



The Security of the Balkan States and the Current Security Threats

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Abstract

One of the major issues facing Western Balkan countries is their security and continuous threats posed to this security. After the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, and finally with the declaration of Kosovo's independence, one of the main goals of the Western Balkans states is to achieve reform of the security policy and establish good neighborhood relations in the region. Balkan states are progressing in reforming their security and defense policy in accordance with NATO membership requirements and peace partnerships. In essence, despite the formal commitments of all the Western Balkans countries to good neighboring relations and to their contribution to regional stability and security, within them is still prevalent a certain obvious degree of anxiety, due to their evident lack of trust about the future behavior of certain other countries of the region. This paper aims to identify the major threats to the security of Balkans states, how to achieve and ensure the security in the Balkans, and how to enhance cooperation between Balkan states to achieve this security. In this paper first are identified, national security and defense policies of the countries of the Western Balkans, the key risks that may destabilize the region and bring to the re-emergence of armed conflicts, including conventional responses, threats of political nature, ethnic and religious aspects, those of state formation and of undetermined borders. The aspects of normalization of the defense relations between Kosovo and Serbia, through confidence building measures, will be discussed considering the potential of this dialogue for stabilizing the disturbed neighborhood relations in the region. Through ought the paper the role of NATO's military involvement in the Western Balkans as a deterrent and stabilizing force will be analyzed as well.

Presented at the Transatlantic Students' Conference
Addressing Diplomatic, Economic, and Migration Challenges in Southeastern Europe
James Madison University
Florence, 23-27 April 2018

Introduction

“The world is always being made and is never finished.”

Rebecca Solnit

As an academic term, "security" was until fairly recently almost monopolized by the International Relations discipline (IR). The term in a narrow sense, has been understood as a synonymous with military power. “For too long, the concept of security has been shaped by the potential for conflict between states and security has been equated with the threats to a country's borders. For too long, nations have sought arms to protect their security”.¹ The theoretical concept of “security”, has been developed from a rather narrow, state-centric and militarized concept ("national security"), via one focusing on national and other identities ("societal security"), to a much wider concept, including concerns for human rights, development, gender issues, etc... Modern concepts of national security arose in the 17th century during the Thirty Years War in Europe and the Civil War in England. In 1648, the Peace of Westphalia established the idea that the nation-state had sovereign control not only of domestic affairs such as religion, but also of external security. Generally, the meaning of the security differs by the actor talking about security. Based on the assumptions of the realist theory of international relations—that security is the dominant concern for states, that force is the major instrument, that governments preserve their unity as they interact with one another—security is achieved once threats to security can be prevented or at least managed.² On the other hand the social constructivism perceives security as resulting from the interactions of various actors, with social values and identities shaping these relations.

Nowadays, the term “national security” refers to the security of the nation state, including its citizens, economy, and institutions.³ Originally conceived as protection against military attack, national security is now widely understood to include non-military dimensions, including economic, energy, environmental, food, cyber security etc. National security risks include, in addition to the actions of other nation states, action by violent non-state actors, narcotic cartels and multinational corporations. The concept of national security has evolved to encompass non-military concerns are reflected in the below statements and definitions:

¹ *Human Development Report 1994*. Online available at www.undp.org/hdro/e94over.htm .

² Nye, J.; Lynn-Jones, S., 1988: “International Security Studies: A Report of a Conference on the State of the Field”, in: *International Security*, 12,4 (Spring): pp.5–27.

³ European Court of Human Rights, Research Division, National Security and European case-law, 2013. Online available at: <https://rm.coe.int/168067d214> .

- a) “a nation has security when it does not have to sacrifice its legitimate interests to avoid war, and is able, if challenged , to maintain them by war (Walter Lippmann, 1943)⁴;
- b) "national security” is the ability to preserve the nation's physical integrity and territory; to maintain its economic relations with the rest of the world on reasonable terms; to preserve its nature, institution, and governance from disruption from outside; and to control its borders." (Harold Brown, U.S Secretary of Defense, 1977-1981)⁵ ;
- c) National and international security may be understood as a shared freedom from fear and want, and the freedom to live in dignity. It implies social and ecological health rather than the absence of risk... and is a common right (Ammerdown Group, 2016)⁶.

Potential causes of national insecurity include actions by other states, violent non-state actors, organized criminal groups, and also the effect of natural disasters. Increasingly, governments organize their security policies into a national security strategy (NSS), such are Spain, USA, and Sweden etc. Some states also appoint a National Security Council to oversee the strategy and/or National Security Advisor. National security is often understood as the capacity of a nation to mobilize military forces to guarantee its borders and to deter successfully defend against physical threats including military aggression and attacks by non-state actors, such as terrorism.⁷

It was stated that “the proper goal of security should be grounded in the wellbeing of people in their social and ecological context, rather than interests of a nation state as determined by its elite”.⁸ This first requires a collective effort to build the conditions of security over the long-term. A commitment to the common good should guide the approach, recognizing that security is a shared responsibility and its practice should be negotiated democratically; when security is the preserve of a few, it will not serve the many and is likely to fail everyone. The overall understanding and acceptance of the national security as a common good is widely being spread by nation states and is reflected in joint international and regional policies and strategies. The United Nations, European Union, NATO and other regional organizations have developed documents, rules and regulations to assist member states and states that aspire integration in the processes of regulation and harmonization of national state strategies. These strategies become more relevant in particular in post-conflict territories including here the majority of the Western Balkan countries. The sections below exemplify this standing.

National Security of Western Balkan Countries

⁴Joseph J. Romm, Defining National Security: The Nonmilitary Aspects, Council on Foreign Relations (April 1, 1993).

⁵ Cynthia Ann Watson U.S. National Security: A Reference Handbook. ABC-CLIO; Annotated edition (September 6, 2002).

⁶ Rethinking Security, A Discussion Paper, may 2016. Online available at:

<https://rethinkingsecurityorguk.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/rethinking-security-a-discussion-paper.pdf>

⁷ FRENCH WHITE PAPER ON DEFENCE AND NATIONAL SECURITY – 2013. Online available at: <file:///C:/Users/IBCM-AC002/Downloads/White%20paper%20on%20defense%20%202013.pdf> .

⁸ Idid 5, at p.9.

It is been stated that Western Balkan countries⁹ have achieved a major progress in reforming their security and defense policies in line with requirements of NATO membership and Partnership of Peace Program.¹⁰ Still, the key risks that may destabilize the region and bring re-emergence of armed conflicts are present. The conventional responses, such as threats of political nature, the nationalistic/ethnic and religious conflicts remain active, issues related to the state formation, and contested/undetermined borders issues surround the Western Balkan Countries.¹¹ The rhetoric and the formal commitment of all the Western Balkans countries to good neighboring relations and to contributions to regional stability and security, within them is still prevalent. However, there is an obvious degree of anxiety present among Western Balkan countries, due to their evident lack of trust about the future behavior of certain countries of the region. All these factors are related to the legacies of the past, the current political implications, and the interests of respective powers in the Western Balkan countries.

According to several analyses in terms of military capabilities and of defense spending and industries, Serbia and Croatia are two dominant countries of the region.¹² Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo still struggle with their defense spending due to the lack of adequate budget and also political developments including the ethnic issue that surround the defense forces (in particular this is relevant for Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina). Still the military capabilities of other Western Balkan countries continue to be marginal when compared with those of these two countries which can at the same time be considered as a threat (in particular in the case of Serbia's aspirations over Kosovo).

It is to be noted here that the NATO's involvement in the Balkans continues to be of a high relevance as it continues to have a deterrent and stabilizing effect. NATO's presence in Western Balkan countries has discouraged armed disputes and has transformed the region from that of war torn societies and hostile neighbouring relations, into a relatively stable one. In particular NATO has been leading a peace-support operation in Kosovo – the Kosovo Force (KFOR) – since June 1999. With the establishment of KFOR after the NATO's 78-day air campaign against Milosevic's regime, NATO aimed at putting an end to violence in Kosovo, but also to stabilize the region. The KFOR operation derives its mandate from United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) and the Military-Technical Agreement between NATO, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbia. KFOR's original objectives were to deter renewed hostilities, establish a secure environment and ensure public safety and order, demilitarize the Kosovo Liberation Army, support the international humanitarian effort and coordinate with the

⁹ Western Balkans Countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

¹⁰ Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development, Kosovo in the Security and Defense Context of the Western Balkans POLICY PAPER No. 3/14 – September 2014. Online available at: http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Kosovo_in_the_Security_and_Defence_Context_of_the_Western_Balkans_310301.pdf .

¹¹ For instance the issue of border demarcation between Montenegro and Kosovo was pending for almost three years. Only in March 2018 Kosovo Parliament managed to vote the agreement for border demarcation with Montenegro.

¹² Supra 10, at p.4.

international civil presence. Today, KFOR continues to contribute towards maintaining a safe and secure environment in Kosovo and freedom of movement for all. NATO strongly supports the Belgrade-Pristina EU-brokered Normalization Agreement (2013) as well.

NATO's role in Western Balkans through its missions- such as KFOR- or only through its involvement in changing the patterns of hard balancing and the doctrines of massive armies that were based on territorial defense and deterrence that was evidenced in Western Balkan countries; and the assistance that it provides for transforming national armed forces into professional armies (i.e. in Albanian and extensively in Kosovo) remains unprecedented. NATO plays a very relevant role indirectly in the enlargement processes of the Western Balkans. It has a fundamental role in locking the interstate borders of the individual countries of the region. A complicating factor for regional security, and a matter of high concern, is Serbia's defense cooperation with Russia. Russia is re-exerting its influence in the Western Balkans by exploiting the region's uneasy ethno-national relations, and weaknesses of the states that are not full members of the European Union and NATO, namely, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia.

In general it can be stated that Kosovo faces a favorable, but also a complex security and defense environment. Its immediate neighbors, Albania and Macedonia exclude any direct threat that might come from Kosovo, while Montenegro sees it as an unfinished story in terms of regional stability and security; and Serbia projects it as a direct conventional threat and rogue entity, rather than as a neighbor with whom it has not settled relations, at the same time when it shares the aim of European Union membership. For sure, the most challenging task for Kosovo's national security remains Serbian intentions towards Kosovo. That is why normalization of the defense relations between Kosovo and Serbia, through confidence building measures, will open a venue for KFOR's withdrawal that would leave behind stability and security in the entire region.

Security Threats of Western Balkans Countries

The Balkans has been generally considered as a conflict area of Europe. Throughout history, the area has been often one of the most intense geopolitical battlegrounds. The Balkans comprise a large number of states with various interests. It is expected that the EU integrative efforts will harmonize the differences and help Western Balkan countries accept and recognize the differences.

While several countries are EU members of the EU, some have recently submitted their EU membership application. Still, according to the countries national security and defense documents, there are several key risks they may destabilize the region and bring re-emergence of armed conflicts, including conventional responses, among which the major ones are threats of political nature-nationalistic/ethnic and religious, of state formation, and of undetermined borders.

Security and stability in the Western Balkans can't be taken as guaranteed. Numerous severe tensions pose at great risk the peace in the area and in Europe. In a very tense environment, a

little spark is needed to ignite the fragile settlement of peace. Ethnic conflict outbursts, geopolitical clashes, terrorism fostering and threats, weak governance, economic painful measures and the constant demand for reform show that many troubles can be detected already in the future of the Balkan security environment. Additionally, the issues related to Kosovo and Serbian relations most of the issues are being discussed in the Prishtina- Belgrad dialogue under EU mediation, but the situation is not sustainable, as the north of Kosovo is still not recognizing the Kosovo authorities governance, as Serbs refuse Kosovo's authorities.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina there is an ethnic conflict that is a major threat to stability in the Western Balkans, but also a major to the EU integration process, while on the other hand we have Macedonia and Greece that have problems with the name of the state of Macedonia that is a key condition for EU integration. There is a special responsibility of the region's leaders to maintain peace and stability as a premise for prosperity and democratic development. Regional meetings and dialogue on still disputed issues should be more frequent, constructive and inclusive in maintaining stability and security in the Balkans.

Strategic Security Sector Review of Republic of Kosovo

Since the declaration of independence on the 17th February 2008, the Republic of Kosovo has become a state actor with responsibilities for both national and regional security. The Republic of Kosovo is responsible for ensuring the safety and security of its citizens and for protecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity.¹³ While, in Kosovo the main actor for maintenance of peace and security remains KFOR, in March 2012 the Government of the Republic of Kosovo initiated the Strategic Security Sector Review (SSSR),¹⁴ a whole of government review of its security institutions.¹⁵ The purpose of the SSSR was to conduct a comprehensive analysis of all the aspects of security in the Republic of Kosovo in order to analyze current and future security challenges, clearly define roles of each institution in the security sector to avoid duplication and maximize institutional capabilities, and to identify capabilities required to provide for the safety and security of Kosovo's citizens.

The vision of the Republic of Kosovo is to be a country that promotes stability and security, not only for its population, but also for the region and wider Europe. The Republic of Kosovo aspires to be an integral part of regional and global security structures, in particular the EU, NATO, OSCE and the UN. It also desires to maintain and promote peaceful neighborly relations in order to enhance stability and confidence among nations in the region. The SSSR process has been a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach that included security sector institutions such as the Kosovo Security Force (KSF), police and the intelligence services, but also the responsible

¹³ See Constitution of Republic of Kosovo, Chapter I. the Constitution. Online available at: <http://www.kushtetutakosoves.info/repository/docs/Constitution.of.the.Republic.of.Kosovo.pdf> .

¹⁴ Republic of Kosovo: ANALYSIS OF THE STRATEGIC SECURITY SECTOR REVIEW OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO, Prishtina, March 2014. Online available at: http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Analysis_of_Strategic_Security_Sector_Review_of_RKS_060314.pdf .

¹⁵ Ibid at p.4.

ministries of KSF, foreign affairs, interior, justice, finance, health, education, environment and infrastructure.

The main objectives of the SSSR are: to define Strategic Objectives of Kosovo and Security and Defense Policies of the Republic of Kosovo; to define the Strategic Security Environment, and possible security Risks and Threats; to analyze the current capacities of internal security institutions; to define the capacities that internal security institutions need in the future; to make recommendations for developing necessary capacities and the dissolution of those not needed, based on SSSR capabilities analysis; to provide guidance for new National Security Strategy of Kosovo; to establish security institutions based on SSSR recommendations and based on the National Security Strategy.¹⁶

According to the SSSR the National Security Interests and Objectives of the Republic of Kosovo are independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, constitutional order, sustainable economic development, life, welfare, property and safety of the citizens of Kosovo, and regional stability and membership in international organizations. It is expected that the security of Kosovo is also favored by the fact the Kosovo authorities continue to promote good neighborly relations with all the Southeast European countries. Kosovo has no territorial claim towards any of its neighbors and expects from its neighbors the same national policy and position. Notably, the relaxation and normalization of relations between Republic of Kosovo and Serbia has commenced and is continuing in the spirit of non-confrontation and European integration.

The presence of EU, NATO, and other organizations in the region continues to remain a factor of building a sustainable peace and regional stability. Regional risks and threats are proliferation of small arms, ethnic and religious extremism, and organized crime including trafficking, economic crimes, regional political instability epidemics, and natural disasters.¹⁷

However, the Government of Kosovo has been criticized on the process follow up of the SSSR. Several years after the of Strategic Security Sector Review (SSSR), the only completely locally led, whole of the government, rigorous, transparent approach to analyzing future requirements of its security sector as to appropriately rationalize scarce resources across the security sector. In these two years, the Government of the Republic of Kosovo (RKS) has not taken any action to implement the recommendations of such a vital process to the national interest of RKS.¹⁸

Conclusions

According to national security and defense documents of the countries of the Western Balkans, the key risks that may destabilize the region and bring to the re-emergence of armed conflicts,

¹⁶ Republic of Kosovo, Government, Analysis of Strategic Security Sector Review of the Republic of Kosovo

¹⁷ Republic of Kosovo, Government, Analysis of Strategic Security Sector Review of the Republic of Kosovo

¹⁸ On the criticism of the SSSR see generally: Fridrih Ebert Stiftung: KOSOVO'S STRATEGIC SECURITY SECTOR REVIEW A MISSED OPPORTUNITY? BESA KABASHI-RAMAJ, MPIA JUNE, 2016. The report is available at: http://www.fes-prishtina.org/wb/media/Publications/2016/KOSOVOS%20STRATEGIC%20SECURITY%20SECTOR%20REVIEW_permiresimet_final.pdf.

including conventional responses, are threats of political nature – nationalistic/ethnic and religious, those of state formation, and of contested/undetermined borders. There are huge discrepancies between countries of the region regarding military capabilities and defense industries, and only Serbia and Croatia have credible ones. NATO's military involvement in the Western Balkans in particular NATO's military presence in Kosovo remains crucial for stability and security of the Western Balkans, until the full normalization of relations between Prishtina and Belgrade is not achieved. As such the need for further EU support and presence is evident in ensuring security in the Western Balkan states.

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