STRATEGIC CULTURE AND LEGITIMACY OF VIOLENT POWER TAKEOVER

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Strategic culture, in a broader context, can be viewed as the relationship between the most important social actors, primarily political and military one, concerning force and its use. Although the concept of strategic culture is mainly related to war, it does not necessarily have to be reduced to studying the attitude of a social community towards this most extreme form of the use of force. This paper discusses the relationship between strategic culture and violent change of the highest state authorities. The main hypothesis is that strategic culture, as a part of political culture, and in a broader sense of national culture, as well, is one of the sources of legitimacy of the use of force in the process of violent power takeover. It is emphasized that the factors of strategic culture, primarily political ones, including: (1) historical experience, (2) political system, (3) the belief(s) of elites and (4) military organization will necessarily influence the decision on the use of force, as well as the choice of methods, in this case violent ones, when replacing current regimes with some new ones. An analysis of political factors through a flagrant example of the violent power takeover from national history such as the March 27 Coup, shows the relationship between strategic culture and the use of force for coming to power, as well as the (il)legitimacy of such an act.

Key words: *strategic culture, political factors of strategic culture, legitimacy, violent power takeover, March 27 Coup*

Introduction

The concept of strategic culture emerged and developed in the relatively recent past in attempts, mostly by the Western theorists, to explain views and actions in the field of politics related to the use of force in pursuing the state security

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and defence interests. Despite the fact that today there are many papers, mostly by foreign authors, dealing with this topic, it is evident that there is still neither generally accepted definition of strategic culture, nor a single position on its real impact on social practice. These attitudes range between two extremes, from the claim that behaviour and decisions in the field of national security are necessarily conditioned by different strategic culture of actors themselves, primarily political and military elite, to its significance being rather symbolic, without measurable impact on practice.[1] Nevertheless, most authors agree when it comes to elements that make up the concept itself, i.e. the sources of strategic culture, which again does not mean that they can establish a single and final list of all factors that define this concept, as well as their specific difficulty.[2] The concept of strategic culture, as one of the determinants of national security, in national scientific, and also the wider social public, has been updated by a project of the Strategic Research Institute of the Ministry of Defence. The first results in "unveiling" the concept itself, its factors, as well as its relationships with the concept of military neutrality that Serbia has opted for, are presented in the special issue of the Interdisciplinary Scientific Journal of the Ministry of Defence – "Vojno delo", number 8/2019.

According to a definition, which is an acceptable framework for this analysis, strategic culture is "a specific set of beliefs and views on the use of force, and practice related to the use of force, which exists within a group and develops over time through a single long-term historical process."[3] It is, therefore, a sufficiently broad definition that includes a set of beliefs and views, as well as the practice of the use of force, which is developed and embodied in a social community, defined by its characteristics. Bearing in mind that strategic culture is viewed as a part of political culture, and thus national culture, it can be related to legitimacy, which regards decisions, as well as the way elites act because it directs decision-makers to choose those measures and activities that, from their perception, are considered legitimate. This is a particularly sensitive issue when it comes to state actions at the international level, given that "strategic culture provides a framework in which legitimate foreign policy decisions can be made".[4] However, various reference points, i.e. different strategic cultures, lead to different perceptions of the legitimacy

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[1] Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture", *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 4, spring 1995, p. 55.

[2] On the origin, development and various attempts to define the concept of strategic culture, as well as its relationship with national security, see more in: Veljko Blagojević, "Strateška kultura i nacionalna bezbednost", *Zbornik Matice srpske za društvene nauke*, No. 2/2019, pp. 163-178.

[3] Kerry Longhurst, "The Concept of Strategic Culture" in *Military Sociology*, ed. G. Kummel and D. P. Andreas. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlags-gesellschaft, 2000; Prema Asle Toje, "Strateška kultura kao analitički alat", *Strateška kultura i reforma sektora bezbednosti, Bezbednost Zapadnog Balkana*, year 4, No. 14, July-September 2009, Belgrade, p. 4.

[4] Uroš Živković, "Strateška kultura u Evropi – kako promene u strukturi međunarodnog sistema utiču na ideacione faktore legitimiteta za upotrebu sile u međunarodnim odnosima", *Vojno delo*, No. 2/2017, p.71.

of decisions or actions at the foreign policy level, which, when it comes to the use of force, further deepens the conflict and makes it difficult to resolve dispute peacefully. In a broader sense, strategic culture can be viewed as a source of legitimacy in the use of force in general, both in acting in the international environment and in solving internal political problems. This is particularly important to have in mind when analysing the use of force to change regime.

The following can be recognized as possible forms of violent power takeover: (1) coup d'état, i.e. putsch, which is mainly just a more militant type of coup d'état; (2) revolution, and more recently the so-called colour or plush revolution, which can also be viewed as a hybrid creation with elements of classical revolution and coup d'état;[5] (3) coup by uprising and (4) military intervention aimed at coup. All these forms are the result of internal crises and contradictions that exist in a society, as well as projections of interests of a foreign factor in some country or region.[6]

On the basis of the analysis of actors, resources in use and the way it is implemented, it can easily be concluded that the last form of coup - military intervention is conducted with dominant participation of foreign factor by engaging military forces, to change regime in some other country – the object of intervention, in order to pursue political, military and/or economic interests. In contrast to this one, the other three forms of coup are predominantly the result of internal processes and actors. However, it is difficult to imagine that any events of violent regime change have ever, especially today, taken place without assistance, support or at least knowledge of the most important global or regional powers.

Legitimacy of violent power takeover

When considering legitimacy of violent power takeover, it is first necessary to distinguish between two close, but still different concepts - legitimacy and legality. The fact that both terms are derived from the same Latin word *lex* (law), as well as that they may coincide in certain cases, creates some confusion.[7] However, it has to be clear that although there are cases of consent, what is legal does not have to be legitimate, and vice versa. For legal, we could say that it refers to something legal, related to law, i.e. what is permitted or required by law. On the other hand,

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[5] See more about colour revolutions in: Miloš R. Milenković, Miroslav Mitrović, "Obojene revolucije u paradigmi hibridnog rata", *Vojno delo*, No. 6/2019, pp. 248-263.

[6] On the ways of violent regime change and the impact of foreign factor, see more in: Miloš R. Milenković, "Nasilna promena režima kao sadržaj hibridnog rata", *Vojno delo*, No. 6/2017, pp. 316-329 and Miloš Milenković, Veljko Blagojević, "Obaveštajne službe kao akteri državnog udara", *Vojno delo*, No. 5/2015, pp. 117-132.

[7] For example, in well-known dictionaries of foreign words and expressions in the Serbian language (Milan Vujaklija, *Rečnik stranih reči i izraza*, Prosveta, Beograd, 2003, as well as Ivan Klajn, Milan Šipka, *Veliki rečnik stranih reči i izraza*, Prometej, Novi Sad, 2006), no significant and essential difference can be seen between the concepts of legality and legitimacy.

legitimately could be something that has a fair and acceptable reason, and also something that is in accordance with general social norms, customary law, and, ultimately, with current law, which is why this term is related to the term legally. However, as Starčević, PhD, warns, "one should know that law throughout history has been only one of the sources of legitimacy of power in addition to myth, religion and ideology or political platform".[8]

The problem with legitimacy is also "the position" of the one who evaluates it. When it comes to the evaluation of power or means and methods by which one comes to power, it certainly depends on whether it is evaluated by someone "inside" or "outside". In practice, this means that a government, which is legitimate from the point of view of internal political entities, does not have to maintain such a status in the evaluation by relevant international entities, and vice versa. In addition, although there is no doubt that the way to come to power by the use of force and violence is illicit, that is, illegal, the question of legitimacy of such an act still remains open. Due to its deep relationship with tradition, political system, dominant ideological basis of society and state structure, as well as the role of national armed forces in society, the sources of legitimacy of the decision to use violent methods to change power can be found in strategic culture.

It should be noted that considering the question of the legitimacy of the very act of coming to power also raises the question of the legitimacy of this new, violently conquered power. Thus, it is important to note that there is a difference between these two legitimacies. In principle, it can be said that the legitimacy of violent power takeover consists of the legitimacy of the previous, i.e. current government, i.e. from the answer to the question: has the government lost its legitimacy by its way of governing or not? This makes it questionable whether current government, due to the loss of legitimacy, is capable of having force that is sufficient and can protect current order at its disposal. Writing about revolution and legitimacy, Starčević, PhD, notes: "The fact is that the revolutionary victory becomes possible only when the government of 'the old regime', due to loss of legitimacy, disintegrates to such an extent that it no longer has effective armed forces at its disposal and loses monopoly over armed organization".[9] In addition, there should be the evaluation of the legitimacy of the way the government changes or, in other words, whether the use of force and organized violence against current authorities (which may be accompanied by numerous victims, which of course depends on the form of coup) is justified, or it is superfluous, indiscriminate, vindictive, brutal and disproportionate, which distances the incoming government from legitimacy.

In the other case, when evaluating the legitimacy of new, violently won power, in addition to the previous two criteria, one should also take into account the assessment of the way of governing, which is crucial in this case, bearing in mind that the legitimacy

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[8] Srđan Starčević, *Politički smisao žrtava revolucionarnog terora*, Zadužbina Andrejević, Beograd, 2018, p. 83.

[9] Srđan Starčević, *Revolucija i legitimnost*, Čigoja štampa, Beograd, 2020, p. 207.

of new government can be discussed only after its establishment. Thus, whether new government that came to power illegally, in this case by force, would still have legitimacy, will depend on whether it is perceived as better than the previous one, that is, whether it is capable of bringing progress to state and society, meet expectations and deliver those goods that the previous government could not or did not want. There is no doubt that new government, even if it was forcibly introduced, will find it easier to gain legitimacy if the previous one, with its actions and attitude towards citizens, lost it.

Regarding the legitimacy of state power, one can most often find in the legal literature the definition saying that "legitimacy is a positive evaluation, belief in the validity and acceptance of institutions and executives because they are in compliance with political ideals and values supported by most members of political community."[10] There are various theories about the legitimacy of state power, which have evolved and changed over time. The one that still exists in the democratic world today is based on the principle of the citizens' electoral will. According to this theory, the government that gains the trust of the majority in elections is legitimate. However, there is a tendency to slowly shift the concept of the power legitimacy from the sphere of politics, so that it increasingly acquires its economic and social dimension. In that sense, it can be said that "political power becomes legitimate only if it can provide the proper functioning and stability of economic and social system."[11]

On the other hand, even when the majority supports the government, one should be careful in evaluating its legitimacy. The problem that can arise is the so-called "tyranny of the majority", which was loudly opposed by John Stuart Mill, one of the most famous representatives of liberalism.[12] Franz Neumann points out that accepting the views of the majority, from the point of view of legitimacy, can be problematic, saying: "Evil cannot become just only because the majority wants it. On the contrary, it makes evil greater."[13] On the wave of such thoughts, academic Stanovčić concludes that "consent, participation, mass support and other similar expressions of acceptance and popularity are only a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for the legitimacy of a government."[14]

The legitimacy of opposition to the government, which by its actions either violates law or the main principles of governance, based on political culture of a social community, was discussed a long time ago, through the consideration of the

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[10] Ratko Marković, *Ustavno pravo i političke institucije*, IP Justinijan, Beograd, 2004, p. 195.

[11] Ljubomir Tadić, *Nauka o politici*, Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika i Službeni glasnik, Beograd, 2007, p. 105.

[12] Mill was an opponent to a one-sided view of democracy and "stupid conformism", associated with the belief that the majority always has to be right, so he advocated the thesis: "If all people except one person thought the same, and only one person had the opposite opinion, humanity would have no more right to silence that person than he would have the right to silence humanity if he had power."; See more in Miloš Milenković, "Traganje za idealnim oblikom vladavine – Ideje Džona Stjuarta Mila", Kultura polisa, Novi Sad, No. 20/2013, pp. 184-204.

[13] Franc Nojman, *Demokratska i autoritarna država*, Naprijed, Zagreb, 1974, p. 177.

[14] Vojislav Stanovčić, *Moć i legitimnost*, Službeni glasnik, Beograd, 2006, p. 63.

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right to resist tyranny. Our well-known sociologist Aleksandar Molnar deals with this issue in detail in his book "Pravo na otpor tiraniji", which is a part of a greater study entitled "Rasprava o demokratskoj ustavnoj državi". Following the main concepts such as "law", "resistance" and "tyranny", Molnar notes that even the ancient Greeks considered tyrants to be leaders-autocrats, who did not care about law in their manner of ruling, and only in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance a distinction was made between two types of tyrants: "1) tyrant – usurper (*tyrannus ex defectu tituli*), who comes to power without usual rules and 2) tyrant who illegally exercises his regular power (*tyrannus ex parte excercitii*)."[15] The latter can establish his tyranny in two ways: "by violating positive law and by violating natural law".[16] Thus, the first way implies violation of the Constitution and relevant laws and regulations, while the other one refers to governing contrary to dominant norms of behaviour in political life (not only in power), which is based, among other things, on political or strategic culture of a social community.

When it comes to the phenomenon of "resistance", Molnar believes that it consists of three components: subject, act and goal. The people most often appear as a subject, i.e. their political representatives, while it can be other elites, as well, opposed to the one in power, oligarchs, and even members of the ruler's close surroundings, relatives and friends. It should also be said that the role of a part of state apparatus, especially the armed forces, which have the greatest and most efficient resources for the use of force, is very important, and in certain cases of coups, it is crucial, as well. The act itself can be carried out in three ways: "conspiracy (which, as a rule, aims at assassinating a tyrant), (more or less spontaneous) rebellion and (organized) warfare."[17] Molnar recognizes several possible goals: "the goal of resistance is to either 'teach a tyrant' (i.e. warn him to give up his 'evil policies'), or to punish him (in parallel with forcing him to compensate for damage done to his subordinates), or overthrow him (which can, but does not have to be followed by persecution) or, after all and most often, kill him (tyrannicide, tyrannical murder)."[18]

The political factors of strategic culture on the example of the March 27 Coup

Although all factors, whether physical, political or socio-cultural, influence the development and manifestation of strategic culture of a collective, the assumption is that the political factors of strategic culture, which include (1) historical experience, (2) political system, (3) the belief(s) of elites and (4) military

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[15] Aleksandar Molnar, "Pravo na otpor tiraniji" u *Rasprava o demokratskoj ustavnoj državi*, Samizdat B92, Beograd, 2001, p. 27.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid, p. 28.

[18] Ibid, p. 29.

organization, may first be related to legitimacy of violent power takeover. An analysis of the political factors of strategic culture on the example of the March 27 Coup should confirm this assumption. Namely, it can be rightly said that the events of March 27, 1941 are *the mirror of the Serbian strategic culture*. They reflect the attitude towards freedom; willingness to defy the great and powerful no matter the price; the tendency to make "irrational choice" in critical moments, from the point of view of military, economic and partly political criteria, and, lastly, the readiness to change the legal government by force. The decision to use force to change the legal government, as well as the legitimacy of such a decision and act from the standpoint of the Serbian strategic culture will be analysed on the example of the March 27 Coup, which in the Serbian national consciousness, despite numerous controversies, still has the status of a national symbol.

Historical experience

Analysing and understanding historical experience as a factor of strategic culture is important from the point of view of knowledge about personalities, events and processes that took place during the life of a nation and the establishment and development of its identity and state. In addition to true knowledge of the past, it is important to know and understand its interpretation in collective memory of a political community. The observation by Deletić, PhD, is interesting and it points out: "No matter how much scientists and influential social factors would like to deny the political character of history (and historiography), it will always be the symbol of nation and social forces that legitimize it".[19] One should be aware that from the point of view of strategic culture, collective memory is even more important than it really used to be because it unequivocally points to social values in a collective that are promoted through state and other social manifestations within a community.[20] When it comes to violent regime change, it is important to consider the role of political violence during the life of a state, that is, society, especially the history of subversive activities and tendency, that is, readiness to change power holders by violent methods.

On the basis of the analysis of previous coup, it has been noticed that the probability of violent regime change in a country is significantly higher if such events have already been recorded in its history.[21] For example, in political science studies, a specific type of coup is recognised, which is characteristic of certain cultural

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[19] Zdravko M. Deletić, *Zanat istoričara: metodologija istoriopisanja*, Filozofski fakultet u Prištini i Istorijski arhiv Kraljevo, Kosovska Mitrovica, 2019, p. 43.

[20] On the significance and content of historical experience as a factor of strategic culture, see more in: Miloš R. Milenković, "Prilog određenju političkih činilaca strateške kulture", *Vojno delo*, No. 8/2019, pp. 56-58.

[21] Dragan Simeunović, *Državni udar ili revolucija*, Simtrade, Beograd, 1991, p. 57.

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regions in which it is a part of "the tradition", and whose name is pronunciamiento (*Spanish: pronunciamiento*). Pronunciamiento is, in essence, the Spanish and South American version of "the military coup d'état", that is, the coup, which was later taken over by some African countries. It is characterized by the fact that it is organized and led by a military commander on behalf of the entire officer corps, i.e. the army as a whole, as opposed to coup conducted only on behalf of a part of the army or, more precisely, a conspiracy group within the army or coup d'état that can also be conducted by civilians, supported by some military formations.[22] Historical experience, in terms of repeated practice, which in this case can be considered as a part of the tradition of some nations or political communities, indicates an increased possibility that this type of coup will be repeated, and also a specific strategic culture that by such or similar options gives legitimacy to power.

Considering the Serbian tradition, historian Dubravka Stojanović points to the fact that only Prince Miloš Obrenović died by natural death while in power whereas all other Serbian monarchs were killed or forced to abdicate, which makes her conclude that violent change of power is a dominant characteristic of the political life of Serbia. "Karađorđe was forcibly overthrown while Prince Miloš and Prince Mihailo were violently removed after their first government. Prince Alexander Karađorđević was overthrown from the position of Prince. Prince Mihailo was killed. King Milan was exiled from Serbia, and his son Alexander was brutally killed in 1903. King Peter Karađorđević was forced to abdicate in 1914 due to the pressure by members of the Black Hand, his son Alexander was killed in 1934, and King Peter II was overthrown along with the very monarchy in a revolutionary way."[23]

The example of the March 27 Coup clearly shows that the readiness of political and military elites to participate in the coup, which forcibly removed the supreme holders of state power, is, among other things, found in historical experience. Namely, only 38 years before this event, a similar revolutionary action was carried out, known in the Serbian historiography as the May Coup. In 1941 there were relatively fresh memories and true witnesses to the events and circumstances related to the May Coup, in which the last rulers of the Obrenović dynasty, King Alexander and Queen Draga, were killed in 1903. The success of the May Coup, in addition to the fight for "higher goals" and "the correction of historical injustice" that took place only two days earlier, was the basis for believing that the March 27 Coup would succeed, as well. The historical experience from World War I and the attitude towards war allies at that time, the feeling of humiliation and injustice, on the one hand, and patriotic duty, on the other hand, as well as role models of conspirators and the success of the previous coup, the choice of violent methods for the change of power, which by its political actions *de facto* lost the support of most members of the political community, gained legitimacy.

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[22] Edward N. Luttwak, *Coup d'Etat, a practical handbook*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1969, p. 10.

[23] Dubravka Stojanović, *Ulje na vodi: Ogledi iz istorije sadašnjosti Srbije*, Peščanik, Beograd, 2010, p. 44.

Political system

The analysis of political system as a political factor of strategic culture raises the question of *who* and *how* makes decisions in a political community.[24] Decision-makers give decisions some kind of legitimacy with their authority, no matter whether it is an individual or an institution, then procedures, their existence, compliance and transparency, as well as effects, that is, consequences that those decisions make. The embodiment of the decisions made by the government, whose implementation produces social reality, as well as the character of the government, its readiness and capability to provide citizens with services and products expected from it, and above all basic and universal human rights, define legitimacy of authorities themselves.

It can be noticed that authoritarian and totalitarian regimes are much more susceptible to violent change of power than democratic regimes. The lack of legitimacy in their way of governing is the basis of legitimacy for the use of violence to remove them. It is even considered that resistance to an undemocratic regime is not only the right, but also a duty. On the other hand, some authors, primarily Republican ones, warn that only those "freedom-loving nations" have the "capability" to resist tyranny, bearing in mind that all subjects of resistance mostly call for freedom, concluding that "only the regiment which is not corrupted by life under authoritarian rule, i.e. which *wants* freedom, and above all political freedom, is capable of resisting tyranny".[25]

The question of the right to forcibly change "bad government", the government that, due to the way it rules, lacks legitimacy among the people, gets its answers in practice through countless successful and unsuccessful types of coup. This is a particularly interesting question when considering political systems and rulers, who have not become so in an electoral process and whose mandate is not timely limited, as is the case, for example, in monarchies or hereditary republics. It is practically impossible to replace such rulers in elections, and procedures, if they exist at all, are difficult to implement in practice. As Raymond Aron observes, "Sometimes it is impossible to remove oligarchies without resorting to violence".[26] What has to be clear is that "no government can be permanent and stable if it is not perceived as legitimate".[27]

As it has already been said, the justification of violence against ruler, or the justification of tyrannical murder, has its roots in ancient Greece. According to Aristotle, the legitimacy of power is based on two criteria, which are not met in tyranny: firstly, ruler has to be just and, secondly, he has to rule in accordance with law. "Since tyrant is opposed to king, it follows that he has gained power either by

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[24] On the significance and content of political system as a factor of strategic culture, see more in: Miloš R. Milenković, "Prilog određenju političkih činilaca strateške kulture", gen. quote, pp. 59-62.

[25] Aleksandar Molnar, "Pravo na otpor tiraniji" in *Rasprava o demokratskoj ustavnoj državi*, gen. quote, p. 29.

[26] Remon Aron, *Demokratija i totalitarizam*, Izdavačka knjižarnica Zoran Stojanović, Sremski Karlovci, 1997, p. 344.

[27] Srđan Starčević, *Politički smisao žrtava revolucionarnog pokreta*, gen. quote, p. 83.

force or fraud, or he used to be a ruler who ruled kingdom freely, but he does so contrary to equality and justice by destroying laws and treaties he solemnly swore to."[28] These are precisely the arguments invoked by those who consider tyrannical murder to be legitimate. Tyrannical murder as the most common way of violent change of power was talked about in the Middle Ages, as well. "Everyone can kill a tyrant, oaths cease to be valid, and immoral means against tyrants are allowed."[29] Such awareness has continued to last, so it has not bypassed our territory, either. Njegoš also spoke about the resistance to tyrannical rule in his verses: "To stand up against tyranny, to bring it to the knowledge of law, that is the most sacred human duty!"[30]

There is also the problem of legitimacy in the totalitarian regimes that we could say marked the 20th century. Carl Schmitt claimed that leaders in totalitarian states do not act according to law, but draft law themselves. Historical experience has shown that the end of the existence of totalitarian systems of government and their leaders was accompanied by turbulent events. The assumptions that this type of undemocratic regimes, faced with a critical mass of demands for change, would rather disintegrate than change, were confirmed by the sudden and unexpected collapse of the European communist regimes at the end of the 20th century.[31] The change of such regimes was accompanied by the so-called "colour revolutions", which, in addition to some similarities with classical revolution, are characterized by a much smaller role of violence in its execution. Moreover, "the absence of successful or unsuccessful palace revolutions", i.e. coup d'état or coup, is described as "one of the most important features" of totalitarian regimes.[32] If it is accepted that the legitimacy of power is confirmed by the will of the people in elections, academic Stanovčić notes that all those who "come to power by violent or illegal means (coup d'état, rebellion, revolution, with the assistance of foreign occupiers) will have a problem to turn the possession of power into legitimate authority."[33]

The state in which the March 27 Coup took place was, according to political system, the hereditary and constitutional monarchy, as defined by the 1931 Constitution, known as September or Octroic Constitution, which ended the dictatorship of King Alexander I Karađorđević.[34] The state itself, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, established on the foundations of the old Serbian kingdom with the

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[28] Stefano Junius Brutus, *Vindiciae Contra Tyrrannos*, in Constutionalism and Resistence in the Sixteen Century ad. Julian H. Franklin Indianopolis, 1969, p. 185; According to *Enciklopedija političke kulture*, Savremena administracija, Beograd, 1993, p. 1180.

[29] Franc Nojman, *Demokratska i autoritarna država*, Naprijed, Zagreb, 1974, p. 172.

[30] Petar Petrović Njegoš, *Gorski vijenac*, Srpska književna zadruga, Beograd, 1973, p. 34.

[31] *Enciklopedija političke kulture*, Savremena administracija, Beograd, 1993, p. 1201.

[32] The exception is the failed coup d'état attempt, which a group of German officers tried to carry out against Hitler in July 1944. Hana Arent, *Izvori totalitarizma*, FIK 94, Beograd, 1998, str. 414.

[33] Vojislav Stanovčić, *Moć i legitimnost*, gen. quote, p. 7.

[34] Constitution of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, State Printing House of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Belgrade, 1931. It was published on September 3, 1931 in the *Official Gazette* No. 200.

Serbian dynasty Karađorđević on its throne, was accompanied by the unresolved national issue of the constituent people since its founding. Political and parliamentary life, on the one hand, was burdened by strong social divisions, and, on the other hand, by constant interference of monarchs in the selection of holders of the most important state functions, regardless of the electoral will of citizens. Corruption was destroying all spheres of political, economic and cultural life.

Separatist aspirations, assisted by hostile neighbours, who had constant territorial pretensions towards Yugoslavia, were an insurmountable burden throughout its existence. In addition to separatist aspirations of some South Slavic nations, the demands of national minorities, encouraged by their homelands, aimed at destabilizing the state, became increasingly louder. The world economic crisis could not bypass Yugoslavia either, and economic dependence on other countries was increasingly higher. The political division of the people over an important political issue, at a time when there is already war in Europe and distrust of the highest state leadership, was the sufficient reason, or rather good ground, to carry out violent change of power by coup on the basis of such dissatisfaction and mistrust.

It should not be forgotten that Prince Paul Karađorđević, as well as King Alexander Obrenović, a victim of the previous officer conspiracy, came to power after the strong person who, especially in the army, was an inviolable authority. In assessing the personality of Prince Paul, who was overthrown as regent by the coup carried out on March 27, 1941, Dragan Simeunović, PhD, noted that the cult of personality of his predecessor also had great influence: "The tragic death of his cousin King Alexander, who, like all the tragically killed rulers of this nation, was loved and raised to the limits of the cult only after his death, cast an unjust shadow on the entire course of Prince Paul's reign. Being compared to a cult always means from the very beginning to be a loser rather than a winner."[35]

Beliefs of elites

Beliefs, i.e. views and ideas of elites, as well as their implementation in practice, are in fact perhaps even the most important creators of the reality that is taking place in political, economic, security, cultural and any other social sphere.[36] Hence, the view that "elites are 'objectively necessary' for the maintenance of social institutions and culture" should not be surprising.[37] It should be added that their "necessity" is also required when it comes to articulating national interests and directing actions for

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[35] Dragan Simeunović, "Knez Pavle i 27. mart: Da li se 27. marta 1941. godine dogodio državni udar, puč ili teroristički akt", Zbornik dokumenata okruglog stola – *27. mart 1941: Knez Pavle u vihorima evropske politike*, Beograd, 2003, p. 150.

[36] On the significance and content of the belief(s) of elites as a factor of strategic culture, see more in: Miloš R. Milenković, "Prilog određenju političkih činilaca strateške kulture", gen. quote, pp. 62-65.

[37] Šeldon S. Volin, *Politika i vizija*, Filip Višnjić i Službeni glasnik, Beograd, 2007, p. 477.

their fulfilment. In the context of violent change of power, elites can rightly be considered organizers or inspirers, and in some forms even direct executors of coup. Their capability to influence social processes is also interpreted on the basis of the fact that elite is perceived as "a group whose supremacy is based on the skill of manipulation".[38] Due to differences between and within themselves, elites can create different and multi-layered reality, which can be understood as acting within some kind of subcultures.[39] However, despite the fact that they are not totally monolithic and firmly organized communities, they should still, unlike the masses, be viewed as social groups.

It is important to emphasize that actions of social groups should be distinguished from actions of the masses because in addition to organized, conspiratorial groups, the coup actors are the masses, which have a different role depending on type of coup. Starting from the assumption that "every action is individual", group action is possible "only when a group has managed to organize individual actions, so that they harmoniously appear outwardly as a single entity in the service of transparent common interest."[40] Analysing the internal structure of a group, three key characteristics can be identified: (1) voluntary association of members (individuals), (2) the existence of a clear internal order (which provides coordinated actions of members as a whole) and (3) effective delegation of authority to group bodies (accepting leadership that guides group actions).[41] On the other hand, the mass is not an active social group, because, unlike the previous characteristics that define a group, it: "(1) is not based on the association of members, but on *inclusion* of individuals in a temporary agglomeration; (2) does not have an internal order; (3) responds to emotional stimuli generated by leader." From this it can be concluded that the mass is "a mere tool used by leader in his actions (and, possibly, the active group of his associates), and not a group of united individuals who accomplish their transparent goals by group actions."[42]

The masses are often viewed against elites and in this context they sometimes take on negative connotations. Unlike elites that represent an interest-linked group and have "a vitally important role in social system", the masses are usually considered to be an unrelated group that lacks independence, initiative, organization, directed and rational behaviour. Due to all their characteristics, the masses are a group of people who are suitable to be led or directed in the direction

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[38] Ibid.

[39] On the phenomenon of "subculture", if and in what way subcultures in Serbia can be considered, see more in: Milan J. Igrutinović, "Blumfildov model potkultura i moguća primena u razumevanju strateške kulture Srbije", *Vojno delo*, No. 8/2019, pp. 273-293.

[40] Aleksandar Molnar, "Građanska neposlušnost" u *Rasprava o demokratskoj ustavnoj državi*, Samizdat B92, Beograd, 2001, p. 20.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

in which leader or social elites, primarily political ones, would like. Therefore, it can be clearly concluded that behind every directed activity there are some social groups – elites, which use the masses to fulfil their goals and interests. In types of coup such as revolution and conspiracy by uprising, the dominant actors are the masses, while in coup d'état, i.e. coup, the main coup holders are political, that is, military elites.

The loss of political, economic, military and any other power of the elites that are formally in power and their possession by others, who are not in key state functions, are the most serious reason for the crisis of power that inevitably leads to its removal. At some point, those who *de facto* have power will wish to formalize such possession of power by taking over the most important state functions. Therefore, the Marxism theorists believed that coup d'état, as a flagrant type of coup, is in fact a consequence of the fact that "real political power is not in the hands of those marked as such by constitutional regulations, that is, state organization, but in the hands of others, and that at the same time political conditions and state organization do not allow regular, legal transfer of power into the hands of those who are the politically strongest, thus they can seize power in an irregular way – by coup d'état."[43] Furthermore, when it comes to coup d'état, it is important to note that at least a part of actors should have some power, i.e. has to be a part of the ruling elite that has control over some resources and is capable of initiating and controlling some mechanisms of state apparatus, or at least their parts. "Coup d'état can be executed by any elite that is a part of state apparatus. These can be members of the army or security services, and also civilians from the top of state power."[44]

Since the coup took place on March 27, 1941, which is actually only a more militant type of coup, the main holder of this form of violent power takeover is the elite coming from the national army. A part of political elite, primarily nationally aware politicians and social activists, members of the Serbian National Corps, as well as a part of the officer corps, based on their political and national beliefs, and due to the decision on the accession of Yugoslavia to the Triple Alliance, decided to forcibly replace the current authorities led by the regent Prince Paul. Although there is some evidence of foreign intelligence services' involvement in the preparation and organization of the March 27 Coup, primarily the British intelligence service, military and political elite, characterized by strong national and anti-fascist mood, had a decisive impact on this type of coup.

The relatively strong emotional memory of the events and actors of World War I, as well as the established relationship with former allies and enemies from that war, were deeply woven into the consciousness of the majority of Serbs. Contemporaries,

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[43] Risto Tubić, *Enciklopedijski rječnik marksističkih pojmova*, Veselin Masleša, Sarajevo, 1974, p. 92.
[44] Jonathan M Powell & Clayton L Thyne, *Global instances of coups from 1950 to 2010: A new dataset*, Journal of Peace Research 78(2)/2011, London, p. 251.

as well as official historiography, note that the regent, Prince Paul, despite the fact that he brought Yugoslavia into an alliance with Germany, was not a Germanophile, but on the contrary, a pronounced Anglophile. The signing of the pact with the Axis powers, especially given his anti-fascist mood, can be interpreted as "a rational choice" rather than a choice based on personal preference or ideological and political closeness. In the desire to provide peace and preservation of territorial integrity in the extremely unfavourable foreign policy and military-strategic position of Yugoslavia, Prince Paul yields to the pressure and ultimatum of Germany. However, regardless of that, as well as the fact that the conditions under which Yugoslavia acceded to the Triple Alliance were more favourable than the conditions given to others,[45] such a choice was unacceptable from the standpoint of the Serbian strategic culture.

Military organization

A particularly important factor of strategic culture, which should be adequately evaluated in the context of violent change of power, is military organization. Military organization should be viewed through the place and role of the national armed forces in society, and also through the specifics of military culture that dominates in a particular military organization.[46] It is well-known that during instability, military circles often consider themselves as protectors of state from chaos, and are believed to be called to intervene to provide the institutional stability of a country, economic prosperity and stable foreign policy.[47] It can be noticed that this phenomenon is more common in the surroundings where the army has a more pronounced social role and the historical tradition of the founder and guardian of state. Military culture and values cherished by the national army is a signpost for the possible development of the crisis of power legitimacy, and also a source of legitimacy for the use of force to protect or change it. The analysis of this factor of strategic culture indicates that the use of the army for political purposes is not only a reflection of political culture of a social community, but also of subculture of its parts key to constituting and maintaining power.

The fact that Serbs owe great gratitude for the re-establishment of the state from the beginning of the 19th century, after a centuries-long break, as well as the liberation of territories under foreign rule and the defence of its freedom from many

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[45] On the content of public and secret clauses of the Triple Alliance that Yugoslavia signed on March 25, 1941, see in: Dokumenta o spoljnoj politici Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije 1941-1945, Savezni sekretarijat za inostrane poslove, Beograd, 1988, pp. 7-11.

[46] On the importance and content of military organization as a factor of strategic culture, see more in: Miloš R. Milenković, "Prilog određenju političkih činilaca strateške kulture", gen. quote, pp. 62-65.

[47] Nikolay Marinov and Hein Goemans, "Coups and Democracy", *British Journal of Political Science*, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 4.

enemies, to weapons, made the army an institution and soldiers as members of community have an important place in its political culture. Many times, the social status of the army was much higher than the Constitution and laws define it. The army, despite not always being capable of meeting all expectations, especially not those related to the development of internal political events, was one of the few institutions that enjoyed great trust of citizens, even when other state institutions did not do so. There are many written and oral traces of the Serbian culture that glorify warriors and heroes from numerous wars that have not almost bypassed any generation of Serbs. Therefore, especially in times of crises, the eyes of the people were on soldiers, who were expected to do what represents the protection of "higher interests". It is exactly these expectations, and also "the sense of duty" that nationally enlightened members of the army have that are the basis of the legitimacy of the use of force in order to change regime.

Since putsch represents an extremely militant type of coup d'état, there is no doubt that the army had an important, even decisive role in the violent change of power on March 27, 1941. However, in order to evaluate this way of power takeover, it is necessary to understand the broader context, as well as the place and role of the army in the Serbian (Yugoslav) society. We should remind ourselves that at the time of the March 27 Coup, the 1931 Constitution was in force, which defined that king was "the supreme commander of all military forces". Officers and soldiers were bound by an oath to ruler and dynasty, and the army was often the monarch's most reliable mechanism of power. It was common for officers of that time, as in the past, to be royal regents, prime ministers, ministers of war, ministers of transport, construction, foreign affairs, heads and members of the State Council, heads and members of scientific institutions and associations. Military elite, as a part of social elite, had a great impact on the overall development and modernization of the Serbian society and state.[48] Although mostly recruited from lower and middle classes, from agricultural and artisan families, officers became the upper class. As a respectable part of the community, they established family ties with the most influential families of the time.[49]

It should be said that the Army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, especially among Serbs, was usually perceived as the successor to the victorious Serbian army from the Balkan Wars and World War I. Such a vision created the illusion of its invincibility and capability to resist any, even several times more powerful enemy. What was once considered the character of the Serbian Army was uncritically attributed to the Yugoslav one. The main problem with the power of the Yugoslav Army was its

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[48] Latinka Perović, "Politička elita i modernizacija u prvoj deceniji nezavisnosti srpske države", *Srbija u modernizacijskom procesu XX veka,* Beograd, 1994, p. 235.

[49] By controlled and directed marriages, officers became sons-in-law of prime ministers, ministers, diplomats, state advisers, industrialists, bankers, high-ranking officers and judges, doctors, university professors, etc. According to some research, every fourth wife of an officer came from such families. Mile Bjelajac, "Ženidbe oficira srpske i jugoslovenske vojske 1881-1941", *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju*, knj. II, sv.1, Beograd, 1995, pp. 25-26.

national heterogeneity, which arose from the national structure of the state itself. The fact that King Alexander Karađorđević's project to establish a single Yugoslav nation was not successful also reflected on the different understanding of the Yugoslav nations about common goals and national interests, and thus the role and capability of its army.

The March 27 Coup was carried out primarily by officers from the Serbian National Corps, in response to the signing of the Triple Alliance. The participation of the army in the Coup was justified, as it usually happens, by "higher interests", i.e. the interests of the people and state. Many newspaper articles emphasized the loyalty of the army to the king in whose name, but without his knowledge, the coup was carried out that brought him to the throne, although being a minor. The legitimacy of such an action was sought in the national ideals and glorious tradition of the Serbian military leaders from World War I. The newspaper "Politika" of March 28, 1941, wrote: "As it might be expected, the People's Army was the first and most secure support for King Peter II in carrying out his mission. Our brave army has always been firmly connected to its people. It was always inspired by the high ideals of the people. It went with its people both in evil and good. After all, how would the sons of farmers, craftsmen, workers, merchants and officials who dedicated themselves to military service work and behave differently? The same traditions that warmed and created Putnik, Mišić, Stepa Stepanović, Bojović and many others, live and burn today in the hearts of young and old officers, who yesterday showed how close they were to their people and how loyal they were to the King and folk traditions."[50]

Conclusion

Strategic culture is a complex and multidimensional construct that can, on the one hand, help to understand many decisions and events from the past in the field of politics, and in relation to the use of force, and also, on the other hand, predict some future decisions and events. What is particularly important is that, although not always the most reliable tool, due to its foundation in tradition, which implies long duration, and also a slow and difficult change, it can help us get to know ourselves better, and the others, as well. However, this paper is an attempt to point out another dimension of strategic culture – that it can be viewed in the context of the legitimacy of the use of force generally, but also specifically, in order to change the current government. An example of this type of analysis and proof was the March 27 Coup, the event from national history that, as a kind of national symbol, reached almost mythical status.

Namely, as a flagrant example of the manifestation of the Serbian strategic culture, the March 27 Coup is sometimes called "the Serbian Vidovdan of the 20th

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[50] The newspaper "Politika", No. 11788 since Friday, March 28, 1941.

century", which draws a parallel with the Kosovo myth, which is deeply instilled into the consciousness and mentality of Serbs. This, in fact, alludes to the moral and doomed dilemma: "Whose kingdom should we incline to - heavenly or earthly?". Serbs, of course, in the spirit of the Kosovo myth, chose "the heavenly kingdom" in 1941, more or less aware of the price that had to be paid for such a decision. Slogans that could be seen and heard in the streets of Belgrade and greater cities, primarily in Serbia, such as "Better War than Pact!" and "Better the Grave than a Slave!", best describe the Serbian strategic culture. They unequivocally indicate the readiness of Serbs to fight for freedom at all costs, without regretting their suffering, because it is the one that has the highest value.

The fact that "a doomed choice" was made on March 27, 1941, which cannot be called "rational", also indicates that this event can and should be viewed in the context of strategic culture. It is important to emphasize that strategic culture, in general, is important only in the segment of the legitimacy of coming to power, i.e. the legitimacy of the use of force to replace the current regime, while evaluating the legitimacy of the way of governing is more a matter of political culture. It is also important to point out that the issue of the legitimacy of the March 27 Coup is inseparable from the issue of the legitimacy of the accession of Yugoslavia to the Triple Alliance only two days before it. By drawing a parallel between these two events, it can be concluded that decisions that are not based on dominant strategic culture of a nation and its elites, without adequate and systematic preparation, can hardly be sustainable in the long run.

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Стратешка култура и легитимност насилног освајања власти

Стратешка култура се у ширем контексту може посматрати као однос најзначајнијих друштвених актера, у првом реду политичких и војних, према сили и њеној употреби. У овом раду проучава се веза између стратешке културе и насилне промене највиших носилаца власти. Основна хипотеза јесте да стратешка култура, као део политичке и националне културе представља један од извора легитимитета употребе силе у процесу насилног освајања власти. Рад претежно анализира следеће политичке чиниоце стратешке културе: (1) историјско искуство, (2) политички систем, (3) уверење (веровања) елита и (4) војну организацију и њихов утицај на доношење одлуке о употреби силе, као и избору метода насилног освајања власти. Анализом политичких чинилаца кроз један еклатантан пример насилног освајања власти какав је Двадесетседмомартовски пуч, може се сагледати веза између стратешке културе и примене силе, као и (не)легитимност таквог чина.

Кључне речи: *стратешка култура, политички чиниоци стратешке културе, легитимност, насилно освајање власти, Двадесетседмомартовски пуч*

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