

VETERANSKI IMPERATIV DANES

VETERANS IMPERATIVE TODAY

Povzetek Obramba domovine, države in naroda je bila in ostaja brezčasna in univerzalna vrednota, saj poleg obstoja zagotavlja tudi varnost. Obrambne sisteme predstavljajo in gradijo posamezniki, ki so pripravljeni za varnost drugih zastaviti vse, tudi svoja življenja, zato bi lahko pričakovali dostojno in spoštljivo obravnavo vseh, ki so znotraj obrambnega sistema aktivno delovali za varnost drugih. In vendar ni tako! Zaradi odsotnosti velikih varnostnih izzivov in oblikovanja zgodovinskega spomina prav obrambni sistemi doživljajo velike proračunske reze. Med njimi so predvsem tisti, ki za sistem niso več nujni, to so veteranske organizacije. Takšno ravnanje lahko negativno vpliva na vrednote v sistemu, sproži upadanje pozitivne podobe, načenja obstoj vojaške identitete ter končno povzroči zmanjšanje bojne morale. Če upoštevamo, da so prav veteranske organizacije most med civilnim in vojaškim okoljem, ki lahko pomembno prispeva k razumevanju nalog obrambnega sistema, bi bilo nujno negovati naš odnos do veteranov in njihovih organizacij. V takšnem stanju se vse prevečkrat ustvarjajo okoliščine, ko so veterani potisnjeni na družbeni rob.

Ključne besede *Vojak, veteran, oborožene sile, obrambni sistem, vrednote.*

Abstract Defence of the homeland, country and nation has always been, and still is, a universal value ensuring both existence and security. Defence systems are represented and created by individuals who are ready to put everything at risk, even their own lives, in order to ensure the security of others. Therefore one would expect that all those who were actively involved in providing security for others within the defence system would be treated with honour and respect. Unfortunately there are many examples where this is not so! In the absence of great security challenges, and with the creation of historical memory, defence system budgets are being severely cut. In this process veteran organizations are recognized as a non-vital element of defence systems. Such acts lead to an erosion of values within defence systems, and do a

great deal of damage to the positive image and the existence of military identity, and, finally, contribute to declining combat morale. Added to these facts is also the unique position of all veteran organizations in acting as a bridge between the civilian and military environments, and as a facilitator to understanding the functions of the defence system. It is therefore not only proper to support them, but also necessary. More and more examples show that veterans are being pushed to the verge of modern society and ingloriously left behind.

Key words *Soldier, veteran, armed forces, defence system, values.*

Introduction What all defence systems around the world have in common is the defence of the state and its citizens, which is carried out on the basis of institutionalized, systemically organized and centralized activities under an executive power. The existence of the national security system, part of which is the defence system, enables the existence and functioning of the state, in which national authorities have a monopoly on the use of force, and, in exchange, they provide security to the citizens at both national and individual levels. Its functions are defined within the obligations arising from various alliances, which often extend beyond the national framework.

Every social system is based on people, who enable its existence and functioning through their actions. The same applies to defence systems, whose basic building blocks are soldiers. However, a defence system is distinctly different in its specifics from other social systems. A particularly prominent specific is the force individuals have at their disposal, with the extreme purpose of taking their opponents' lives. In addition, each member of the armed forces must understand the level of risk to their own lives, and take into consideration the possibility of losing their lives during the performance of their functions. For this reason defence systems have precisely defined rules regulating interpersonal relationships, which are based on clear rules, two of which are especially important for military organizations, namely the unity of command and subordination.¹ In addition, the conduct of members of the armed

¹ *The Slovenian Armed Forces are organized hierarchically in a way that enables effective, proper and flexible leadership and command. The superior-subordinate relationship is the essential element of leadership and command. The organization of the command establishes superiors and subordinates according to the principle of the unity of command. All military personnel must know at all times who they are subordinate to, and what their powers are. Clearly defined relationships regarding the command are absolutely necessary for the execution of any order. Effective organization of command according to the principle of subordination provides every commander with the maximum freedom possible in the fulfilment of the duties under their authority. This enables the development of their responsibility, initiative and independence. Superiors are obliged to provide to subordinates information relating to the performance of tasks in the extent necessary (Rules on Service in the Slovenian Armed Forces, Official Gazette No. 84/2009).*

forces is regulated by other internal rules, including the rules on service² and military codes³, as well as the legal norms of nation states and provisions of international humanitarian and military law⁴. The goal of all limitations and guidelines regarding the conduct of members of the armed forces is control over the potential use of force, and the setting of standards governing their conduct within and outside the system. According to Južnič (1993, p. 306), soldiers and officers are in the service of defending and looking after the interests of a state, and they must completely identify with it. For this reason, military service is the most distinct public service, where national and military identities intertwine. National identity is closely linked to space, which defines the living space of a nation and, indirectly, also its characteristics. The foundation of military identity is also the living space which must be defended. Even though efforts are being made nowadays to put the understanding of military identity in connection with national identity in perspective, I maintain that the relation between the two identities has in no way changed, despite some new functions and forms of the manning of units. What is more, defence systems of modern states are based on those foundations, and are consequently effective in their performance of their functions. On the other hand, relativizing the foundations undermines the most important basis of the military organization; a process we have witnessed in the Slovenian Armed Forces⁵, which suffers identity under-representation in core elements. One would expect a complementarity of military and civil values, but there is a growing gap between them. According to public opinion polls, there are no identical values to be found among the core values listed in the Military Code of Ethics of the Slovenian Armed Forces. Based on that, the conclusion can be drawn that military values do not reflect civil values, which would significantly increase the possibility of understanding of the military system, its necessity and its functions. Veteran organisations, which are indirectly linked to the military system, share a similar fate.

² *The Rules on Service in the Slovenian Armed Forces (hereinafter: the Rules on Service) regulate the rights and duties of military personnel during military service, their code of conduct during military service, relationships, order in facilities used by the Slovenian Armed Forces, work and internal services, guard service and alarm systems, and military ceremonies and mourning. During war, the Rules on Service are applied in accordance with the war situation and the Rules on Combat Operations of the Slovenian Armed Forces. The Rules on Service apply to all personnel performing military service in the Slovenian Armed Forces (Rules on Service in the Slovenian Armed Forces, Official Gazette No. 84/2009).*

³ *During military service, members of the Slovenian Armed Forces must comply with the Military Code of Ethics of the Slovenian Armed Forces (hereinafter: the Code), which is the code of the Slovenian Armed Forces as a military organization. The primary purpose of the Code is to ensure that all members of the Slovenian Armed Forces perform their military service with honour and in accordance with ethnic guidelines and principles set out in the Code. Members of the Slovenian Armed Forces must comply with and follow this Code throughout their performance of military service in the Republic of Slovenia and abroad (Military Code of Ethics of the Slovenian Armed Forces, Official Gazette No. 52/2009).*

⁴ *The provisions of the international law of war are based on international treaties, and represent limitations to the use of force, the protection of vulnerable groups, and rules on the conduct of combatants during the conduct of operations. Compliance with these provisions is obligatory, and represents an upgrade of the national legal order for states and their armed forces (Jogan, 1997, p. 3).*

⁵ *The five basic identity elements are: defence of the state, clearly defined patriotism, respect for authority, strict compliance with international war and humanitarian law, and high ethical and moral standards (Prebilič and Juvan, 2012, p. 67).*

However, it is not always exclusively a question of values. Due to the economic crisis, numerous cuts have been made and economic measures taken with a view to reducing the expenditure of social systems which could not be funded from national budgets as a result of the loss of income. Defence budgets are no exception. De France (2015, pp. 1-4) states that, without exception, European national defence budgets were reduced over the period 2008-2014. It is possible to observe a correlation between the severity of the crisis in a state, and the scope of the reduction in the defence budget. Interestingly, defence budgets of mostly Southern European countries were reduced by 30%. A result of that is the internal restructuring of the defence budget, which reduces expenditure on training and the supply and maintenance of equipment, while expenditure on salaries, which represents an increasingly large proportion of defence budgets, remains the same.

The question of financing veteran organizations, which are usually (insofar as they do not have their own ministry) under the Ministry of Defence, is therefore quite common. A decline in resources is to be expected; in circumstances where the system itself is in financial peril, such expenditure represents a dispensable component of the system. The bonuses awarded to veterans are also uncertain. The question of that expenditure is therefore more than fair. The answer is not clear-cut, as is not in regard to the definition of the term veteran; but that expenditure can be extremely high. On that subject, Stiglitz and Bilmes (2009, pp. 61-90) mention expenditure on veterans in the US, which includes all form of rehabilitation, disability allowances and benefits for the veterans' family members; psychological and physical consequences suffered by veterans change the lives of entire families. Considering the fact that there are around 24 million veterans in the US – meaning those who have the status of veteran – of which 3.5 million claim various benefits on account of injuries, it is to be expected that after the conclusion of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, where 1.6 million soldiers have conducted military operations, the number of beneficiaries will increase dramatically. The two authors estimate that after the conclusion of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan the costs will be between \$422 and \$717 million. It is true that over the last two years there has been an increase in defence budgets, especially in Central Europe where SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) researchers found an increase of 13% (SIPRI, 2017), but the question is how and, even more importantly, to what degree, the funds allocated to veteran organizations have been aligned with these changes.

Working in the defence system undoubtedly involves specific limitations, which is understandable; however, it is less understandable when the question arises regarding the status of those who no longer perform tasks in the system for various reasons. What benefits are possible, and what could be their scope of work done in the defence system? What is the status of those who have fought, and exposed and risked themselves for the security of others? Why does this remain a topical question despite otherwise clearly defined relations? How is it possible that within the defence system, and even more outside of it, veterans are overlooked, and maybe even rejected and discouraged from continuing their activities? And finally: why is

the funding of veteran organizations and the meagre benefits paid to the defenders of the nation even a political question, and subjected to austerity measures in the state and society? The responsibility for these and similar situations is at least three-fold: the first entity responsible is represented by national institutions which take and implement decisions; the second is represented by veteran organizations, because it seems that they are not active enough in pointing to certain issues; and the third entity is civil society, which should be considerably more proactive when it comes to discussions on the status of veteran organizations. What their cooperation looks like, who is responsible and to what extent, and why it seems that the role of veteran organizations in modern societies must be given more room in terms of quality and quantity, are the topics discussed in this article. One should bear in mind that by acknowledging veteran organizations, and with an appropriate attitude to veterans and their unanswered questions, the state and citizens acting on its behalf show only due respect. The attitude to veterans is also a good indicator of the attitude to national history.

1 WHO IS A VETERAN?

Even though it may seem unnecessary, certain dilemmas and questions relating to veteran organizations and veteran status should be highlighted. It must be clearly stated immediately that there are two aspects to the word “veteran”: the first aspect is about the legal status, and is based on the legal definition and connected to status benefits determined by law; the second is represented by a significantly looser understanding of veterans, and refers to participation in combat tasks and missions, and to the termination of active service in the armed forces. In both cases there is no clear boundary marking the status of veterans. The predominant reason for this lies in the way of manning of the armed forces, and the tasks performed by members of the armed forces on behalf of the state. These tasks have recently exceeded the basic missions of all armed forces – the protection of national territory from the aggression of outside threatening elements. They are a result of a changed security architecture including various forms of alliances, which in addition to safety benefits bring certain obligations. Despite emphasizing these systemic changes, there are also specifics at the national level of individual states. On that subject, the capabilities of states themselves must be stressed, and more importantly, the attitude that states foster towards the defence system and consequently those who have carried out its tasks.

When defining who a veteran actually is, one discovers that there are various different definitions of this concept. Multiple meanings can also be found. The term “veteran” does not necessarily denote only former military personnel. The Dictionary of Standard Slovenian specifies that a veteran can also be “an elderly and experienced worker in a certain field”⁶. Such understanding undoubtedly applies to the military organization, because it refers to experiences as virtues and skills acquired during service in an organization or system. The Dictionary of Standard Slovenia draws

⁶ *Dictionary of Standard Slovenian. Available at: <http://bos.zrc-sazu.si/sskj.html>.*

attention to that fact by listing two meanings of the word “veteran”. A veteran can be “an old experienced soldier or one who is no longer in active service”⁷, or “an elderly and experienced worker in a certain field”⁸. International Encyclopedia of Military History⁹ explains that the definition of a veteran varies according to the nation or state where veterans live. Simply put, veterans are people who have served in the armed forces during combat, although the use of that term has different meanings depending on the historical period and nation. In the US, for example, the term is applied to someone who has served in the armed forces¹⁰, while other nations reserve this term essentially for someone who has actually fought, i.e. taken part in combat tasks. An example of such description is used in the UK; namely, “ex-service” is a term denoting someone who has served in the armed forces, while the term “veteran” applies to someone who has actually fought¹¹. Australia and Canada have yet another definition of a veteran. The first awards veteran status only to those who have been actively involved either in operations abroad or in wars the state fought in the past (Burdett, 2012, p. 2). Similarly, the Netherlands associates veteran status with participation in operations; the term “veteran” describes every military person who has participated in a war, or has been included in international operations and UN operations. Canada redefined the term in 2000: a veteran is every person who has served honourably in the Canadian Armed Forces or their allies at any time. In 2001, the extended content of the definition of a veteran included all former military personnel and members of the contract reserve who meet the conditions set out by the Canadian Department of National Defence, and have concluded their service with an honourable discharge (Sešel, 2007, p. 20). The International Military and Defense Encyclopedia¹² explains the term veteran depending on whether it is used in peacetime or wartime. A veteran during wartime is someone who has combat experience, while the term in peacetime often applies to those who have fought during wartime (in a war). From the military perspective, the term usually describes people who have served for a period of time in the armed forces, have retired from active service, and receive suitable benefits for their loyal service to the state. Bowyer (2004, p. 250) identifies a veteran as a person with extensive combat experience, which fundamentally does not include retirement from the defence system, and

⁷ *Dictionary of Standard Slovenian*. Fran Ramovš Institute of the Slovenian Language, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Available at: http://bos.zrc-sazu.si/cgi/a03.exe?name=sskj_testa&expression=veteran&hs=1

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *International Encyclopedia of Military History, 2006, Volume 2: K-Z.*

¹⁰ *In the US, the term denotes every person who has actively served a minimum of two years in the army, and has been awarded at least the status of honourable upon leaving the armed forces, irrespective of whether they have participated in combat operations or not, or a person who has been permanently injured or disabled due to the consequences of war (Sešel, 2007, p. 19).*

¹¹ *The definition of a British veteran is short and unquestionable: veterans are everyone who has served in the armed forces for longer than one day (Dandeker et al., 2005, pp. 161-177). This highly inclusive definition represents over 5.5 million former military personnel in the UK, which, together with the relatives these people are responsible for, and widowers/widows (which the definition joins with the veteran status), amounts to around 13 million people or around 20% of the British population. A more restrictive definition of a veteran has been proposed, but has not been adopted due to public disapproval (Sešel, 2007, p. 20).*

¹² *International Military and Defense Encyclopedia, 1993, Volume 6: T-Z.*

consequently a person who is entitled to benefits arising from veteran status. He also points out another specific feature: it is becoming increasingly common to use the term veteran for those who have completed a military mission – Gulf War veterans, Falklands War veterans, etc.

The interchangeable use of the terms “veteran” and “combatant” as synonyms is very common. The Military Encyclopaedia (*Vojna enciklopedija*)¹³ also defines a veteran as a combatant; it says that “veteran” is a title awarded to retired soldiers, old combatants and meritorious persons who have performed various social functions for a longer period of time. In Slovenia, the term combatant applies to Second World War veterans. According to Rogač (2007)¹⁴, the term veteran in Slovenian legislation is applied explicitly to people who fought in the First and Second World Wars.

1.1 A veteran as a former combatant

The status of a veteran as a former combatant is a logical and necessary process stemming from two earlier processes: demobilization and reintegration. Both processes relate to conventional armed conflicts which are based on call-ups, i.e. the mobilization of additional human resources, a wide use of force, and the consequences of war. Such understanding of war is most frequently founded on the defence of the nation and the territorial integrity of the state. In that context, Garb (2002, p. 32) discusses the need for the transition between “the soldier’s war and the nation’s war”, and between “the soldier’s story and the nation’s story”¹⁵. “The soldier’s story” or the rehabilitation of a war veteran as a full and content member of society, takes place under circumstances surrounding general reconstruction, and is therefore marked with or limited by other reconstruction efforts (for example, the rivalry in the labour market), and simultaneously embedded in general efforts and addressed in the framework of international, national and local politics. At the national level, demobilization and reintegration programmes are being developed, and a legal basis for providing help to these groups is being adopted. There is an opinion that the demobilization of combatants is a solely logistic problem, while their integration is simply a development problem. Former combatants should therefore not require special attention, and should not be a special target group entitled to assistance. Garb (2002, p. 138) stresses that veterans are not the only group which needs to be integrated into society. Returning refugees and displaced people usually exceed even the number of veterans. Emphasizing the category of war veterans as a special target group in a post-conflict society, and dealing with their problems separately, may lead to a sense of neglect of other groups which also suffer due to the consequences of war. Despite that, Garb¹⁶ notes that arguments for helping war veterans as a special

¹³ *Vojna enciklopedija*, 1975, Volume 10: Tirani-Žažul.

¹⁴ Lara Rogač, 2007, *Družbeni položaj vojnih veteranov*, Ljubljana.

¹⁵ *Model and Haggerty in: Garb, 2002, p. 137.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

group in need of assistance have prevailed. Several arguments justifying that war veterans must be given appropriate attention after armed conflict¹⁷:

1. Humanitarian reasons – veterans may have a variety of social and economic issues (they are often unemployed, and far away from home; their basic needs and accommodation must be provided for);
2. Due to their sacrifice for the state, or as a compensation for missing education and other rights due to compulsory enlistment in the armed forces;
3. Former combatants can contribute significantly to the overall development of the community and society as a whole;
4. Failure to pay attention to former combatants may endanger peace and development processes. War veterans may turn to crime, or join political options advocating the use of violent means.

It should be noted that there is a clear difference between the demobilization and reintegration of professional soldiers and conscripts; especially because the latter is undeniably more challenging and long-lasting. In principle, the attitude to veterans – former combatants – is not undefined. People who have participated in national conflicts and the defence of the nation and territorial integrity enjoy a certain status and related benefits in every state. A legal framework clearly defining who is eligible to be a member of a veteran organization is normally established as well. The state forms a positive attitude in relation to them, for they represent an important part of the national historical memory, as one of the key components of national identity. They are the representatives of the historical memory; live witnesses to key national historical events.

However, it must be noted that veteran organizations based on the rule of former combatants have no future. The removal of conventional conflict entailing mobilization, the introduction of professional armed forces on a global scale, and the discontinuation of the conscript system do not enable new members to be included in veteran organizations. Such organizations are therefore condemned to the aging and gradual loss of their members. During that process, the above-mentioned historical memory fades, and the attitude to national security culture changes; the latter should be based on a broader understanding of security culture relating to the participation in collective efforts to defend the state¹⁸. A special, unfortunately largely overlooked, category comprises veterans who have served in international operations and missions. Participants in these functions undoubtedly perform tasks which exceed the understanding of peacetime operations, but are also not conventional combat tasks. This discussion undeniably lacks attention to the performance of tasks outside Slovenia's territory; there can be no doubt that members in international operations and missions not only participate in the concept of providing collective security, but indirectly also increase the safety of Slovenia's citizens.

¹⁷ Kingama and Ball in: *Garb*, 2002, p. 138.

¹⁸ *Modern understanding of security culture relates mostly to resource and company management. In that sense it is perceived as part of the organizational culture which plays an important role in companies, mostly in the form of defining their own system of values and norms, which define the activities of all company stakeholders (Sedonja Kardoš, 2011, p. 19).*

2 VETERANS' IMPERATIVE

Veterans are inextricably linked to the armed forces because they have served or still serve in their structures. Their position in society is therefore a reflection of the situation within the defence system, and the presence of the system itself in civil society, which is usually more or less distant from it. A typical aspect of the armed forces is the functional and social imperative which in its essence defines the legitimacy of the armed forces. Gow (1992, p. 27) describes the legitimacy of the military as “the quality of the relationship between the armed forces and their sociopolitical environment”, and talks about two types of legitimacy¹⁹: functional²⁰ and socio-political²¹. He believes that it is possible for the socio-political imperative to “collide” with the functional one, and that one of the aspects of legitimacy of the armed forces is the balance between functional and socio-political demands. “The armed forces must be capable of fulfilling their basic functions, and simultaneously not distance themselves from their society” (Gow, 1992, p. 28). In other words, the armed forces face demands and expectations with regard to their obligations and powers. The achievement of social and political imperatives is reflected in the form of citizens' support to the military organization. The level of harmony is therefore connected with the level of legitimacy, which as a concept represents the significance of understanding the relationship between the armed forces and society. In the process of legitimizing the armed forces, two sides are confronted: the army, which requires legitimacy, and the citizens of the state, which, under certain conditions, can provide legitimacy. In that sense, the loyalty of the public or civil society can be viewed through the prism of understanding the armed forces as the holder of fundamental social values. On that basis, a field of interaction is formed between the armed forces and civil society which defines civil-military relationships. The level of harmony or the integration of the military into politics is connected with the notion of legitimacy as a concept which is crucial for the understanding of relationships between the armed forces and society (Jelušič, 1997, pp. 13-14). The legitimization of the armed forces calls for the consideration of specific circumstances of civil society, which are based on social norms and values falling into two categories: (1) universal values comprising those shared by societies at an approximately equal level of development, or closely comparable with them, and (2) national values which are held by individual nations, and are therefore not directly comparable, and are a result of historical, territorial, sociological and other circumstances. What is most important is that the armed forces gain legitimacy exclusively on the basis of interaction between the two environments: the defence system and civil society. Legitimacy cannot be forced or acquired through various forms of pressure exerted

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

²⁰ *Functional legitimacy relates mostly to the effective achievement of the functional imperative or the basic task of the armed forces, namely the defence from outside physical threats. Their legitimacy would be seriously undermined if the armed forces were unsuccessful at fulfilling that basic function. Gow states that the armed forces can meet their functional imperative in two ways: 1) in a latent or covert way, i.e. without the active use of force, and 2) in a more obvious way, i.e. by engaging in an open conflict against other armed forces.*

²¹ *Sociopolitical legitimacy refers to the effective achievement of the social and political imperative, which the author defines as a set of non-functional requirements made by society to the armed forces.*

on civil society. Quite the opposite; it undermines legitimacy, and consequently calls into question the acceptability of the defence system as a centre of power.

According to Huntington (1957, pp. 1-3), the relationship between the civil environment and the military organization is formed on the basis of two imperatives: the functional and the social. The functional imperative stems from the functions expected to be fulfilled by the military, especially in relation to the dangers threatening state security. The social imperative is composed of other functions assigned to the armed forces as a result of ideologies, values and cultural norms. When it comes to providing legitimacy to the armed forces, a balanced approach must be taken in carrying out both the functional and social imperatives. If the defence system completely dedicates itself to meeting the demands and expectations of the social imperative, it can no longer fulfil its functional obligations. And vice versa: if the military fails to pay enough attention to the social imperative, it will soon distance itself from civil society, and therefore, in extreme circumstances, become illegitimate and as such unnecessary and even unwanted.

2.1 The functional imperative of veteran organizations

A similar parallel can be drawn in the status and role of veterans and veteran organizations. If the basic functional imperative of the defence system is to provide security to the civil environment, this imperative in the field of veteran organizations represents the position of veterans in society. It relates to the formal legal framework, specifically the fulfilment of the legal imperatives and conditions which define veterans. As emphasized above, this area is characterized by great diversity, which is undeniably reflected in national characteristics of organizing and functioning of veteran organizations in individual societies. The functional imperative refers to veterans and their position in society, while the social imperative dictates the presence of veteran organizations in civil society. Both are interconnected and complement each other, but are not always in balance. The absence of one imperative normally affects the other, which over a longer period of time results in the deterioration of the veteran status on the one hand, and the gradual removal of veteran organizations from the civil environment.

One of the important factors of the functional imperative is the establishment of normative bases defining the rights and duties of veterans, which are represented by veteran organizations on behalf of individuals. The variability of benefits depends on national legislation, and also on the military tradition, the formal and informal status of soldiers in society and the state, and the financial capabilities of individual states. In the case of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, US budget planners will have to take veteran benefits into account for the next 10 years or longer. Stiglitz and Bilmez (2008, pp. 78-79) have assessed that expenditure on the basis of 751,000 US soldiers who were deployed to both crisis areas and are entitled to various forms of benefits due to physical or mental injuries sustained during the performance of tasks on the battlefield. In total, over 1.7 million US soldiers have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. The assessment includes the costs of direct medical treatment

and future compensation. Over the period 2007-2017, the costs are estimated to increase together with the growth rate from \$1.3 billion to \$6.2 billion. During the entire ten-year period, the costs are estimated to reach \$37 billion. That is significant expenditure; there are 24 million veterans in the US, of which 3.5 million receive various forms of disability benefits which amount to \$34.5 billion per year (Stiglitz and Bilmez, 2008, p. 71).

However, these compensations in and of themselves do not solve a number of issues affecting soldiers, who are exposed to stressful situations including facing and carrying out tasks in asymmetric combat²² involving direct urban warfare and the violation of international military and humanitarian law. Bobrow (2015, p. 33) draws attention to the consequences of post-traumatic stress disorder, which continue even after veterans attend different counselling programmes and receive professional medical help. The effects of the disorder persist; it is important to acknowledge them and try to mitigate them. However, one question remains unanswered: what is the quality of life of the individuals and their loved ones, if there is any to speak of at all? That cannot be translated into numbers and determined financially. But it is indisputable that in many aspects these consequences leave negative traces, mostly in the mental health of soldiers. Balfour and others (2014, p. 165) note that between 18% and 30% of those who have worked in war areas suffer from various forms of mental disorders, which often lead to the destruction of families and loss of homes, reducing them to the life on the social margins of society²³. Although all veteran and other benefits relating to the veterans' health conditions, and premiums granting them a decent life, are defined by legislation and paid by national governments, they represent an area where veteran organizations can contribute significantly to the understanding of the numerous problems facing veterans, on the basis of their activities and the monitoring of veterans. From that aspect, veteran organizations should and must be an important partner in national discussions, and thus carry out their functional imperative for the protection of veteran rights, even when

²² *One of the definitions has been provided by Svete (2002, p. 29), who explains that asymmetric warfare takes place when "the actors, including individuals and international coalitions (ad hoc and permanent), use methods and means over a certain period of time, and cause the most disproportionate effects in relation to the resources invested while taking into account the adversary's and their own defensive and offensive capabilities and vulnerabilities. It entails the use of military and non-military forms at all levels of interaction between the actors encompassing situations from peacetime to war."*

²³ *The latest research suggests that every fourth soldier will have suffered the consequences of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after military service in Afghanistan and Iraq. These assumptions are based on the fact that 103,792 members of the US Armed Forces were diagnosed with PTSD in the period between 2000 and 2012. Experts from the field of mental research in the armed forces point to the phenomenon of a new generation of veterans with post-traumatic disorders which is predicted to emerge in the next five years. Because these disorders lie at the base of stigmatization within the military system and signify a likely end of the military career, a timely recognition of such problems is still extremely difficult (Balfour, 2014, p. 166). Severe depression can manifest itself in various forms of deviant behaviour, including suicide. The number of suicides has risen dramatically over the last decade – over 8,000 veterans have taken their own lives, which equals 22 suicides per day and exceeds the number of suicides committed by active members of the armed forces – and statistics indicate one suicide every 36 hours. 30,000 members of the US Armed Forces, either veterans or active soldiers, die every year as a result of suicide. While there were 9.6 suicide cases per 100,000 people in 2004, the number has increased to 29.2 cases per 100,000 people by 2012. According to experts' forecasts, the trend will continue to grow in the future (Carlos and Kintzle, 2014, p. 1).*

interference with their rights and benefits is to be expected. Veteran organizations are therefore expected to function in the sense of a union, which should not imply the politicization of the veteran question and organizations. Veterans should not be denied the right to become members of political parties, which is limited by law in numerous states; however, the code of conduct should be considered with regard to veterans who have served the state and not individual political elites, which is why diametrically opposed conduct on behalf of veterans is not to be expected. Political polarization usually leads to the disintegration of veteran organizations, as a result of the lack of the element of cohesion as the most fundamental aspect of their functioning and existence represented by patriotism, i.e. loyalty to the state and politics, and their elites. What is important is dialogue, and a presentation of the actual situation among veterans supported by valid arguments, which ultimately mirrors the situation in the defence system, and particularly in the military system of a state. The tasks of the functional imperative can therefore be directly linked to the position of veterans in relation to their health, finances and status in civil societies. Their position must be balanced, and reflected in civil societies in such a way as to prevent the marginalization of veterans on the one hand, and the excessive privilege of their status on the other, which can lead to social confrontation. The first stages of a growing dissatisfaction are evident in the reduction of legitimacy of veteran organizations, which usually has implications for their funding and may significantly affect the funding of the entire defence system of individual states. Although veteran organizations are difficult to understand in their institutionalized fight for veterans, I nevertheless believe that it is possible to be more proactive than Slovenian society is nowadays.

2.2 The social imperative of veteran organizations

The social imperative comprises the activities of veteran organizations with regard to the interaction between civil society and the defence system. They could even be marked as the ambassadors of the defence system; owing to the value system which defines them, they represent the mission and values of the defence system in a most credible way. The Military Doctrine of the Slovenian Armed Forces defines the following values:

- honour
- courage
- loyalty
- esprit de corps and
- selfless service.

These values derive from the most basic value, namely patriotism, which is defined as the awareness of allegiance to Slovenia, and unselfish performance of duties in accomplishing common goals (Military Doctrine, 2006, p. 18).

In a society where different attempts are made to change the security system and even re-evaluate the fundamental values which regulate the functioning of all societies, it is crucially important to not only defend but also continually give meaning to the

value system via different institutions. It should be stressed that military values are social values, and are in that sense a mirror of values (Norton-Taylor, 2011). Unlike modern societies, defence systems, and the armed forces as their most important part, represent a very conservative side to changes in values, of which ethical conduct²⁴ on the part of members of the armed forces holds a special position and should be seen as the guardian of legal and legitimate performance of functions (Robinson, 2008, p. 21). As hierarchical systems they can only function when values are continually respected, which is why these values are extremely difficult to change. Seen from that perspective, veteran organizations have great social capital which often remains unexploited, which is also due to an increasingly precise and consistent distinction between the civil and the military (Prebilič and Juvan, 2012, p. 58). Considering the thesis that an important source of the deepening economic crisis facing modern societies is the severe erosion of fundamental social values, the social capital of veteran organizations could help these organizations to become a significant and important corrective factor in these societies. In this way, veteran organizations could carry out their social imperative to a considerable extent.

Seen from the perspective of the social imperative, veteran organizations represent a bearer of military experiences and historical memory. A war as an act which irreversibly changes societies and leaves indelible traces is prohibited by international law²⁵, and yet it is a constant companion of humanity. The more the memory fades, and the more distant wars and conflicts become in space and time, the more important it is to draw the attention of decision-makers and civil society to the unacceptability of war and especially its consequences. Civil society bears a large proportion of the consequences which it cannot imagine (Prebilič and Juvan, 2007, p. 261). It can be argued that veteran organizations play the role of the ambassador of patriotism in the context of sacrifice for the home, the state and the nation.

Veteran organizations can also be seen as a bridge between the defence system and civil society; they no longer carry out the tasks of the defence system in the formal legal sense, but having served in the system for a long time, they know it extremely well. They can therefore explain and interpret the activities of the defence system, and inform civil society even when the defence system is unable or unwilling to do so for various objective or subjective reasons. Veteran organizations can represent a

²⁴ *The effectiveness of the defence system is based on military ethos, which most often consists of conservative values and norms which are necessary for discipline, morale and obedience. However, the armed forces must simultaneously reflect liberal values and norms to be supported by society. It is to be expected that soldiers will fight for their homeland and defend the system of rights they identify with personally, that their morale will be highest when they are able to carry out tasks in accordance with their own rights, and that they will fight hardest when they understand the political values they are fighting for. That means that the defence system may be different from society, but its legitimacy must be provided from its integration in the civil-social value concept (Garb: 2009, p. 106).*

²⁵ *War should be understood as a state of regulated armed conflict between different groups, usually states, which relates mostly to the conventional understanding of war as articulated in international law and treaties. Seen in the wider context of armed conflict, which has significantly impacted the lives of modern societies especially in the 21st century, war can be interpreted as a state in which organized violence is either used or is threatened to be used by the armed forces (Speller and Tuck, 2008, p. 1).*

specific form of strategic reserve in the national security system, particularly in an era of diminishing security culture of modern societies, and considerable widening of the gap between civil society and the defence system, which is partly a result of the professionalization of the armed forces on the one hand, and the changing security architecture with new security challenges on the other. Representatives of veteran organizations could participate in an open curriculum at different levels of the formal educational system, significantly contribute to the formation of more distinct patriotic feelings of young people, assume the role and tasks of the national security system, and with a set of positive values co-create modern, active and responsible young citizens (Prebilič and Juvan, 2014, p. 262). However, the potential unprincipled political activities of veteran organizations should also be noted; although I do assess that their value concept is perhaps the best defence mechanism.

The balance between both imperatives, i.e. the functional and the social, enables the provision of the legitimacy of defence structures in civil society. The imperatives put forward clear demands and expectations to the military, which are more difficult to fulfil in certain circumstances – a substantial reduction in financial sources coupled with the expectation of effective performance of tasks and functions. Such circumstances are undoubtedly frustrating for everyone: the defence system and its employees, and civil society, whose expectations are not realized. Such circumstances create the impression that balance between the two imperatives is difficult to find, which is finally reflected in the legitimacy of the defence system. Therefore, “the final goal of all civil-military relations, such as the balance between values and beliefs, and the agreement on the most appropriate role of the armed forces in society”, is not achieved (Edmonds, 1988, p. 132). The same applies to the existence and functioning of veteran organizations. The problem arises when values held by a specific group (for example, veterans) become substantially different from the dominant values of civil society. Under such conditions, the doors to first the incomprehension of existence and then the marginalization of veteran organizations are wide open, which has a significant negative influence on the image of the defence system as a whole. Taking into account the observation that the most fundamental value of both the defence system and veteran organizations is patriotism, then this is the moment of truth: is patriotism still the value that holds the right to homeland within civil society? If the answer is negative, it is easier to understand the low level of security culture in Slovenia, and the high level of unwillingness to defend one’s own homeland.

Conclusion Veterans exist and are a fact in all states which have been involved in armed conflict in the course of their history. That is why states must deal with the question of veterans. All discussion about the rationality of the existence of veterans and their role in society should be senseless and unnecessary. And yet, the reality is different. The meaning and role of veterans are changing under the influence of various external and internal factors. A profound difference in the understanding of the importance of the veterans’ mission can be perceived, which can be partially explained by the difference in the political culture in different states.

And yet, a similar understanding of the veterans' imperative is expected despite all its specifics. Just as the functional and social imperatives provide legitimacy to the defence forces, there is ample space in both fields with regard to veteran organizations. These organizations are not exactly comparable institutions; however, they must ensure their legitimacy in relation to its users, i.e. veterans, and to civil society. While the first group holds expectations in the field of the functional imperative, the expectations of civil society, namely the social imperative, should not be underestimated. Diminished legitimacy usually leads to two situations: the failure to meet the expectations of the first causes the undermining of internal cohesiveness in the group of veterans, while the distancing from the civil environment leads to the lack of understanding of the mission and general existence of veteran organizations. If important changes in values and the disagreement between the military and civil society is added to these situations, the conditions for the marginalization of veterans are quickly met.

In the past, veterans were individuals who were prepared to sacrifice their lives for their homeland. That is another reason why they are entitled to certain rights, and why they deserve respect from civil society and political elites. Some battles and wars would not have been won without veterans. Veterans are an essential pillar of historical memory, and a reminder of challenging events. They can act as an important link between civil society and the defence system, and thus contribute significantly to the strengthening of civil-military relations and the legitimacy of the armed forces. But without the awareness of that fact first among veterans and veteran organizations themselves, changes in the current, not very enviable, state cannot be expected.

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