democratic state inherited from the *ancien régime* was unsuitable for the security scenario taking shape in the region.

Challenges to Hungarian Security

Since 1990, defense officials and politicians have been quick to point out that Hungary has no specific enemy and is under no direct threat. Still, there are a number of potential challenges they must take seriously, particularly because of Hungary's unfavorable geostrategic position. It has no natural borders intimidating to land forces; it is relatively easy to overrun, as a number of armies have demonstrated throughout the past millennium; and its military establishment has weakened considerably since 1989.

In the 1990s, several neighboring countries (Czechoslovakia, Romania) found themselves facing security dilemmas similar to Hungary's, while others (republics of the former Yugoslavia) encountered explosive situations requiring drastic increases in defense budgets. Although in Hungary

the 1990s were a period of substantial contraction in military expenditures, not all of the region's armed forces have experienced such reductions in their defensive potential (table 3.1).[4]

In spite of the losses incurred during the recent Yugoslav War and the destruction of some of its defense industry, rump-Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) still possesses a military potential that is impressive by the region's standards. Many industrial enterprises across the country are capable of producing small arms, and Russia continues to ship supplies to the Serbian military, particularly to its air force. In addition, Yugoslavia's airspace is well guarded. The Yugoslav National Army's (JNA's) personnel are well trained, and a significant proportion of them are battle-tried. Croatia's defense outlays have been considerable, its armed forces are highly motivated, and many current officers and NCOs participated in the Yugoslav War. Although MiG-21s constitute the backbone of Croatia's air force, Zagreb has already ordered for them an upgrade package developed by Israel, which will result in machines on a par with MiG-29s. On a per-capita basis, Slovenia's defense outlays are more than twice as large as Hungary's.

In the north, Slovakia's military represents a potential danger for Hungary, given the presence of an entire air force regiment equipped with MiG-29s in addition to the ten MiG-29s "inherited" from the Czechoslovak armed forces. Moreover, Slovakia's offensive capability is strengthened by Su-22 and Su-25 airplanes, dozens SS-22 ballistic missiles, and the S-300 air defense missile system.

In stark contrast to Slovakia, Romania's existing military arsenal and ongoing equipment acquisition programs are characterized by an unambiguous Western orientation. Romania recently acquired four Hercules transport planes from the United States, and most of its 110 MiG-21 fighters have already been upgraded with the Israeli package. On order are four AN/TPS-117 radar-locator systems from Lockheed-Martin, which satisfy top NATO standards. During his July 1998 visit to Washington, President Emil Constantinescu committed Romania to the purchase of additional US-made Bell helicopters, notwithstanding the dire economic situation at home and his finance minister's threat of resignation should the deal materialize.[5]

TABLE 3.1

Defense Spending by Hungary and Its Neighbors, 1997

Variable	Hungary	Austria	Croatia	Romania	Slovakia	Slovenia	Ukraine	Yugoslavia
Population (in millions)	10.16	8.04	4.70	22.77	5.37	2.01	50.85	11.35
Total personnel in armed forces (in thousands)	49.1	45.5	58.0	227.0	41.2	9.5	387.4	114.2
Defense budget (in billion $)	0.51	1.70	1.20	0.77	0.60	0.21	0.81	1.10
Defense expenditures per capita (in dollars)	50.3	211.4	255.3	33.8	111.7	106.3	15.9	96.9
Main battle tanks	797	174	285	1,255	487	109	4,063	1,270
Fighter aircraft	80	24	20	291	109	NA	790	170
Flying time (average annual hours per pilot)	50	130	NA	40	50	NA	NA	NA

Source: *The Military Balance, 1997–1998* (London: IISS, 1997), and the author's computations.

For the purposes of this discussion, I leave out the Ukraine, whose military strength is simply not in the same ballpark with that of Hungary and its neighbors, and Austria, a long-consolidated democracy that is unlikely to present any danger to Hungary.

Hungary and Its Neighbors: Democratization and the Minority Issue

Hungary is one of the four central European states (along with the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovenia) in which democracy may be said to have been consolidated. Postcommunist Hungarian politics have been characterized by a level of stability uncommon in the region; indeed, it is the only central or eastern European state where, as of early 1999, each of two freely elected governments has served out its full term without a constitutional crisis. The same is expected of the governing coalition that was formed after the May 1998 elections by the Alliance of Young Democrats–Hungarian Civic Party, the Independent Smallholders' Party (ISP), and the Hungarian Democratic Forum.

According to political and military elites, Hungary's regional security is determined primarily by its neighbors' success in democratic consolidation and their treatment of ethnic Hungarian minorities. Of Hungary's seven neighbors, only Austria and Slovenia may be considered stable democracies. There are small ethnic Hungarian populations in both states, whose treatment has not been a cause for concern in Budapest. The other neighbors are also home to smaller or larger Hungarian minorities, and all of them have encountered difficulties in their democratization processes.

Although nearly four million ethnic Hungarians live in neighboring states, until 1989 Hungary could not pursue improvements in their condition, given its limited sovereignty and its sharing of membership in the WTO with its neighbors. The first postcommunist coalition government (1990–1994), led by József Antall and, following his death in 1993, Imre Boross, intended to change that. Although Antall was not a nationalist, some of his early statements (such as, "In spirit I am the prime minister of fifteen million Hungarians," referring not only to the ten million living in Hungary proper) could be and were taken out of context by the nationalist leaders of neighboring states (that is, Romania and Slovakia), who needed precisely such gaffes to whip up anti-Hungarian sentiment.

The early blunders of Hungarian foreign policy should be chalked up not to revanchism but to inexperience. A few months before taking office, Antall was a museum director, and his foreign minister, Géza Jeszenszky, a college professor with no political experience. More troubling was the presence of István Csurka, an unabashed nationalist, among the vice presidents of Antall's Hungarian Democratic Forum until 1993, when he was belatedly forced to resign.[6] Csurka and his supporters soon established the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP), a right-wing nationalist organization that came in far below the threshold necessary for parliamentary representation in 1994 but did considerably better in 1998 by sending 14 deputies in the 386-seat national legislature.

Hungary's policies toward its neighbors became more conciliatory under the socialist-liberal coalition government (1994–1998) led by Prime Minister Gyula Horn. After long and contentious negotiations, Budapest signed basic treaties with Slovakia (1995) and Romania (1996). Hungary's relationship with Slovakia, among all its neighbors, has been the most acrimonious, particularly since the breakup of Czechoslovakia in January 1993. The two most disturbing issues are the treatment of the approximately 650,000 Hungarians in Slovakia and the construction of the Danube dam at Gabcikovo-Nagymaros. Both awaited resolution in early 1999. Many provisions of the basic treaty are not observed by the Slovak government, despite repeated Hungarian attempts to settle the issues.[7] Politicians in Budapest do not expect profound improvements so long as Prime Minister Mečiar and the nationalist parties that support him are in government.

The Hungarian-Romanian nexus was similarly strained—primarily owing to the treatment of the approximately two-million-strong Hungarian minority—under President Ion Iliescu's tenure (1990–1996). In September 1996 the basic treaty was finally signed, although not without grueling negotiations and numerous postponements. As US Ambassador to NATO Robert Hunter noted, the treaty was signed not "because they like each other" but because both governments realized that their chances of NATO membership would be increased with the agreement.[8] Since the December 1996 national elections that brought democratic forces and President Emil Constantinescu to power in Bucharest, relations between

the two states have become more cordial, although some contentious issues remain.

Hungary's relations with Ukraine have been congenial, although the situation of the Hungarian minority in the Carpatho-Ukraine is considered unsatisfactory in Budapest. A treaty between the two countries was signed by the Antall government in December 1991.[9] Finally, mention must be made of Hungarian-Russian relations, though the two states do not share a border. Hungarian politicians have tried their best to assuage Moscow's fears about the diminution of Russian security after NATO's expansion.[10] Given the constraints created by the unpredictability of Russian domestic and foreign policies, Hungary has managed to maintain friendly relations with Moscow.

The War in Yugoslavia

The most important challenge to Hungary's security in the 1990s was the Yugoslav War. Hungary shares a border with both Serbia (where hundreds of thousands of ethnic Hungarians reside) and Croatia (home to a smaller Hungarian minority), and keeping the country out of the war was an obvious priority. This objective was jeopardized by Budapest's unambiguous sympathies toward Croatia, demonstrated by the clandestine delivery of Hungarian surplus infantry weapons to Zagreb in 1991. The revelation of this covert action by the Hungarian press increased tensions between Budapest and Belgrade.[11] During the war, violations of Hungary's borders were commonplace, with Croatian forces crossing over to engage the JNA from Hungarian territory. The Serbs, in turn, regularly infringed upon Hungarian airspace, most memorably when they accidentally dropped a bomb on the southern Hungarian village of Barcs (causing minor damage and no casualties). The call-up of thousands of ethnic Hungarians by the JNA did not make matters easier. As a preventive measure, the Hungarian and Yugoslav general staffs established direct contacts following the Barcs incident.[12]

As officials in Budapest clearly recognized, Hungary was not directly threatened by the war.[13] At the same time, hostilities so close to the border did call attention to Hungary's vulnerability, to the sources of potential danger to its security, and to its already small and swiftly decreasing

defense budgets, which were causing serious problems in the Hungarian Defense Forces' (HDF's) ability to protect the nation. Since the conclusion of the Yugoslav War, Hungary has maintained good relations with Croatia. Budapest's nexus with Belgrade has been strained because Hungary allowed NATO forces to use its airspace and because the JNA conscripted ethnic Hungarians to serve in Kosovo.

Measures to Alleviate Security Concerns

The challenges to Hungarian security made enhancement of its defensive capabilities imperative. In the early 1990s, NATO membership seemed an elusive prospect, and so Budapest had to enhance Hungary's security in the short term.

The first step toward increasing national security was to devise a new military doctrine.[14] Debate over the doctrine flared up in the summer of 1990 and emerged on two fronts. On one front, the main political parties espoused different views of what constituted national interests. On the other, a professional dispute arose between the largely conservative military leadership and the amateurish representatives of the government (exemplified by the minister of defense, Lajos Für), who had no prior expertise or experience in defense matters. To make matters worse, the debate was conducted in an institutional vacuum, because after 1989 a number of military research centers were disbanded and most experienced members of the General Staff were ostracized owing to their association with the communist regime. The government itself had few experts, and the majority of the parties regarded independent think-tanks (which began slowly to emerge in the early 1990s) with distrust. The debate proceeded in civic organizations, periodicals, newspapers, and parliamentary channels.

As the discussion progressed, two contending views crystallized.[15] The first stressed Hungary's isolation in a region surrounded by hostile nations. Because of this situation, proponents argued, the country should possess strong armed forces capable of its defense. The opposite view denied the need for armed forces entirely. The protagonists of this ultraliberal argument saw a domestic threat in the military and sought to guarantee the country's security through international agreements. In the end,

these extremist views were defeated, and members of parliament agreed that Hungary was to have a smaller but more effective armed force.[16]

The new military doctrine is purely defensive, which has been reflected in the training of the HDF since 1989. The only objective of this defense concept is the protection of Hungarian sovereignty from any aggressor; weapons are to be used only in the case of external attack. The doctrine assumes the presence of sufficient military muscle to stall the advance of a potential aggressor and thereby win time without incurring heavy casualties and damage. Time gain is important because it could afford the possibility of resolving contentious issues through political negotiation; it could also enable Hungary's allies to offer military assistance.

According to the Ministry of Defense (MOD), the country's protection should rest on four pillars.[17] The first is the Euro-Atlantic security system, participants in which could collectively and mutually guarantee the security of the continent. Second are multilateral treaties made between the region's states, and third are bilateral agreements with neighboring countries. The fourth pillar is a small but capable military force that could arrest aggression against Hungary from any direction. The question of whether the HDF would be able to carry out such a function has been addressed, and there can be no doubt that the answer at present is negative. The question of whether a volunteer army might be the answer to the country's defense needs has been widely discussed since 1990. Most military experts agree that the costs of a professional army would be prohibitive for the foreseeable future.[18]

Military Diplomacy

Military diplomacy has played an important role in acquiring guarantees to Hungarian security. It was doubly valuable *prior* to NATO accession because it could yield tangible results contributing to Hungarian security in the short run and also advance Hungary's NATO candidacy. In concert with these considerations, military diplomacy switched into high gear in 1991 and has yet to slow down. The fruits of the myriad meetings, conferences, and negotiations have included a variety of bilateral military and security agreements with many states—most importantly with Hungary's neighbors.

It should be noted that military diplomacy is distinct from state-level diplomacy, and one may not always be reflective of the other. A fitting example is the relationship between the Hungarian and Romanian armed forces. Even in the early and mid-1990s, when relations between the two states were strained, the two armies maintained good relations.[19] The two defense ministries have kept close contacts on ministerial, General Staff, and lower levels and have signed several important agreements. A Romanian-Hungarian military treaty completed in December 1990 was aimed at strengthening confidence between the two armies and ensuring that political tension would not expand to the military sphere. In May 1991 the two countries were the first to sign an "open skies" agreement allowing for four annual unarmed surveillance flights over each other's territory.[20] The first trip of the new Romanian defense minister, Victor Babiuc, in 1997 was to Budapest, where he concluded an accord with his Hungarian colleague on the protection of military secrets. In March 1998 the two defense ministers signed an agreement to set up a joint, thousand-man-strong military peacekeeping unit. Prior to and following the July 1997 NATO conference in Madrid, Hungarian politicians (including Foreign Minister László Kovács) appealed to the alliance to include Romania (and Slovenia).

Although Hungarian-Slovakian military relations have developed less auspiciously, contacts between the two armed forces have been marked by less tension than have relations between the two governments. In July 1994, Hungarian Defense Minister György Keleti called on his Slovak colleague, Pavel Kanis, to defuse tensions. In February 1998, the two countries' defense ministers (Keleti and Jan Sitek) signed agreements on confidence-building measures, including cooperation in military aviation and anti-aircraft defense.[21]

Since 1990, Hungarian military diplomats have succeeded in improving the country's image and concluding a legion of defense agreements with other neighbors and with countries farther away. These cooperative arrangements range from a pact with Estonia that allows for the training of Estonian officers in Hungary to a treaty with France safeguarding military secrecy in hardware and data. In addition, Budapest's military diplomats succeeded in negotiating dozens of training programs enabling an

ever larger number of Hungarian officers to study in the military academies and colleges of NATO member states.

Participation in International Organizations

Hungarian politicians understood that the formulation of the new defensive doctrine and bilateral agreements, although important, could provide no reliable security guarantees. Therefore, prior to the Madrid decision they attempted to improve the country's security situation through participation in international organizations. In the early 1990s politicians in Budapest—and in other central European capitals—had urged the endowment of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, since then renamed OSCE) with concrete military content. They envisioned a new security arrangement for which CSCE could have provided a framework. CSCE was an ongoing conference, however, without troops or weapons, and not a security system. The only working security system for European democracies was NATO, which at that point was not prepared to welcome former communist states.

Although Hungary has been the originator of or active member in several regional organizations—such as the Central European Initiative and the Carpathian Euro-Region Group—none of these is designed for cooperation in security or defense matters. The most promising regional organization has been the Visegrád group (also including Czechoslovakia—later the Czech Republic and Slovakia—and Poland), which was cofounded by Hungary in 1991.[22] The Visegrád experiment has not lived up to its early promises owing to a number of sensitive issues among its members. To date, the establishment of a limited free trade zone has been its most tangible result. The Visegrád group was never intended to become a military pact, because all of its members saw NATO as the only satisfactory long-term solution for their security concerns.

The most important measure Hungary had taken to solve its security dilemma before 1998 was its vigorous and consistent pursuit of NATO membership. The new military doctrine, military diplomacy, and the government's approach to international organizations were all in service of this objective, which in many ways determined the direction of Hungarian foreign and military policy in the 1990s.

Hungary's Campaign for NATO Membership

Since the first democratic elections in Hungary in May 1990, the official view has been that membership in NATO is the primary channel through which Hungary can achieve integration with the West and promote its own security. This policy has been followed throughout seven years of unambiguous and concerted effort, crowned by NATO's official invitation to Hungary at the Madrid conference.

Selling Hungary to NATO

All three postcommunist governments assigned top priority to political and military integration with western Europe, a priority that enjoyed the support of every major parliamentary party. Every foreign and defense minister (respectively, Géza Jeszenszky and Lajos Für, 1990–94; László Kovács and György Keleti, 1994–98; and János Martonyi and János Szabó, 1998–) has actively promoted this goal.[23] This continuity is indicated by Martonyi's high regard for the efforts of his predecessors and Jeszenszky's recent appointment as the new Hungarian ambassador to Washington.[24]

Hungary was the first Warsaw Pact member to speculate about its potential membership in NATO (in February 1990) *and* to urge the WTO's dissolution (in June 1990).[25] In his maiden speech to parliament in May 1990, Prime Minister Antall called for Hungary's withdrawal from the WTO and expressed confidence that other member states would follow his lead. At the November 1990 CSCE conference in Paris, with Soviet President Gorbachev and Defense Minister Dimitri Yazov looking on, he announced that the WTO's political structure was soon to disappear.[26] By the fall of 1990, WTO foreign ministers had reached a consensus that the organization would stop functioning as a military alliance in July 1991.

On 20 February 1990, the last Hungarian communist foreign minister, Gyula Horn, detonated a political bomb by declaring that Hungary's membership in NATO was "not unimaginable in the none too distant future."[27] Western reactions to the announcement were guarded, and one might surmise that Horn was motivated in no small part by the approaching general elections—calculating that allusions to NATO while Hungary was still chained to the WTO might seem a courageous position to his countrymen.[28] Horn's Hungarian Socialist Party was trounced at

the polls; Antall's new government embraced NATO membership as a top priority.

Hungary has organized hundreds of meetings, conferences, and visits between Hungarian politicians and military personnel and their NATO colleagues in order to convince the latter that Budapest was worthy of membership. In Budapest and other central European capitals, NATO's Partnership for Peace (PFP) program was regarded with misgivings because it was considered far short of the early enlargement decision these states had hoped for.[29] Still, Hungary signed up in February 1994 and, trying to make the best of the situation, put PFP in a positive light by portraying it as a useful step toward the attainment of full membership in the alliance.

In the meantime, Hungary tried to curry favor with NATO leaders in several ways. Budapest volunteered to participate in numerous peacekeeping activities; indeed, by early 1999 Hungary had become the twenty-fifth largest contributor to such operations.[30] At that time, unarmed Hungarian military observers were serving in Angola, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Iraq, and Nagorno-Karabakh. In addition, a four-hundred-man engineering battalion was assisting IFOR/SFOR operations in Bosnia, a peacekeeping company was active in Cyprus, and a platoon of military police was stationed in the Sinai Peninsula. Budapest also supported the creation of joint peacekeeping units with Italy, Slovenia, Romania, Ukraine, and other countries. An important Hungarian contribution to NATO's success in bringing the Yugoslav War to a closure was the opening of a military base in southern Hungary (near the village of Taszár) to US forces.

Hungary also tried its best to convince its prospective NATO allies that it could be a valued contributor to the alliance. Although defense outlays were insufficient for the country's defense, units that were singled out for "early NATO compatibility" received priority treatment from the MOD. In addition, the military force structure was comprehensively reorganized to simulate the NATO model.[31]

Selling NATO to Hungarians

The campaign for NATO membership has been decidedly elite-driven and supported by all major political parties. Only extremist political forces

(the Workers' Party on the left, MIÉP on the right) have opposed the government's alliance policy, but they enjoy limited political influence. At the same time—and in contrast to wide-based support for Hungary's membership in the European Union—a sizable segment of the population has been skeptical about the benefits of NATO membership.

Popular reluctance has several roots. First, with the exception of the interwar period, foreign troops have been stationed on Hungarian territory since 1526. Especially since the ill-fated, anti-Hapsburg War of Independence (1848–49), Hungarian territorial integrity has been associated in many people's minds with freedom from the presence of foreign troops. Second, the desire for neutrality is deep-rooted among many who are historically aware and believe that harmful alliances were largely responsible for the tragic events of twentieth-century Hungarian history. Third, the appalling conditions of the Hungarian military establishment, combined with slender state resources, make many citizens think about the financial burden NATO enlargement will signify. Finally, since 1990 the majority of Hungarians have not been concerned about any military threat to their country.[32]

Although the all-out government campaign to gain popular backing for NATO membership did not start until 1996, the number of supporters increased throughout the 1990s. Prior to 1994 (when chances of accession seemed remote), the ratio of supporters never reached 50 percent. Afterwards, their proportion increased to 52 percent in 1996 (57 percent of military officers),[33] 61 percent in summer 1997,[34] and 69 percent after the Madrid conference.[35] Taking nothing for granted, the Horn government conducted a major media campaign to convince people to vote for NATO in a referendum held on 16 November 1997. NATO's praises were written into soap operas, a game called "Natopoly" on CD-ROM was sent to all public high schools and libraries, and pro-NATO documentaries crowded television and radio broadcast time.[36] Thousands of newspaper and magazine articles extolled the benefits of NATO membership. Even the well-liked president, Árpád Göncz, addressed the country urging a positive vote.

The government insisted that the current 4- to 5-percent annual economic growth rate could be sustained and would be more than sufficient

to permit the payment of Hungary's annual contribution to the alliance (believed to be set at $11.7 million).[37] Supportive US officials, such as Defense Undersecretary for Policy Walter Slocombe, who claimed that the military infrastructure Hungary had "inherited" from the WTO could be useful and lower the costs of accession, were widely quoted.[38] Proponents also made much of the expected positive economic impact of NATO membership—including job creation and enhanced foreign investment—even pointing to the infusion of $251 million into the economy of Taszár and its vicinity since the United States had begun to use the base there.[39] In the end, 85 percent of those who voted endorsed accession to NATO, thus saving their government from embarrassment. The turnout was just shy of 50 percent, nearly double the 25 percent needed for validity.

NATO's Expectations

As President Göncz noted, Hungary's need for NATO membership was motivated by values shared with the West, by the desire to belong to a favorable security environment, and by the potential membership offered for creating a more cost-effective defense establishment.[40] Throughout the 1990s, NATO executives continually informed Hungarian leaders what the alliance needed from Hungary if it was to join up.

NATO leaders assume Hungary's continued political stability, further consolidation of its democracy, and firm civilian control over the armed forces. There are, however, a large number of specific expectations that Hungary will have to work hard to satisfy. These include, but are not limited to, increases in military spending, conversion to NATO doctrines and planning, modernization of the HDF's arsenal, progress toward achieving compatibility with NATO equipment, the development of cooperation with other NATO units, improvements in communications and air defense capabilities, reforms in military education and training, and a major increase in the number of English-speaking officers and NCOs.[41]

Although Budapest has agreed to NATO's demands, some potential problems have emerged even before actual membership. For example, during his September 1997 visit to Washington, Foreign Minister Kovács declared that Hungary's defense outlays would be lower than those

requested by NATO, noting that they would be roughly equal to those of smaller NATO countries such as Belgium and Portugal.[42] He neglected to mention that the armed forces of those states were fully integrated into the alliance and were in incomparably better condition than the HDF. In July 1998, Prime Minister Victor Orbán ruled out the possibility of sending troops to Kosovo, owing to the presence of hundreds of ethnic Hungarian conscripts serving in the JNA.[43] MOD officials often noted disparities in the recommendations of American and western European politicians, on one hand, and NATO military and security officials, on the other.[44] For instance, US President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright were more flexible about defense budgets and put the emphasis on Hungary's political stability and its economic and social policies. In contrast, NATO military leaders and politicians such as US Defense Secretary William Cohen were more eager to ensure levels of military expenditures to remedy the HDF's deficiencies.

Given the geographical locations of the three new NATO members, Hungary constitutes an island in the alliance sharing no border with another NATO state. This is not expected to cause any political problems, but it could have negative military implications. Hungarian experts are quick to point out that the IFOR/SFOR operations gave rise to no special difficulties stemming from Hungary's location. In any case, in a potential conflict the two Hungarian neighbors that are not members of NATO—Austria and Slovenia—could provide a bridge to member states and would presumably to be supportive of NATO operations.

Budapest believes that it could most effectively promote NATO's programs and operations by belonging to NATO's Southern Command. This belief is considered justified by the notion that most potential crisis points lie in that direction (the Balkans, the Middle East). In addition, Hungarian officials suggest that in NATO's Southern Command they would not have to compete with the Czech Republic and Poland and could also benefit from their traditionally good relations with Italy and Turkey. In the southern region Hungary could also prove quickly that it intends to be a contributor, not just a beneficiary of the alliance. In this area, they surmise, the HDF's relatively high technical culture could be utilized more extensively than elsewhere.

Democratizing Civil-Military Relations

In all the formerly communist countries, the most important communist legacies in the area of civil-military relations are armed forces that were subordinated to the Communist Party, professional military personnel who are heavily indoctrinated with Marxist-Leninist dogma, and vaguely defined external and internal institutional functions for the armed forces.[45]

Insofar as the Hungarian military is concerned, successful democratic consolidation includes the following: (1) placing the military under the authority and supervision of the elected government; (2) unambiguous constitutional codification of the chains of command and areas of responsibility over the armed forces between state institutions and within the military establishment; (3) termination and prohibition of the activities of political parties within the armed forces, as well as an effective ban on partisan political activities by active military personnel; (4) establishing the government's fiscal responsibility over defense expenditures and the executive branch's accountability to the legislature over military matters; (5) democratizing the military establishment itself, with special attention to inculcating military personnel with fundamental democratic values; (6) creating a pool of independent civilian experts to advise politicians on military and security issues; and (7) reforming military education and training. Despite some remaining shortcomings, during the 1990s Hungary successfully democratized its armed forces and established democratic civil-military relations.

Civilian Oversight Authority

The Hungarian constitution was amended in 1990 to subordinate the military to the constitution and the president, who became commander-in-chief of the armed forces, although he was not to exercise this prerogative in peacetime. The military is responsible to, in descending order, the president, the legislature, the cabinet, and the minister of defense.[46] In April 1991 President Göncz caused a controversy by trying to interfere with the day-to-day running of the MOD, but the Constitutional Court quickly resolved to matter in favor of the latter.[47] Prior to 1993, the defense establishment was divided into two parts: the relatively small

MOD and a separate Command of the Hungarian Defense Forces. This arrangement, devised by the last communist government to make it difficult for its successors to control the armed forces, resulted in the duplication of bureaucracies and precluded full ministerial accountability. In one renowned case, two separate Hungarian military delegations—one from the MOD and one from the HDF Command—each with the same purpose, visited Sweden at the same time, unbeknownst to each other.[48]

The Defense Law of 1993 drastically improved conditions for civilian control by creating the structural underpinnings for "balanced" civil-military relations.[49] The law subordinates the HDF's command directly to the minister of defense and clarifies other questions left open for interpretation. The minister—who remains accountable to the government and its head—supervises three state secretaries within the MOD who are responsible for political, administrative, and operational functions. (The state secretary for military operations is commander of the HDF.) The 1993 law also eliminated the duplication of functions and clearly defined areas of authority and accountability.

The legislature, through its Defense Committee, enjoys the most extensive control over the armed forces. This committee decides military doctrine, the functions of the military within the framework of security policy, the size and budget of the armed forces, and so forth. As the superior policy-making body, the government transmits its decisions to the MOD and, indirectly, to the armed forces. In addition, a new Defense Council was created whose activities are overseen by four individuals: the president, the prime minister, the chairman of the parliament, and the head of the Supreme Court.

Although the institutional structure for civilian control is adequate in Hungary, some practical problems remain. One of these is a lack of rigorous supervision within the MOD and the ministry's providing of insufficient information to the Defense Committee.[50] Incomplete communication between the MOD and parliament has thwarted the development of the legislature's supervisory role over the armed forces. In the first postcommunist government, the politicians chosen to lead the defense establishment were embarrassingly naive about defense matters, which frustrated the democratization of civil-military relations. This

inexperience was particularly troubling before the 1993 structural reorganization, when the MOD was often "out of the loop" because the HDF Command (the bulwark of old-style senior officers) often got away with not informing the MOD about important developments in the armed forces.

On the financial level, the issue of the necessary transparency of military expenditures has not been satisfactorily resolved. Members of parliament are routinely left in the dark about the detailed breakdown of defense allocations. For instance, MPs may be told that the annual defense budget earmarks 21 billion forints (Ft) for the salaries and benefits of personnel, but they receive no figures broken down by individual units. In government budgets "defense" makes up merely 4 pages, supplemented by 120 pages of footnotes and explanations.[51] Another problem has been the conversion of political objectives into practical military tasks. The political directives of the government and the Defense Committee are often vague, and there is no concrete strategy or guidance available that would foster their interpretation by armed forces personnel.

The deficiency of internal control within the defense establishment has also been blamed for a number of scandals involving military personnel since 1990. These included the large-scale illegal sale and dilution of the army's fuel, financial embezzlement during the construction of a military hospital, and numerous other schemes.[52] More recently, the MOD's procurement office violated the principle of equal opportunity and fair competition over a contract for anti-missile systems. In February 1998 the Supreme Court ruled against the MOD and fined it Ft 15 million ($72,000).[53] At the same time, notwithstanding the MOD's perennial and justified pleas (buttressed by the arguments of foreign and domestic analysts), parliament has been effective in reducing military budgets and, in the process, drastically decreasing the HDF's capacity to defend the nation.

In sum, while the institutional structure of parliamentary civilian control over the armed forces in Hungary is adequate, the internal control mechanisms of the MOD are in need of further development. In large measure the problems have been due to general inexperience and the negligence and oversight of some high-ranking military officers.

Depoliticization and Democratization

The overwhelming majority of the armed forces welcomed the collapse of communism and the military's subsequent depoliticization.[54] In Hungary, the army's decommunization—the Main Political Administration and Communist Party organizations were disbanded, political officers dismissed or retrained, and so forth—was largely completed before József Antall's first postcommunist government took office in May 1990. Political activity may not be conducted in the armed forces, and active military personnel are not permitted to join political parties. The domestic function of the armed forces was settled by the 1990 Defense Law, which prohibited any role for the armed forces in domestic contingencies, with the exception of certain units that might be utilized for the defense of buildings housing public offices (such as parliament, ministries, etc.). The use of the military even in such cases is strictly limited to instances when these edifices are attacked by armed force.[55] As in other democracies, the HDF has been active in disaster relief operations.

The full democratization of civil-military relations requires the availability of civilian experts on defense and security matters who can provide knowledgeable and impartial advice to politicians and policymakers. One of the remaining shortcomings of civil-military relations in Hungary is the dearth of such experts, caused primarily by the lack of appropriate courses and programs in the civilian educational system. Most of those with the requisite knowledge and training are either active military personnel or persons with strong ties to the armed forces. Many of them are active in recently established think-tanks, some maintained by the MOD.[56]

The 1993 Defense Law laid the foundations of democratization in matters of personnel and strictly regulated the professional relationship between officers, NCOs, and conscripts. A particular source of problems in the past had been the habitual and generally overlooked hazing of fresh draftees by older conscripts. The 1993 Defense Law made such behavior illegal and subject to disciplinary action, allaying the fears of soldiers and concerned parents. In the same year, the Law on Religions reestablished the institution of military chaplaincy.[57]

Since 1989, HDF personnel have organized several independent associations and trade unions representing various interests to serve conscripted

and professional soldiers alike. At times these organizations have resorted to public demonstrations in order to call attention to the plight of discharged officers and NCOs and to the extremely low remuneration of professional military personnel. Although the state and the MOD have fully accepted the legitimacy of these associations, most grievances remain unresolved because of meager MOD resources.

The Military Leadership

Postcommunist transitions are generally more traumatic for the armed forces than for other occupational strata. One of the problems is that the officers whom nascent democracies inherit from the past are tainted by their service of the Marxist-Leninist regime. This situation is nearly impossible to redress in the short term, because many military officers possess special skills unavailable elsewhere in the labor market. In Hungary, the few generals and officers who refused to pledge their allegiance to the democratic state were dismissed from the HDF along with political officers who could not be reassigned or retrained. By 1998, no general remained in the HDF who had received his promotion before 1989.[58]

The aforementioned problems in Hungarian civil-military relations may be partially ascribed to the questionable qualifications of postcommunist defense ministers. During the 1990s, three men led the MOD; all three were dubious choices, although for different reasons. Prior to his appointment, Lajos Für was a university lecturer specializing in the history of Hungarian agriculture. He had no expertise in military matters and no comprehension of the military profession. During his ministership (1990–94), Für devoted a great deal of energy to the design of new Hungarian uniforms (reflecting historical traditions), which, given their nearly prohibitive cost, in 1999 still awaited large-scale introduction. Für's interest in historic uniforms and traditional paraphernalia prevented him from concerning himself with many far more pressing and weighty issues. He evidenced neither conceptual clarity about key defense issues nor the ambition to understand them.[59]

Expertise was not what was missing from the resume of Für's successor.[60] Colonel György Keleti had retired after a twenty-eight-year career as a professional officer, some of it spent as a political officer. In 1990–94 Keleti served as the MOD's spokesman under Für. In the 1980s Keleti was

a respected propagandist for the communist regime who was pegged to contribute the politically most sensitive parts of textbooks on national defense for secondary school students. "The main objective of capitalist armies is the annihilation of all progressive social systems," and "The most significant threat to world peace is NATO," opined Keleti in 1984.[61] That a high-ranking communist military officer wrote such nonsense in the mid-1980s is not particularly surprising. But his appointment by the socialist government as the defense minister charged with overseeing Hungary's campaign for accession to NATO demonstrated a lapse in judgment. (Then again, Prime Minister Gyula Horn and several other members of his cabinet had been equally ardent enemies of NATO and the West less than a decade earlier.)

Although little is known of János Szabó, an ISP politician who succeeded Keleti in 1998, his curriculum vitae divulges no prior defense-related background or interest.[62] According to his early speeches, Szabó planned to focus his energies on the resuscitation of Hungarian defense industries and on a limited reorganization of the MOD hierarchy.[63]

The classification and qualifications of MOD personnel are issues Szabó needs to address. In 1990–91, Für conducted a very limited purge of the high brass and subsequently made an effort to hire more civilians in the MOD. In contrast, Keleti surrounded himself with many of his old cronies. Although he accepted the policy of reducing the proportion of military officers at the MOD, Keleti made sure his advisers remained nearby, although reclassified as civilians. Another, related problem is that in the recent past a number of civilian experts employed by the MOD decided to put on uniforms and join the active military service, since military officers often receive perquisites (such as apartments) that are closed to civilians. In 1998 the majority of the MOD staff still consisted of either active or retired military officers (the latter were classified as civilians). Among the eighteen department chiefs of the MOD, twelve were active officers and six were civilians (of whom four were retired officers and two were true civilians).[64]

The State of the Hungarian Defense Forces

Postcommunist Hungary inherited a military establishment that had been prepared and outfitted as part of the Warsaw Pact's doctrine of

coalition warfare. As such, it was fraught with an oversized command structure, strategic imbalances, antiquated armaments, organizational asymmetries, and apathetic professional personnel. The number of combat, logistical, and training units was excessive, and there was virtually no indigenous air defense capability.[65] Aside from these problems, the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty and other international agreements limited the future size and composition of Hungary's military equipment.[66] In some of the most important and costly types of weapons, such as fighter aircraft and attack helicopters, the HDF's holdings were far below the permitted number. In others, such as main battle tanks and artillery pieces, the HDF possessed considerably more than the limit and was obliged to spend scarce resources on their disabling or destruction. In order to measure up to the challenges brought by its new security environment, Hungary needed to boost defense outlays to finance the needed restructuring of the HDF and the modernization of its equipment. Instead, military budgets plummeted along with the size, armament, and overall strength of the armed forces.

The Political Economy of the HDF

The transition from a centrally planned economy to one determined by market forces has caused major economic dislocations and adverse sociopolitical phenomena in Hungary. Prior to mid-1995, macroeconomic indicators were unimpressive. Military leaders repeatedly announced that it was impossible to maintain the country's defenses with the meager resources allocated to them. Still, defense budgets continued to decline. Quite simply, reducing defense budgets was good politics, particularly considering the government's fiscal priorities. In concert with these political preferences, Hungary's military budgets shrank from 3.5 percent of GDP in 1988 to 1.5 percent a decade later. As a result, the HDF became thoroughly impoverished.

Such inadequate defense outlays allowed virtually no procurement of new equipment and could not keep pace with the growing maintenance requirements of antiquated armaments. In recent years, less than 5 percent of the HDF's budget could be devoted to development and acquisitions. The HDF often lacks funds to purchase badly needed spare parts.

New uniforms were introduced in 1991, but the MOD has been unable to allocate the funds for their purchase for any units except those serving abroad. Indeed, year after year only half the needed money has been available for uniforms and related items.[67] The media have frequently criticized the poor nutritional value of soldiers' meals.[68] The vast majority of buildings in the HDF's care are in extremely poor repair. In one celebrated case, prior to US Defense Secretary William Perry's visit to the Taszár air base, HDF officers had all the buildings along his route repainted or draped with camouflage netting, because they did not want Perry "to see what NATO would be getting."[69] On several occasions in 1994 and 1995, the minister of defense voiced his fears that the MOD would be unable to pay salaries.[70] The press is full of reports describing widespread and long-lasting shortages in the HDF, from uniforms to fuel. Even with substantial reduction in the HDF's manpower, training has suffered owing to the lack of financial resources.

To contain the damage done by small defense budgets, the MOD has had to be attentive to its financial management. Under Für, a great deal of money was spent on useless or nonessential items, such as replacements for communist-era symbols and Western-made automobiles for MOD bureaucrats. Keleti pledged to improve the ministry's housekeeping by selling unused or underutilized MOD property and introducing new fiscal guidelines. By 1997 the MOD had succeeded in reducing its debt from Ft 1.5 billion to Ft 830 million.[71] Several recent investigations of the services have shown that the MOD's fiscal management has become more efficient.[72] The MOD has tried to make salaries and wages its main priority, given the exceedingly inadequate remuneration of military personnel. In 1993, for instance, 17 percent of officers, 46 percent of NCOs, and 57 percent of civilian employees lived below the officially established poverty line.[73] Since then matters have not improved perceptibly.

Spurred by the imperatives of NATO accession, in 1998 the government pledged to expand its military outlays by an annual 0.1 percent of the budget, to reach 1.8 percent by 2001. Given the HDF's needs, such budgetary expansion will guarantee no radical improvement in Hungarian defense capabilities without the additional infusion of funds from NATO.

Armed Forces Reform

Considering the inadequacy of resources, it is amazing that any improvement at all could be achieved in the HDF's restructuring. Surprisingly, a lot has been done.

Since 1990, the military's command structure has been streamlined and rationalized by abolishing the separation between the MOD and the HDF Command. The army's force structure has been significantly altered. Between 1989 and 1997, the number of active military bases and installations was decreased from nearly 300 to 81. Thousands of vehicles, weapons, and equipment of all kinds (24,000 tons of materiel in all) was relocated.[74] The previous concentration of bases in the western part of Hungary has given way to a more even distribution of forces around the country. The number and size of combat units inherited from the WTO have been cut, and those of rapid reaction forces—with an eye toward NATO membership—have been increased.

The HDF was the first former WTO army in which the corps-brigade structure was introduced in place of a system based on divisions. As a result of this reorganization, as of 1999 the HDF was divided into three military districts (headquartered in Tata, Cegléd, and Kaposvár, respectively) in addition to the Budapest Military District.[75] In the new system, three types of brigades are deployed within the military districts: rapid reaction (incorporating mainly professional soldiers), training (containing conscripts), and reserve.

One of the key military objectives between 1989 and 1997 was reduction of the army's manpower. As a result of this undertaking, the HDF shrank by approximately two-thirds. The number of HDF employees, including civilians, decreased by 64.2 percent, from 155,700 to 55,757. In terms of active military personnel, during the eight years of gradual force reductions the officer corps decreased by 51.5 percent, the number of NCOs by 33.4 percent, and that of conscripted soldiers by 70.7 percent (fig. 3.1; table 3.2).

Since 1989, the period of mandatory military service has also been reduced, first from eighteen to twelve months in 1991 and then from twelve to nine months in 1993. Moreover, there has been strong popular pressure for the further compression of service to six months. The new

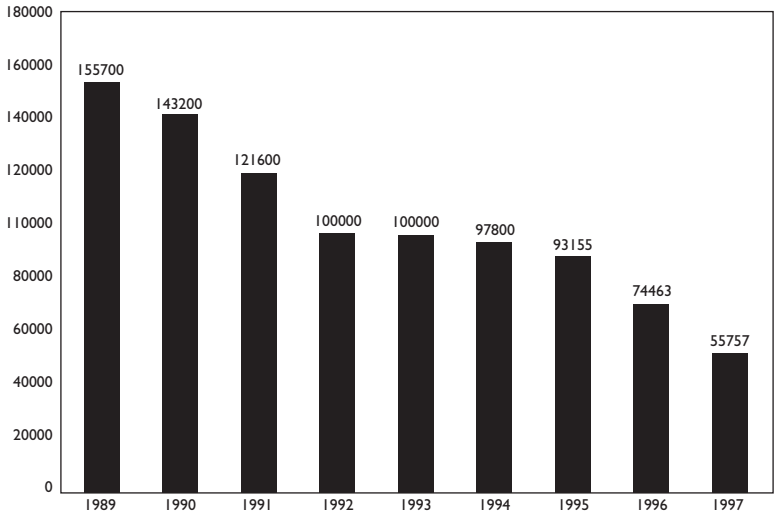

Figure 3.1 Manpower reductions in the Hungarian Defense Forces, 1989–1997.

TABLE 3.2
Size of the Hungarian Defense Forces, 1989–1997

Year	Officers	NCOs	Civilian Employees	Conscripts	Total
1989	17,800	12,700	33,300	91,900	155,700
1990	17,300	12,400	32,500	81,000	143,200
1991	16,800	11,900	27,600	65,300	121,600
1992	14,400	8,500	26,000	51,100	100,000
1993	13,700	8,300	25,660	52,340	100,000
1994	13,100	9,000	24,060	51,640	97,800
1995	13,308	9,603	23,894	46,350	93,155
1996	11,983	9,433	17,115	35,932	74,463
1997	8,634	8,453	11,789	26,881	55,575

government and the top brass agree with this objective, although some worry about the absence of the financial resources required by the more intensive training that must accompany the abbreviated training time.[76] Since 1989, there has been some political pressure for the abolition of mandatory conscription altogether. The present system is not entirely fair, considering that there are more young men in the eighteen-to-twenty-five age-group than the HDF can accommodate, and so thousands are excused from the extremely unpopular military service. The introduction of alternative service in 1990, which includes the possibility of service without arms or at civilian hospitals and charities, has not entirely solved the problem.

Aside from the additional fiscal burden an all-professional army would signify, the availability of qualified soldiers in sufficient numbers is also doubtful. In 1997 the MOD began to recruit professional soldiers because conscripted soldiers, owing to their limited service time, could not discharge many tasks requiring sophisticated skills. So far this project has met with limited success, given the shortage of eligible applicants. In August 1998, for instance, the MOD offered 5,100 contracts, but the number of qualified aspirants was considerably smaller, mainly due to the modest pay.[77] Still, the establishment of a professional army remains the long-term political objective.

There are few impartial reports on the HDF's performance. Following the fall 1994 British-Hungarian joint exercise, held under the aegis of the PFP program, HDF troops received favorable reviews from reliable analysts, although communication problems were widely noted. The four hundred military engineers serving in Bosnia have also been favorably appraised.[78]

Training and Conditions of Military Personnel

The overall poverty of the HDF is duly reflected in the training, living standards, and quality of its personnel. During the communist period, the profession lost its earlier social esteem, despite the above-average pay and benefits of officers and NCOs. As supporters of the communist regime, professional soldiers were despised, and ordinarily only those with no other career alternatives entered the ranks. Since 1989, the profession

has regained little of its lost prestige. First, in real terms the remuneration of military personnel has decreased substantially. Second, the number of career opportunities in the private sector has increased exponentially. Third, the HDF has raised demands on its personnel because of the new doctrine, the accession to NATO with the imperative language acquisition, and the shortened period of conscription. Fourth, as a result of force redistribution, many officers and NCOs have had to resettle, with their families, in distant parts of the country. Consequently, thousands of officers and NCOs have left the service, especially those who possessed qualifications and skills that enabled them to find more lucrative employment in the private sector. These were the individuals the HDF wanted least to lose.

At the same time, there have been some positive changes in the situation of officers and NCOs. First, the military is no longer associated with the WTO, the Soviet Union, and communism. Second, NATO accession brings not only new tasks and obligations but also benefits such as foreign travel and study and the increase in prestige expected from membership in the alliance. Third, the HDF has made a major effort to improve the housing conditions of its officers and NCOs through the sale of MOD-owned apartments on favorable terms. Fourth, the quality of officer and NCO training has improved by virtue of the termination of political indoctrination and an enhanced focus on professional matters.

Still, the living standards of the majority of professional military personnel are extremely low; many live in poverty. Their modest circumstances are especially conspicuous in an increasingly materialistic society and are reflected in the HDF's recruitment problems. Prior to 1989, attracting applicants to military colleges was difficult primarily for political reasons.[79] In the 1990s, in spite of low material rewards, the number of those interested in the occupation has increased. The most important problem has been that of attracting *qualified* applicants. In 1998, for instance, three times as many young men and women applied to the János Bólyai Military Technical College as the institution could accommodate, but after the rigorous academic and physical exams, only 60 percent of the available positions could be filled.[80]

Owing to the HDF's restructuring, hundreds of female civilian employees chose to be reclassified and entered the officer corps rather than

lose their jobs. The training of female officer candidates at military colleges began in 1994. Female candidates generally score higher in their entrance exams to military colleges than their male counterparts.[81] In 1998, the first year in which female officers were graduated, 122 women were sworn in as second lieutenants. As of early 1999, 13 percent of the HDF's professional and contract soldiers were women. Their relative and absolute numbers have been increasing; in 1998 women constituted 5 percent of the officer corps and 23 percent of NCOs.[82] By all accounts, the MOD has been pleased with their performance.

Since 1990 the MOD has succeeded in reforming the system of military education. The top-level postgraduate education of HDF officers at the Miklós Zrínyi National Defense University has been transformed to emulate that of similar institutions in the United States. In military colleges, the training period has increased from three to four years. Curricula have been drastically overhauled to reflect political, societal, and military changes. Courses on Marxism-Leninism have been replaced by a focus on the military's role in democracies, and an emphasis on the Russian language has been supplanted by a stress on Western languages. The military leadership has managed to increase the proportion of civilian instructors and the compatibility of military institutions with mainstream universities and colleges to ease the transition of discharged or retired officers into civilian life. Thanks to the large variety of exchange programs offered by NATO member countries and other democratic states, the education of talented Hungarian officers in the West commenced soon after 1990. According to MOD sources, by 1998 more than a thousand Hungarian officers and NCOs had benefited from some exposure to Western military academies.[83] The main objective of these changes has been to inculcate professional personnel with democratic values and to professionalize their training.

At the same time, the resource-poor MOD has been unable to maintain, let alone improve, the training and preparedness of its troops. Freshly discharged conscripts often lament the amount of time wasted in idleness, which hurts morale. According to one interview, draftees spend more than half of their service time doing nothing, owing to poor organization and the shortage of weapons, ammunition, or fuel.[84] This

observation is easily substantiated by looking at the preparation of Hungarian air force officers, particularly pilots. Reports mention no problems with theoretical instruction, but a host of complaints have been publicly aired regarding the inadequacies of the practical training. There are many aviators who fly no more than 30 hours per year, which is insufficient to maintain already acquired skills, much less to develop them.[85] According to Captain Gyula Vári, one of the forty Hungarian pilots flying MiG-29s, prior to 1989 the average flying time was 100 hours per year, although many pilots routinely flew 120 to 160 hours. In 1991 Vari was still allowed to log in 117 hours, but in 1997, as a result of consistent annual reductions, he was allowed only 63 hours. In 1998 Captain Vári was slated to fly 60 hours, 15 of them as an instructor pilot training a prospective colleague.[86]

Surprisingly, the Hungarian air force has been free of tragedies until recently. The MiG-29 that crashed in July 1998, killing its pilot, was the first major accident in several years. The subsequent investigation concluded that the mishap was caused by pilot error.[87] It is worth mentioning that when former Defense Minister Keleti was asked in February 1998 to comment on the brevity of flying time, especially in contrast to the 120–170 hours flown by many Western air force pilots, Keleti replied that although the average time Hungarian pilots spent in the air had fallen to fewer than 50 hours, dangers to their lives could be minimized by more thorough preparation and ground training.

In order to at least partly alleviate its recruitment and replacement difficulties, the HDF has established several military secondary schools. As of 1999 there are two military high schools, which are expected to produce a fair number of qualified candidates for military colleges. In addition, the MOD operates five secondary schools that train future NCOs. Instruction in all of these institutions has been designed to prepare officers and NCOs for the challenges presented by Hungary's impending NATO membership.

Finally, a few words should be said about the various social problems affecting HDF personnel. Morale has been low among professional soldiers, owing to insufficient remuneration, frequent relocation, and low occupational prestige. The majority of officers come from rural areas and

the lowest income groups of society. Only 1–2 percent of those with an officer or NCO among their family members choose the military profession.[88] Social problems also affect conscripts, among whom drug abuse is reported to be rampant (an average of 35 percent use drugs while on furlough).[89] According to a study of the eleven thousand youths drafted in 1997, fewer than 5 percent were college graduates, and more than 25 percent had no more than eight years of education. Moreover, nearly 40 percent were unemployed prior to entering the armed forces.[90]

Equipment: Procurement and Maintenance

The vast majority of the HDF's weaponry is composed of old and obsolete Soviet-made equipment. According to Keleti, the necessary modernization of the HDF's armaments would require the government's entire annual budget.[91] During the 1990s, given minimal funds for procurement, maintenance and the best utilization of existing resources had to be the HDF's priority.

As far as its principal weapons are concerned, the HDF's main battle-tank fleet is composed of 797 units—597 T-55s (177 in storage) and 200 T-72M1s. The two air force regiments are equipped with 52 MiG-21s, 27 MiG-29s, and 59 Mi-24 attack helicopters. All of these weapons are Soviet-made, and their parts supply has been uneven at best. Since 1989 the HDF's acquisitions have included 100 T-72s from the surplus stock of the Belarusian army, 28 MiG-29s from Russia, more than 200 French Matra air defense missiles, some US-made communications equipment, dozens of Soviet-made BTR-80 armored personnel carriers, and a sizable German donation of arms (including 20 L-39 trainers, aircraft engines, and spare parts) from the arsenal of the former East German air force.

The HDF would have preferred to purchase only Western-made equipment, but it lacked the funds to do so. The reason for the procurement of so many Soviet-made armaments after the dissolution of the WTO is that Russia owed Hungary $1.5 billion, which cash-strapped Moscow chose to pay off with weapons. Hungary would have liked to buy F-16s, but during the Yugoslav War the United States did not allow the sale of advanced arms to countries in the region. Thus Budapest was forced to accept a Soviet offer of 28 MiG-29s in 1993. During the 1990s, Russia paid off

some $800 million in debt with weapons; according to recent reports, the remainder of Moscow's obligations (around $700 million) will be paid off through military and civilian technology.[92]

The close of the 1990s found Hungary actively soliciting bids to modernize its air force equipment. The future purchase of new fighter planes has received a great deal of media attention, but the financial realities of such acquisitions are rarely examined. The cost of the thirty aircraft the MOD has been discussing would be approximately $1.5 billion, whereas the HDF's entire budget for 1997 was $511 million. Despite forecasted increases in defense allocations, the purchase of such expensive weapons seems to be beyond Hungary's means in the near future, especially considering other pressing concerns.

One such urgent task is the modernization of the HDF's vehicle fleet. The majority of jeeps, buses, trucks, and armored personal careers are 1970s vintage, and only one-third of the HDF's entire stock of vehicles is less than ten years old. All in all, more than sixteen thousand vehicles need to be replaced. The MOD has commenced the technical preparation of the Ft-50-billion ($240-million) project, which is expected to be completed in 2003. Because of the types of equipment needed, most of the bids will be won by foreign firms, although the MOD wants at least some of the vehicles to be manufactured in Hungary.[93]

The problems of the HDF's arsenal are compounded by the fact that the country's defense industry did not weather the postcommunist transition well.[94] Although Hungary has never had a robust defense industry, prior to 1990 this sector employed more than thirty thousand people. In the early 1960s the domestic arms industry concentrated on the production of ammunition and military vehicles, but by the late 1980s the emphasis had shifted to relatively modern electronics, 70 percent of which were exported, primarily to WTO states. The industry has yet to fully recover from the loss of over 80 percent of its traditional market since 1990. Since 1996 the small defense industry has become marginally profitable, though it is not competitive in world markets owing to the low technological level of its products.[95] The new defense minister has pegged the development of the arms industry as one of the MOD's major priorities.

Assessment

What does NATO gain by adding Hungary to the alliance? And what are the expected costs and benefits for Hungary itself? The picture that emerges from the foregoing analysis is decidedly mixed.

On the positive side, NATO will have a new member that has been one of the leaders of postcommunist democratization and economic transition in central Europe. Hungary has done a great deal to extricate itself from the post–Warsaw Pact security limbo. It has conducted a constructive foreign policy and devised a new defensive military doctrine. Its campaign for NATO membership has been intensive and consistent and has, by and large, enjoyed popular support. Since 1989 the political and military elites have established civil-military relations suitable for a democracy. Although some shortcomings remain, civilian control of the armed forces appears to be solid. Budapest has repeatedly expressed its willingness to send troops to wherever NATO might need them. This commitment should be qualified, however, owing to the presence of Hungarian ethnic minorities in every one of the country's seven neighbors, which makes sending Hungarian soldiers to them a sensitive issue at best. Hungary's strategic location may be considered both a curse and a blessing for the alliance. It will be a NATO island bordering on no other member state, and it is close to the center of Europe's most volatile region. The very same location, however, might prove quite useful for NATO, as demonstrated by the basing of IFOR/SFOR troops in Hungary since 1996.

At the top of the negative (or "dubious") column is a mighty handicap —the pathetic state of the Hungarian Defense Forces. Since the dissolution of the WTO, the HDF's responsibilities have increased dramatically. To measure up to the challenge, military budgets would have had to be substantially boosted to pay either for an increase in the army's size or for the preferred alternative: the technological modernization of the HDF's arsenal. Given the country's political and economic priorities, the opposite has transpired during the 1990s: year after year, the MOD's budget has decreased considerably, along with its personnel, the preparedness of its officers and men, and its overall strength. For the size of the country and its population, the HDF in 1999 is one of the weakest national military establishments in Europe.

The HDF's obsolete equipment, inadequate supplies, and low-tech training faithfully reflect the low priority Hungary's postcommunist governments have assigned to national defense. The prestige of the military profession is among the lowest in the region; since 1948 the army has been the bailiwick of the incompetent. Hungary's own resources now and in the foreseeable future will be inadequate to drastically alter the HDF's arsenal or the quality of its personnel. The large increases in budgetary outlays necessitated by the HDF's conditions are certain to be extremely unpopular, considering the state's slim resources. Lack of money is by far the biggest part of the HDF's predicament. At the same time, one should not dismiss Hungary's potential for a hostile entanglement with one of its neighbors (Slovakia, Romania, rump-Yugoslavia). To be sure, such an eventuality seems extremely unlikely as of early 1999, and NATO membership is expected to reduce its probability further still.

As the new Hungarian government well recognizes, the next period will be spent in the improvement of the Hungarian military and security apparatus for a smooth transition to NATO.[96] There will be many obstacles to master, ranging from issues of interoperability to language acquisition. The infusion of considerable NATO resources, know-how, and political support is likely to transform Hungary and its armed forces into a valuable asset for the alliance.

Notes

My thanks to Randel Zabel for assistance with the tables.

1. For an excellent review of the debate, see Adam Garfinkle, "NATO Enlargement: What's the Rush?" *National Interest* 46 (Winter 1996–97): 102–111.

2. See *Népszabadság,* 9 and 15 February 1989; *New York Times,* 11 February 1989.

3. See *Dátum,* 3 March 1990. To read General Lajos Morocz's "Katonai doktrínánk föbb tételei" (The major tenets of our defense doctrine) is to read an abridged version of the Soviet defense doctrine without the least pretension of consideration for Hungary's security. See *Magyar Tudomány* 33, no. 11 (November 1988): 833–842.

4. The data on eastern European armed forces come from recent issues of *The Military Balance, 1997–1998* (London: IISS, 1997) and from personal interviews with Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and Romanian diplomats and defense officials. For a recent Hungarian assessment, see *Napi Magyarország,* 6 June 1998.

5. On this issue see, for instance, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Daily Report* (hereafter RFE/RL DR) Part II, 2:147 (3 August 1998).

6. On Csurka and his political views, see Zoltan Barany, "Mass-Elite Relations and the Resurgence of Nationalism in Eastern Europe," *European Security* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 162–181.

7. See László Valki, "Hungary and the Future of European Security," in Stephen J. Blank, ed., *European Security and NATO Enlargement: A View from Central Europe* (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: US Army War College, 1998), 108.

8. Hunter was quoted in the *Wall Street Journal,* 2 January 1997.

9. Alfred A. Reisch, "Central and Eastern Europe's Quest for NATO Membership," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report 2, no. 28 (9 July 1993): 36.

10. *Magyar Hírlap,* 27 May 1995.

11. The sale included twenty-four thousand Kalashnikov assault rifles that had belonged to the disbanded Workers' Guard. See Brigitte Sauerwein, "Defence Adequacy: The Hungarian Defence Forces," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 6, no. 10 (October 1994): 440.

12. Author's interview with Lieutenant Colonel János Szabó (Budapest, May 1993).

13. See the views of Defense Minister György Keleti in *Új Magyarország,* 19 May 1995.

14. This discussion draws on Zoltan Barany and Péter Deák, "The Civil-Military Nexus in Postcommunist Hungary," in Constantine Danopoulos and Daniel Zirker, eds., *The Military and Society in the Former Eastern Bloc* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), 31–50.

15. On this issue, see Péter Deák, "Mi van a katonai viták mögött?" *Beszélö,* 21 September 1991, 9–11.

16. On this issue, see the interview with MOD spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Lajos Erdélyi in *Heti Magyarország,* 2 April 1993; and *Magyar Nemzet,* 19 November 1994.

17. See, for instance, the MOD's "A Magyar Köztársaság biztonságpolitikája" and "A Magyar Köztársaság honvédelmi politikája" on the Worldwide Web (hm.hu/HM/magyar_koztarsasag_vedelempoliti.htm), 1998.

18. In July 1998, parliamentary leaders of the Alliance of Free Democrats once again raised the issue in several press conferences. See, for instance, *Népszabadság,* 27 July 1998.

19. This impression was confirmed during several rounds of interviews the author conducted with high-ranking Romanian and Hungarian military officers and diplomats in Budapest and Bucharest in 1993, 1995, and 1996.

20. Reisch, "Central and Eastern Europe's Quest," 39.

21. RFE/RL DR II, 2:24 (5 February 1998).

22. See Joshua Spero, "The Budapest-Prague-Warsaw Triangle: Central European Security after the Visegrad Summit," *European Security* 1, no. 1 (Spring

1992): 58–83; and Zoltan Barany, "Visegrad Four Contemplate Separate Paths," *Transition* 1, no. 14 (11 August 1995): 56–59.

23. See, for instance, *Pesti Hírlap,* 8–9 January 1994; and *Új Magyarország,* 19 May 1995.

24. See *Magyar Nemzet,* 6 June 1998.

25. Zoltan Barany, *Soldiers and Politics in Eastern Europe, 1945–1990* (London: Macmillan, 1993), 132–133.

26. Reuters dispatch (Paris), 20 November 1990.

27. See *Népszabadság,* 21 February 1990. For commentary, see Miklós Szabó, "Improvizáció—a NATO tag Magyarországról," *Beszelö,* 3 March 1990.

28. See an interview with Lawrence Eagleburger, and a NATO spokesman's statement, in *Népszabadság,* 22 February 1990; and reports of the Budapest visit of West German Defense Minister Gerhard Stoltenberg, *Népszabadság,* 12 July 1990.

29. See Jeffrey Simon, "Post-Enlargement NATO: Dangers of 'Failed Suitors' and Need for a Strategy," in Stephen J. Blank, ed., *From Madrid to Brussels: Perspectives of NATO Enlargement* (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: US Army War College, 1997), 31.

30. Author's interview with Zoltán Martínusz, head of the Department of NATO Affairs at the Hungarian Ministry of Defense (Budapest, May 1998).

31. On this issue, see Thomas S. Szayna and F. Stephen Larrabee, *East European Military Reform after the Cold War: Implications for the United States* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 1995).

32. See, for instance, Christian Haerpfer, Clair Wallace, and Richard Rose, *Public Perceptions of Threats to Security in Post-Communist Europe* (Glasgow: CSPP/University of Strathclyde, 1997).

33. *Népszabadság,* 26 February 1997.

34. RFE/RL DR II, 1:155 (7 November 1997).

35. *Népszava,* 29 August 1997.

36. See *The Economist,* 15 November 1997, 54.

37. *Világgazdaság,* 9 October 1997.

38. See, for instance, *Új Magyarország,* 30 October 1997.

39. *Népszabadság,* 8 April 1998 and 12 November 1998.

40. See Árpád Göncz, "The Least Expensive Way to Guarantee Security," *Transitions* 4, no. 7 (December 1997): 19.

41. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Christopher Jones, "NATO Enlargement: Brussels as the Heir of Moscow," *Problems of Post-Communism* 45, no. 4 (July–August 1998): 44–55.

42. RFE/RL DR II, 1:128 (30 September 1997).

43. RFE/RL DR II, 2:142 (27 July 1998).

44. Author's interviews with defense officials (Budapest, May 1998).

45. This section draws on Zoltan Barany, "Democratic Consolidation and the Military: The East European Experience," *Comparative Politics* 30, no. 1 (October 1997): 21–44.

46. See János Szabó, "Hadsereg és civil ellenörzés," *Társadalmi Szemle* 50, no. 4 (April 1995): 68–76.

47. See Zoltan Barany, "Civil-Military Relations in Comparative Perspective," *Political Studies* 41, no. 4 (December 1993): 605.

48. See the interview with former State Secretary of Defense Rudolf Joó in *A honvédelem négy éve, 1990–1994* (Budapest: Zrínyi, 1994), 164.

49. *Ibid.,* 38–47.

50. See, for instance, *Napi Magyarország,* 6 June 1998; author's interviews with MOD officials (Budapest, May 1998); and *A honvédelem négy éve,* 178.

51. Author's interview with Zoltán Martínusz.

52. See, for instance, *Magyar Nemzet,* 8 October 1993; and Reuters (Budapest), 9 October 1993.

53. *Magyar Hírlap,* 26 February 1998; and RFE/RL DR, 2:39 (26 February 1998).

54. See Barany, *Soldiers and Politics,* 119–122.

55. On this issue, see *Népszabadság* (Budapest), 29 October 1990; *Magyar Nemzet* (Budapest), 3 November 1990; and Endre Sík, "The Vulture and the Calamity (Or, Why Were Hungarian Taxi Drivers Able to Rebel?)," in János Mátyás Kovács, ed., *Transition to Capitalism? The Communist Legacy in Eastern Europe* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, 1994), 275–289.

56. See, for instance, *Pesti Hírlap,* 7–8 May 1994.

57. *Magyar Hírlap,* 17 July 1998.

58. Author's interviews with MOD officials (Budapest, May 1998).

59. See, for instance, the interviews with Imre Mécs and Tamás Wachsler in *A honvédelem négy éve,* 174–178.

60. The pattern of inexperience was not broken under Keleti's term either; his deputy for political affairs (in the rank of state secretary), István Fodor, was a veterinarian.

61. *Honvédelmi ismeretek* (Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1984), 76.

62. See *Szabadon választott: Parlamenti almanach, 1990* (Budapest: IPKV, 1990), 225.

63. MOD, Heti Sajtóösszefoglaló, 1998/44 (3 July 1998), www.h-m.hu/HM/cron/1998/19980703.html.

64. Author's interview with Zoltán Martínusz.

65. See Sauerwein, "Defence Adequacy," 438.

66. See *Los Angeles Times,* 4 November 1990; and *Financial Times,* 5 November 1990.

67. See *Magyar Hírlap,* 4 May 1998.

68. See, for instance, *Népszabadság,* 12 March 1997.

69. *Wall Street Journal,* 2 January 1997.

70. See, for example, *Új Magyarország,* 19 May 1995.

71. *Népszabadság,* 26 February 1997.

72. For results of the recent accounting probe of the air force, see *Népszabadság,* 21 July 1998.

73. *Magyar Honvéd,* 1 October 1993.
74. *Népszava,* 8 March 1997.
75. See *A honvédelem négy éve,* 71–78.
76. See *Népszabadság,* 4 April 1998; *Népszava,* 3 July 1998; *Magyar Hírlap,* 7 August 1998.
77. *Magyar Hírlap,* 7 August 1998.
78. *Die Süddeutsche Zeitung,* 3 December 1994; *Wall Street Journal,* 2 January 1997.
79. On this issue, see Zoltan Barany, "Military Higher Education in Hungary," *Armed Forces and Society* 15, no. 3 (Spring 1989): 371–389.
80. *Magyar Hírlap,* 28 July 1998.
81. See *Magyar Hírlap,* 28 July 1998.
82. *Magyar Nemzet,* 10 August 1998.
83. On this issue see, for instance, Captain Marybeth Peterson Ulrich, "When East Meets West: Fostering Democracy in Postcommunist States," *Airpower Journal* 9 (Special Edition 1995): 4–16.
84. *A honvédelem négy éve,* 69.
85. *Népszabadság,* 21 July 1998.
86. *Magyar Nemzet,* 29 July 1998.
87. *Magyar Hírlap,* 28 July 1998.
88. See the interview with military sociologist János Szabó in *Népszabadság,* 2 August 1993.
89. *Népszabadság,* 21 April 1998; *Magyar Hírlap,* 4 August 1998.
90. *Népszabadság,* 14 February 1997.
91. *Magyar Nemzet,* 15 October 1994.
92. RFE/RL DR II, 1:153 (5 November 1997).
93. *Magyar Hírlap,* 13 March 1998.
94. See for instance, *Heti Magyarország,* 7 January 1994.
95. See *Magyar Hírlap,* 12 November 1997 and 21 April 1998.
96. See the interview with Foreign Minister Martonyi, *Magyar Nemzet,* 6 June 1998.