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The Challenges of the 21st Century from the Perspective of Defence and Security Administration in Hungary

Abstract

The protection of Hungary, the maintaining and development of national security and the enforcement of its related interests, the manageability of the diverse and complex challenges and threats of the 21st century's security environment, coordinated preparation against natural and civilisational events, as well as offensive behaviours based on human actions, and the enhancement of general national resilience are of paramount importance. The Hungarian defence and security administration bodies and institutions had to face many new or unprecedented challenges in the 21st century, such as major floods, the 'red mud' disaster, the Covid–19 pandemic, or the refugee crisis generated by the Russo–Ukrainian war that is still affecting us today. These challenges brought about essential reforms in the domestic defence and security sector, which has fundamentally changed during the 21st century.

Keywords: *defence and security administration, Covid–19 pandemic, Russo–Ukrainian war, coordinated defence activity, gradual crisis management, national economy mobilisation*

Introduction

The past decades have brought many changes to our daily lives and routines, which, though not necessarily unimaginable, were clearly new phenomena due to their unpredictable form, intensity and diversification. The nature of conflicts and hazards has also changed considerably, although the basic structuring principle still stems from Clausewitz's basic tenet, namely that the purpose of the use of state violence is

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intended to force our opponents to fulfil our own will, from which it follows that the purpose of war, which is the use of force to achieve a goal, and the political character of the use of force itself continue to play an important role nowadays as well.² In the modern era, however, the Grotius principle, which holds that in the event of war, both parties must act fairly, i.e. in accordance with international law,³ is increasingly being pushed into the background, as the use of cyber tools, autonomous weapons and artificial intelligence in warfare begins to blur ethical boundaries.⁴

After the millennium, extreme weather conditions,⁵ overpopulation and the illegal mass immigration, the unprecedented Covid pandemic and the refugee crisis in Hungary following the outbreak of the Russo–Ukrainian war in 2022 have brought us challenges that have increasingly focused on the adequacy of national regulations and national resilience. This quarter of a century has generated fundamental changes in the management of emergencies, but at the same time has prompted legislators to essentially reform defence administration. The participation in the annual crisis management exercises as a NATO member since 1999 has reinforced the need to develop a national crisis response system in line with the NATO crisis response system⁶ in the field of operations within the bodies of the defence administration. This need stemmed not only from practical experience but also from the processing of NATO's crisis response measures and the need for their national adaptation. By coordinating government tasks in the field of crisis response and processing them up to the level of the territorial defence administration, the central body of the defence administration has been carrying out a decisive activity for the future. In a system of national defence, defence preparation aimed at the complex use of civilian and military capabilities and the concentrated provision of available resources. Accordingly, the defence preparedness events planned and implemented in the early 2000s focused on modelling the tasks to be addressed through civilian and military cooperation. In my experience, in the course of emergency management and sectoral coordination, there was an increasing need to develop and keep up-to-date reliable databases as time progressed. Whether in the event of a refugee crisis or flood protection, these databases would be the primary support of the defence committees. I reckon it would be worth considering the development and use of a self-designed and self-contained design module based on artificial intelligence. This should be designed in such a way that all other hazards of the use of artificial intelligence are taken into account and used strictly for legal interpretation, database management and intervention planning, i.e. only in the pre-decision function.

² BODA 2024a: 57.

³ BODA 2023: 222–224.

⁴ See BODA 2024b.

⁵ These include the great floods of Bereg-Tisza in 2001, the Danube in 2002 and the Danube and Tisza in 2006, and the red mud disaster in 2010. Among the measures taken by the Government, it was essential, although it was not linked to a special legal situation, but primarily in the event of a disaster or catastrophe, the Government could order the simultaneous use of civil protection organisations and arrange for the involvement of the Hungarian Defence Forces and law enforcement agencies. See KESZELY et al. 2025: 62.

⁶ For more details see www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/crisis-management

Events and actions that led to the changes

In the context of the terrorist attack against the United States of America on 11 September 2001, the Resolution of the National Assembly,⁷ issued separately in the course of the implementation of its 2001 defence preparation tasks, ordered the introduction of protection measures in Hungary. In several points of the Resolution, the security management tasks and regulations, the implementation of which was the responsibility of the various sectoral bodies, were laid down separately. With these specific security tasks and regulations in addition to the sectoral leaders involved, the County and Capital Defence Committees under the responsibility of its presidents, the respective action plans have been completed. The above-mentioned Resolution also confirmed that national defence tasks must be carried out in accordance with the National Defence Act in force and its implementing decree. This document formed the basis for further preparation of national tasks in the fight against terrorism.

On the other hand the planned exercises, conducted under the leadership of the Minister of Defence in September–October 2003, focused on the review of national tasks and the modelling of the implementation of the NATO Article 5 crisis, in line with the defence and security challenges of the period. The objectives of the highly important System Exercise focused on potential crisis situations affecting the Republic of Hungary, examining the applicability of the legislation in force in crisis situations, analysing the decision-making processes of government crisis management, influencing the activities of crisis management organisations and providing the resources necessary for crisis management tasks, and examining the possibilities for their activation.⁸

Since 2002, new changes have been introduced at the level of territorial defence administration. Basic operational issues are laid down in legislation. Of great importance was Resolution No. 2073/2004 (IV. 15) on the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Hungary. As part of the amendment to the Constitution, the scope of classified periods has been extended to include the situation of preventive protection.⁹

As mentioned above, NATO and then the EU membership have also given rise to new responsibilities: planning of national receiving assistance, national crisis response system, civil emergency planning, protection of critical infrastructure elements and complex and concentrated use of national economic resources necessary for the implementation of national defence missions. One of the most important areas of the complex system of defence administration was the mobilisation of economic resources and securing them in a given exceptional situation. Almost a decade of professional experience and development led to the publication of Government Decree 131/2003 (VIII. 22.) on regulating the implementation of the tasks of preparing and mobilising the national economy in the field of defence. The new legislation abandoned the previous approach, which applied only to the war period, taking

⁷ See Resolution No. 62/2001 of the National Assembly (IX. 25.) on the foreign and security policy measures taken by the Republic of Hungary following the terrorist attacks on the United States of America.

⁸ BAÁN et al. 2014: 26–28.

⁹ On 1 January 2005, the category of special legal orders was extended to include the situation of preventive protection. In principle, the dichotomy of war and peace is not broken, it is only intended to avoid an escalation of war. See more in JAKAB–TILL 2023.

into account changes in security and defence challenges, dynamic developments in the ownership and content of the economy.¹⁰ However several changes have taken place in preparation for economic mobilisation in the decades since NATO and EU accession. At the same time, we still do not have an up-to-date database of strategic capacities or products, services or real estate falling within the scope of economic material services.¹¹

At 12:25 on 4 October 2010 the largest ecological disaster in Hungary's history occurred from the perspective of the defence administration. This event took place on the territory of MAL Ltd. (Hungarian abbreviation in English: Hungarian Aluminium Producer and Trading Ltd.). As a result of the breaking of the dam of the 10th sludge reservoir cassette, the mixture of about 800,000 m³ of red mud and strongly acidic water flooded parts of the settlements of Kolontár, Devecser and Somlóvásárhely through the Tarna stream, then went down the river Marcal in the direction of the rivers Rába and Danube. Directly the area covered by the acidic mud was three hectares in Kolontár, seven hectares in Devecser, one hectare in Somlóvásárhely and about a thousand hectares on the outskirts. The number of victims of the incident was ten. This civilisational catastrophe required special treatment, because MAL Ltd. was not sufficiently prepared for a catastrophe like this, although simulations had been carried out for such an event, they did not account for a scenario that would have serious consequences.¹²

It was not a domestic event, but the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 fundamentally changed our vision of international security. The rapid and precise military action was followed by a referendum on the affiliation of the peninsula, in which the people of Crimea decided by a large majority to join the Russian Federation from 18 March 2014. Of course, the result of the referendum was not accepted by the UN, but in any case, with this step, the Russians wanted to legally justify the annexation of the Crimean peninsula, which, according to their narrative, was done in order to protect the people of Russian nationality living there.¹³ The Covid pandemic also brought a completely new situation to the public administration, as the measures to be introduced and the tasks to be carried out were largely unknown and it was difficult if not impossible to predict the possible outcomes, so first the establishment of a legislative framework would have been necessary¹⁴ to avoid the use of 'ad hoc' solutions, bearing in mind that in this way the decision-making processes linked to the crisis can be established and practiced well in advance.¹⁵ Yet, due to its novelty, intensity and scale of spread, the pandemic forced those involved in the defence to use immediate, 'ad hoc' solutions. Government Resolution No. 1101/2020 (III. 14.) was

¹⁰ BAÁN et al. 2014: 37.

¹¹ An important element of defence and security planning is the Country's Coordinated Defence Plan, compiled in accordance with Decree 400/2022. (X. 21.). The government decree defined and described the principles, monitoring and evaluation criteria of the planning, as well as the rules governing the planning document.

¹² MUHORAY-PAPP 2013.

¹³ POLI-CANDURA 2023.

¹⁴ For example see Government Resolution No. 1012/2020 (I. 31.) on the establishment of an Operational Staff for the Protection against the Coronavirus Epidemic; Government Decree No. 297/2020 (IV. 24.) on the establishment and tasks of the Economic Protection Operational Staff; Government Resolution No. 1088/2022 (II. 24.) on the National Security Operational Team.

¹⁵ KÁDÁR 2024b: 270.

ordered to revitalise the functioning of the state organisations and to ensure effective protection against the coronavirus by setting up 11 action groups.¹⁶

The territorial defence administration has performed remarkably in protecting against the Covid pandemic, playing an essential role in the organisation of local protection and in the implementation of centrally issued measures at county and local levels. It is not an exaggeration to say that it was also a measure of the overall defence system in the management of the epidemic. It seems necessary to highlight the fact that there was a need to implement much more improvisation in the management of the epidemic at central level than at territorial level; it can also be concluded from this that the basic operation of the system in the county dimensions should not have been significantly modified, since it was possible to operate efficiently even with the existing control chains. Adequate knowledge of the competences of territorial defence committees and their proper application played a key role in the protection system as a whole, as certain protection and preparatory activities by the authorities cannot be carried out without them. On the one hand, the military organisations involved in the defence need to know what they can expect from the authorities of the territorial administration, what time and technical content they can expect to be implemented. Of course, it would be neither appropriate nor justified for the forces to take over the tasks delegated to the administration or the territorial defence committees. Secondly, however, it is essential that territorial administrations should actually be able to carry out the defence-relevant administrative work expected of them at the appropriate level and in a timely manner, without which the military capabilities of the forces as a whole cannot be used effectively – in extreme cases, we may even have to take into account the complete inability of defence capabilities.¹⁷

While during the Covid pandemic the territorial defence secretariats largely supported public health tasks in addition to normal operations, organised vaccinations, coordinated vaccine deliveries and decontamination tasks, there was also a need to rely heavily on the local knowledge of the secretariats and their contacts with mayors and local notabilities; it was necessary not only to organise the provision of the premises, but also to inform the public, which was not necessarily the task of the secretariats so far; despite the fact that the territorial and local governance of defence lies with the defence committees and mayors under the leadership of the chairs of the defence committees.¹⁸

In many cases, during the pandemic crisis management, it was demonstrated that the liaison and coordinating role of the territorial bodies of the defence and security administration had also increased, which was not only an interposed management element, but, on the contrary, had become the driving force and organiser of defence

¹⁶ For more details see Government Resolution No. 1101/2020 (III. 14.) on further measures to protect against coronavirus. The 11 LAGs established by the Government Resolution: Coronavirus Education Action Group, Mobile Epidemic Hospital Action Group, Hungarian Enterprise Safety Action Group, International Coordination Action Group, Communication Action Group, Extraordinary Rule of Law Action Group, Coronavirus Financial Action Group, Economic Reset Action Group, Coronavirus Research Action Group, Border Control Action Group, Volunteering Action Group. As a result, the LAGs were able to perform their tasks in almost all areas of damage control or restoration to normal operation in the future.

¹⁷ KÁDÁR 2024a: 20.

¹⁸ MUHORAY 2019: 117.

at the territorial level, connecting the administrative bodies – also supporting the coordination between the county leaders –, the specialised institutions, the police forces and the disaster management forces, in order to make the whole of the government's defence as effective as possible.

After the pandemic, the defence and security administration system had to face another challenge. In the context of the refugee crisis caused by the Russo–Ukraine war in February 2022, it has been necessary to carry out complex tasks¹⁹ that have not yet been experienced, albeit with a decreasing intensity over time. Even the central defence administration bodies and the protection secretariats at the regional level have had and still need to have refugee coordination responsibilities. This activity, which is additional to but more complex than the performance of civil protection tasks, includes supporting the accommodation, care and possible medical treatment of refugees, managing or contributing to job-seeking matters, and even organising the nursery and school services of refugee minors, tasks which are already transferred to the sphere of immigration, employment and social services. It should be pointed out that it is not a question of specialised institutions not operating or operating in the right framework, but of territorial defence secretariats at county level having to connect the parties involved as a result of the outbreak of the refugee crisis, guide the incoming refugee through the relevant institutions and then provide care and accommodation, all because protection and care systems were significantly overstretched.

A comprehensive change

The experience of dealing with the previously detailed catastrophic events since the turn of the millennium and the evolution of cooperation between organisations involved in defence administration have also helped to improve the system, while the ninth amendment to the Fundamental Law of Hungary brought about a comprehensive change. The new emergency situations that appeared in various forms and intensity made the previous classical approach, which relied exclusively on law enforcement agencies and the Hungarian Defence Forces, obsolete. Defence systems had to be built and operated with the involvement of the entire government, society and international cooperation, which required a great deal of reliance on the effective performance of tasks by territorial defence committees and mayors.²⁰ This process was implemented by transforming the previous defence administration system into defence and security administration.²¹ Changes in the security environment have increased the importance of non-military dimensions of security in recent decades. The problem is further compounded by the fact that challenges affecting multiple

¹⁹ See further in this regard Act XLII of 2022 on the prevention and management of the consequences in Hungary of armed conflict and humanitarian disaster in the neighbouring country.

²⁰ MUHORAY 2019: 113.

²¹ See more in KÁDÁR 2022.

disciplines often arise simultaneously, without any time separation, which poses a major challenge to defence and security administration.²²

In addition to previous threats, especially before the change of regime, which were mostly of a military nature, the emergence of new types of security-threatening factors, mostly affecting disaster management competence, has led to the need to introduce the term 'all-hazards approach'. We must therefore take a comprehensive approach to the threat situations and the effective protection against them can be achieved through government control and the effective functioning of defence and security administration.²³

From a security and defence management approach, events whose adverse consequences are addressed through civil protection are referred to as priority security risks, challenges, peacetime crises, natural hazards, major accidents, intentional incidents, disasters, and, in the case of a qualified situation, emergencies.²⁴

Many governmental and non-governmental bodies are involved in addressing threats in a comprehensive manner. Comprehensively addressing the threats to our security therefore requires a whole-of-government approach, in line with which it is essential to enhance close and effective cooperation and coordination between institutions in charge of crisis management, strengthening their overall frameworks that can adapt to the security environment. Successful action also requires coordinated and focused use of government and sectoral resources.²⁵

Hungary's 2020 National Security Strategy²⁶ took into account the deteriorating trend of the global security situation and the gradual deterioration of the characteristics of our security environment in the 2020 decade and it later turned out to be a perfectly correct assumption.

It has focused on prevention, resilience and the ability to respond quickly and decisively to challenges, and has also taken action to shape these capabilities across government and policy.²⁷

We can think that the emergencies of recent years that have affected our country as well, be it the containment of the illegal influx of refugees on our southern border, the Covid pandemic or the management of the refugee crisis arising from the Russian–Ukrainian war, have shown the participants in the defence that, due to the build-up of events, the emergence of one basic problem generates another in

²² Just think about the complexity of the protection that had to be implemented after the outbreak of the Covid pandemic in Hungary. Government Decree No. 40/2020 (III. 11.) of 2020 declaring the state of emergency 'In order to avert the consequences of the human epidemic causing mass morbidity endangering life and property and to protect the health and life of Hungarian citizens, the Hungarian Government declared a state of emergency for the entire territory of Hungary in accordance with its powers under Article 53(1) of the Fundamental Law. Many other sectors have also been strongly affected by this fundamental health crisis. Panic purchases forced official prices to be introduced for several products, the purchase of medical protective equipment became cumbersome, curfews came into effect, schools switched to online education. Even the functioning of the public administration has been fundamentally changed by the epidemic, just think about the difficulties of personal administration or the need to extend the expiring permits. This emergency necessitated unprecedented measures.

²³ MUHORAY 2021b: 15.

²⁴ MUHORAY 2021a: 7.

²⁵ See more in Resolution No. 2073/2004 (IV. 15) on the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Hungary (NBS2), Resolution No. 1035/2012 (II. 21.) on the National Security Strategy of Hungary (NBS3).

²⁶ See Resolution No. 1163/2020 (IV. 21.) on the National Security Strategy of Hungary (NBS4).

²⁷ CSIKI-VARGA – TÁLAS 2020: 112.

another specialty. Undoubtedly, the ninth amendment to the Fundamental Law and the reform of the defence and security administration in 2022 were decisive milestones in the management of emergencies. The reform is linked to the introduction of the concept of war emergency in the tenth amendments to the Fundamental Law and the previous amendment Articles 2, 4, 6, 9 and 11 thereof entered into force on 1 November 2022.²⁸

The other major change was brought by the fifteenth amendments. One of these changes is that coordinated defence activities, if the conditions for ordering them are met, can also be ordered during a special legal order. The other change affects the extraordinary powers of the Government. According to the provisions entering into force in 2026, the Government declares a state of war or a state of emergency following its initiative or in a special legal order promulgated, in order to guarantee the life, health, personal, property and legal security of citizens and the stability of the national economy, it may, by decree, suspend the application of certain laws, derogate from statutory provisions, and take extraordinary measures. It is also a new provision that the special legal order of the Government Act or Act enacting a provision of law may not derogate from or suspend the effects of a law or statutory provision, and repealed legislation, legal provision in force may not order its maintenance or re-entry into force. Compared to the ninth amendment to the Fundamental Law, both of these new rules weaken, restrict the powers of the Government and may slow down decision-making.²⁹

The reforms were a quasi-prerequisite for the ninth amendment of the Fundamental Law, after which it was possible to create a new paradigm that is coordinated and uses experience, the cornerstone of which is Act XCIII of 2021 on the coordination of defence and security activities. The key to the reform was therefore the coordination of laws and governance systems that sometimes set conflicting or contradictory protocols in defence. This change was made possible by the ninth amendment to the Fundamental Law of Hungary, which essentially made the special legal regulation more transparent and clear. The former 6 special legal orders were reduced to 3: State of war, state of emergency and emergency situation. Act XCIII can be considered a milestone, as so far there has been a unique shift from different and divergent legislation on defence and security to a harmonised legislation that takes into account the experience of recent years. Act XCIII represented a new field in the Hungarian defence, state and legal science system. Its novelty touched on three new dimensions in addition to the 'coordination'. On the one hand, it has created a new regulatory and institutional framework that has so far been lacking in the system of defence management. On the other hand, it has made up for the materially missing elements of the previous legislation. Thirdly, it absorbed the defence administration with the law enforcement administration effectively creating the so-called whole-of-government level.

²⁸ For more details see Ninth Amendment to the Fundamental Law of Hungary: <https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2020-9-04-00>, and Tenth Amendment to the Fundamental Law of Hungary: <https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2022-10-04-00>. On the other hand we ought to also highlight the 15 amendments to the Fundamental Law, which entered into force in January 2026. According to this provision, the Government will need the authorisation of the National Assembly not only to prolong the state of emergency, but also to suspend laws or derogate from the provisions of the law. See <https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2025-15-04-00>

²⁹ KÁDÁR 2025.

With the adoption of Act XCIII the aim has been achieved that by preparing the national economy, by providing the necessary conditions in a mobilisation situation, the defence and security organisations and the functioning of the country's public administration system, the basic care of the citizens and, last but not least, the functioning of society and the national economy should be smooth and flawless.

However, it is important to note that the benefits of these principles can only be properly exploited if their guarantees are built into the various processes. The heads of the organisations concerned, the defence and security officers and, through their control powers, the central body of the defence and security administration can also play a significant role in ensuring this.³⁰

Summary

It can be said that the defence and security administration can perform its basic tasks effectively and in the current geopolitical situation only if it is able to make the necessary decisions in possession of relevant data at the territorial and county level, as well as to coordinate and support the work of the professional organisations involved in defence. It is also necessary to prepare for the future management of crisis situations that have not been experienced so far, or that do not appear with such intensity and frequency, and which may be fundamentally different from the Covid pandemic or the refugee crisis caused by the Russian–Ukrainian war, while protection will require the existence of a territorially structured, up-to-date database that can not only improve the effectiveness of interventions or coordination, but also extend the role of those involved in protection horizontally.

In terms of significance, non-kinetic attacks can be equally dangerous for the functioning of defence and security administration. Just think of the fact that databases, communication and even an emergency plan are available in electronic form, in a world, in a cyber environment where a traditional computer or smart device with a general internet access provides almost no protection. The examples provided elucidate that, despite the technical developments started in recent years, the resilience of the territorial and county bodies of the defence and security administration could be extended and unified, firstly by extending the accessibility and editing of the existing professional databases for the staff of the territorial defence secretariats, and secondly by creating and keeping up to date a new, so-called territorially connected database. Based on the examples, I wanted to draw attention to the fact that such a complex database and the associated decision-making protocol, even with the support of artificial intelligence – which could be used solely for situational and legislative analysis and interpretation – would greatly improve the territorial and, consequently, the overall national defence capabilities.

³⁰ FARKAS 2024: 8.

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