

# THE KOSOVO-METOHIIJA CRISIS: THE MILITARY STRATEGIC PROBLEMS

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The subject of this paper's analysis is an overview of the military strategic problems related to the Kosovo-Metohija crisis<sup>1</sup>. For a long time, Serbia has been facing challenges related to the Kosovo-Metohija crisis in almost all spheres of the state functioning including the military strategic problems as one of the most difficult. The main hypothesis is that the research of the military strategic problems related to the Kosovo-Metohija crisis, is necessary in order to discover new experiences that are important for the security and defence of the country in the present and future times. The objective of the research is to consider the characteristics of the important military strategic problems from the time of preparation and defence against the NATO aggression, as well as in the post-war period. Standard methods have been used in the paper, such as analysis, synthesis, historical method, content analysis method, and in a certain sense modeling, that is, searching for a way to avoid the problems we faced during the past period. The research has shown that this topic is necessary for at least three reasons. Firstly, the security and defence of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (hereinafter: FRY), and above all of Serbia, in 1999, as well as in the period before and after the aggression, found themselves in an almost unique position - that the country was preparing and defending itself against the aggression of nineteen NATO members.

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<sup>1</sup> The views presented in this paper are partly the result of the research carried out at the Faculty of Diplomacy and Security, and mostly represent the thoughts of the author, which are based on the experiences gained during the performance of the duty of the Director of the Military Intelligence Agency in the periods before and during the war in 1999, as well as the duty of the Chief of the General Staff in the post-war period.

Secondly, there are different interpretations of those events, so it is important that the direct participants in the defence against aggression express their true views. Thirdly, although almost 23 years have passed since the peak of the Kosovo-Metohija crisis – the NATO aggression in 1999, various forms of challenges, risks and threats to the defence and security of our country continue to manifest themselves.

*Key words: Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbia, aggression, NATO, war, 1999, military strategic problems, defence*

## Introduction

The crisis related to Kosovo and Metohija has been current for several decades. It has a multidimensional character. In addition to historical, geopolitical, ethnic, cultural, civilizational, economic and constitutional aspect, international, legal, political and military strategic aspects are particularly important. The theoretical analysis and the author's direct participation in several phases of attempts to resolve the Kosovo-Metohija crisis are a good basis for considering the military strategic problems of that crisis in several periods, especially in the period before and during the aggression and in the post-war period. Practice has unequivocally shown that attempts to solve these problems cannot be limited to unilateral measures, for example, using only instruments of diplomacy or actions of only a few state officials. It seems that the awareness of this is maturing, which can be seen from the fact that this issue is treated responsibly in the previous and current National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia. The NATO aggression against FRY, like many other wars, was an experiment in geopolitical, military strategic, economic, media and other aspects. Those who participated in or supported such an act of the NATO aggression against FRY, are trying to shift the responsibility for that "campaign" to Belgrade. It is interesting that in their analysis our country is blamed for reacting against extremists and terrorists in Kosovo and Metohija, even when it was a victim of the aggression and defended itself as best as it could. It is very important experience and lesson, which points to the conclusion that we should really avoid starting armed conflicts, as much as possible.<sup>2</sup>

The topic "*Kosovo-Metohija crisis: the military strategic problems*" will be discussed through the following sections: (1) the military strategic problems in the period of preparation for the defence against the NATO aggression; (2) the military strategic problems at the time of the defence and the agreement on the end of the war and (3) the military strategic problems in the post-war period.

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<sup>2</sup> About various consequences of the Kosovo-Metohija crisis, in more detail: Radoslav Gaćinović, *Otimanje Kosova i Metohije*, NIC „Vojska“, Beograd, 2004.

## The military strategic problems in the period of preparation for the defence against the NATO aggression

During the period of preparation for the defence against the aggression, several military strategic problems have been present, including the following with a particularly unfavourable impact: the difficult preparation of the Army for the defence; the insufficiently developed awareness that the country faces a real danger of aggression; the fierce propaganda against our country and its Army; the unsuccessful attempts to deter aggression, etc.

*The difficult preparation of the Army for the defence* can be mitigated to certain extent if a state functions well, if there are necessary strategic and doctrinal documents, a reliable ally and if the quantitative and qualitative capacities of the Army are constantly improved.

Although after Dayton, in 1995, there was some relaxation of foreign pressure towards our country, there were new tensions soon, which coincided with the manifestation of misunderstanding between the leadership of Serbia and Montenegro and the complex functioning of the federal state. This relationship of the member states of the federal state had the effect that not even as many funds as it was objectively possible and necessary were allocated for the modernization of the Yugoslav Army (hereinafter: YA). In addition to the real problems faced by the state, the restrictive financing of the YA was also influenced by the fact that some structures believed that the problems related to Kosovo and Metohija could only be solved by political means.

Strategic, doctrinal, normative and planning documents represent a very important part of the preparation for defence against aggression of any country. It is characteristic that FRY did not have adopted strategic and doctrinal documents, such as national security strategy, defence strategy and military doctrine at that time.<sup>3</sup> It is almost a unique case that a country finds itself in a war without documents that essentially analyse the security environment and define the organization and principles of the functioning of the security system, which is very important for the defence of the country. Relying on some earlier experiences, a fairly good basis for the organization of the defence was established in the Army even in such conditions, so that problem was mitigated to some extent. All planning documents related to the functioning of the Yugoslav Army, such as the engagement plan, mobilization plan, security plans, etc. were up-to-date, adopted in time and implemented in accordance with possibilities. It should be particularly emphasized that all the analyses that preceded the preparation of the plans showed an extremely unfavourable relationship between the forces of NATO and FRY, especially our technical and technological inferiority in relation to the aggressor.

For countries with limited defence potential, which have chosen not to participate in military blocs, and that face a number of essential challenges, risks and threats, it is of

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<sup>3</sup> The Defence Strategy of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro was adopted for the first time in 2004, and the National Security Strategy, Defence Strategy and Military Doctrine of the Republic of Serbia were adopted for the first time in 2009.

particular importance to find a reliable ally in time. As it is known, FRY did not do this, which led to rather great military strategic and other problems. It will be recorded in the history of wars that a country found itself in a position to wage a defensive war without allies against the greatest military alliance of that time, and in a certain sense also against neighbouring countries, which supported that alliance even though they were not yet its integral part. It is a great lesson for modern times, as well, in order to think carefully about whether military neutrality should be supported by an alliance with a country or countries that could help our country in the event of a renewed threat to our defence. In any case, an important part of this lesson is that alliances are not sought when a country is in an immediate danger because it is usually late then and unsuccessful, which means that this problem should be solved in time.

Due to the mentioned problems, there was a delay in the necessary improvement of the defence capabilities of the Army. It is known that for more than a decade, our Army has not received any serious armed system that would be a deterrent against aggression, and also a factor of effective defence. In this regard, the fact stated by General Spasoje Smiljanić is characteristic: "The last purchase of some modern weapons system in the Air Force and Air Defence was made in 1987, when 14 MiG-29 aircraft were put into operational use."<sup>4</sup> There were similar problems in other branches and services of our Army, as well. In addition to a series of negative impacts on the defence of the country, the insufficient preparation of the elements of the defence system in an appropriate manner also shows that the Yugoslav leadership at that time did not prepare to solve the problem of Kosovo and Metohija by armed means, but hoped that it could be achieved only by political means.

*The insufficiently developed awareness that the country is threatened by the real danger of the aggression* rather negatively affected the preparation of the FRY defence. Firstly, there were many our citizens, even in important state functions, who thought it was simply incredible that a war would happen at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Europe, or aggression against FRY, without its essential guilt. Secondly, representatives of the highest state, even republican, leadership, were convinced that the problem of Kosovo and Metohija could be solved by political means and that there would be no war.<sup>5</sup> In strategic and doctrinal documents of many countries, aggression is mentioned as a possible form of threat to security.<sup>6</sup> The aggression is mentioned as one of the most important challenges, risks and threats in both National Security Strategies of the Republic of Serbia, which is a good circumstance.

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<sup>4</sup> Spasoje Smiljanić, *Agresija NATO – RV i PVO u odbrani otadžbine*, Beograd, 2009, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> Shortly after the end of the war, in 2004, when the Defence Strategy of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro was developed, there were many discussions about whether the aggression against our country should be included in the scope of challenges, risks and threats.

<sup>6</sup> The Italian Chief of the General Staff told the author of this paper in 2003 that their Army was preparing for the "defence against aggression". When asked what danger of aggression threatens Italy, having in mind that it is a member of the EU and NATO, the Italian General answered: "There is no such danger now, but who knows what awaits us in the future, and the Army is not founded and prepared when there is a danger, but this should be done continuously". It is a truly responsible and instructive approach to the problems of the country's defence.

*The fierce propaganda against our country and its Army*, before the aggression, during it and in the post-war period, is a serious problem that also has military strategic aspects. It is simply unbelievable how insinuations have been launched against our country. It was claimed that 100,000 Albanians were killed, that ethnic cleansing was carried out and that more than a million of them were expelled, that some kind of "Horseshoe" operation was conducted, which did not exist at all, and it turned out that the "Račak" case has a completely different character from the one presented to the public on the eve of the aggression. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia reacted to those untruths, but apparently not enough, because the aggressor had a great advantage in terms of organization and technology. The experiences show that this caused a great damage to the treatment of our country in foreign countries, as it encouraged many to participate in the aggression.

*The unsuccessful attempts to deter aggression* represented a very great military strategic problem because it meant that the country was entering the war. The war against FRY confirms the existence of a correlation between diplomacy and the elements of the security system. This practically meant that the country would have had a better chance of solving the problem of Kosovo and Metohija by diplomatic means if diplomacy had been more successful, and this could have happened if those efforts, by their respective existence, could have been more convincingly supported by the elements of the security system, above all, the strong army. The attempts to politically solve the problems in Kosovo and Metohija and deter the aggression, by the highest state and military structures, took place practically until the last day before the aggression. The US representatives Richard Holbrooke, Christopher Hill and General Anderson left Belgrade on March 22, 1999 at 6:45 p.m., and on March 23, the Chief of the General Staff, General Dragoljub Ojdanić, had a telephone conversation with the NATO Commander General Clark.<sup>7</sup> Through contacts with foreign military and civil diplomatic representatives, our party made significant efforts to exert an influence that war does not occur. On the basis of the reactions of many of those foreign representatives, it could be concluded that they understood what it was all about; many of them openly spoke out against the war, but many repeated that the "NATO credibility" was at stake. The aggression against FRY was long prepared. This is indicated by many statements, and also by practical actions of the NATO structures, such as the detailed recording of potential targets, the performance of command and staff exercises in which our area was included, the development of various plans for the engagement of the armed forces, the support to the establishment, training, equipping and combat engagement of the armed groups of Albanians, etc. It is certain that the preparation of the aggression did not begin after the unsuccessful negotiations in Rambouillet and Paris, or the conflict in the village of Račak, but much earlier.

The military strategic problems during the preparation for the defence against the aggression were numerous and affected the period of war, and some are manifested even in modern times.

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<sup>7</sup> A few days before the aggression, there were several talks between General Ojdanić and General Clark. In one of them, General Clark threatened to destroy our forces in 2-3 days.

## The military strategic problems at the time of the defence and the agreement on the end of the war

A great number of military strategic problems manifested in the course of the war, and the following are the most important: conducting defence in conditions of an extremely unfavourable balance of forces, accepting the moment and reaching an agreement on the end of the war, etc.

Many papers by our and foreign authors have been written about *the performance of the defence against the NATO forces in conditions of an extremely unfavourable balance of forces*.<sup>8</sup> It will certainly be recorded in history that a relatively small army fought heroically against NATO - the greatest power of that time. The main feature of that war period was a rather asymmetric balance of forces.<sup>9</sup>

The complexity of the defence of the YA units deployed in Kosovo and Metohija was greatly aggravated by the fact that a part of the Albanian population was hostile towards our forces, and the units of the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army (hereinafter: KLA) were directly engaged against the Army and Police in that area, as well as from the territory of Albania. In such unfavourable military strategic conditions, the YA displayed a number of exemplary qualities, such as high morale and determination to defend the country, willingness and capability to undertake a great number of atypical tactical actions that somewhat alleviated the disproportion in the balance of forces, undertaking a great number of measures to protect its forces and tactical deception of the opponent, in which, in addition to the Army members, our citizens also participated. In the NATO aggression against FRY, all elements of the security system tried to perform their assigned tasks as best as possible.<sup>10</sup>

In this regard, an interesting assessment was made by the US General McMaster, the former National Security Advisor to the US President. He mentions that "military plans for the bombing of Yugoslavia were made from May 1998 to March 1999, and also that NATO neglected the fact that the outcome also depends on the Yugoslav reactions and initiatives that proved impossible to predict... The ability of Serbs to obtain serious intelligence data on the Allied operations, despite their technological inferiority, calls into question the deniability component of 'information superiority', even against an enemy with very basic capabilities...Less than 5 percent of the Serbian combat systems were destroyed in 78 days of bombing. The NATO efforts to attack the ground troops of the enemy failed. The extent of the failure became apparent only when the war was over", concludes McMaster.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> On the balance of forces, see: Božidar Forca, *Dve suprotstavljene godišnjice*, ZR "Međunarodnopravni i bezbednosni aspekti NATO agresije na SRJ 1999", FDB, Beograd, 2019, p. 49

<sup>9</sup> About the balance of forces in more detail: Spasoje Smiljanić, gen. quote.

<sup>10</sup> It happened that Prishtina Corps conducted several operations at the same time: AD, counterterrorist operation, defensive operation from the attack from Albania, etc.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.blic.rs/vest/svet/novi-trampov-savetnik-o-nato-bombardovi-srbi-su-znali-svaki-nas-korak-unru/kvz24pn> (April 2018).

This analysis by the experienced US representative is very important, from the point of view of considering the correlation of technical and technological inferiority and practical results in the defence of our Army units.

When *accepting the moment and reaching an agreement on the end of the war*, a great number of military strategic problems has also manifested. At some point, all combat actions have to stop and a political solution to a conflict has to be sought. Our case is instructive because there are different opinions about when the war should have ended. In any case, the moment and manner of ending a war are a part of the first-rate military strategic connotation. In this regard, there are many controversial assessments about the role of the Army during the agreement on the end of the war, referring to the signing of the Military Technical Agreement. It should be emphasized that the Army and Police did not decide on the moment of ending the war. The Ahtisaari-Chernomyrdin document was accepted by the Government of FRY and the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. The military strategic importance of this issue, as well as a good lesson and experience, consists of the fact that a situation can be created where the Army representatives lead negotiations and sign documents of the utmost importance for the country as a whole. Special problems may arise in such situations due to insufficient knowledge of international legal documents, as well as negotiation skills, which should be taken into account in the military education process.

## The military strategic problems in the post-war period

Although almost 23 years have passed since the end of the war, many military strategic problems still manifest today, and the following are the most important: the implementation of the provisions of the adopted documents; the effort to preserve the territorial integrity after the withdrawal of the FRY Armed Forces from a part of the state territory; eliminating the consequences of the aggression; the realistic qualification of the attack by the NATO forces on FRY, etc.

*The implementation of the provisions of the adopted documents*, with particular reference to the Military Technical Agreement, the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, and even the Brussels Agreement, has not been carried out as planned. It is well-known how long the list of unaccomplished provisions of those documents is. This, mainly, refers to obstructing the return of the exiled, obstructing the search for the missing, seizing state, church, corporate and private property, endangering the safety of the non-Albanian, primarily Serbian population, then manipulation with the planned disarmament of the Albanian formations, the unaccomplished return of the Army and Police to Kosovo and Metohija, the preservation of the Serbian sovereignty over that area, etc. This attitude of the Albanian representatives and a part of the international institutions seriously calls into question the purpose of reaching any possible new agreement on solving the Kosovo-Metohija crisis because there is no guarantee that it would be consistently implemented. History abounds with examples of bypassing the implementation of adopted international

documents. Therefore, at least two approaches are necessary. The first is reflected in the fact that every wording is emphatically taken into account during the adoption of documents, and the second approach implies that immediately after the adoption of documents, one should insist on their implementation.<sup>12</sup>

*The effort to preserve the territorial integrity of the country*, even though the adopted documents are not implemented, is perhaps the key problem within the Kosovo-Metohija crisis. It is clear that other problems would be easier to eliminate if Serbia had full sovereignty over that part of its territory. Those problems are adequately addressed in our strategic and doctrinal documents. In the meantime, very little has changed, so the threat to our country's security is still current. This can be seen in the Brussels negotiations, as well as through various pressure on Serbia to accept the secession of a great part of its territory. The preservation of territorial integrity in the conditions of the withdrawal of the Armed Forces from a part of the state territory, where a great part of the population is hostile towards the state and other ethnic groups, represents a rather great military strategic and geopolitical problem. In any case, it is a critical period of the war because with the engagement of the army, as a rule, there is an exodus of population, with enormous problems and potential consequences, which lead to great and long-lasting political, economic, moral and other outcomes. Therefore, the preservation of territorial integrity is still a serious military strategic, security and even political problem.<sup>13</sup> Within that, the defence of the non-Albanian population in Kosovo and Metohija and the return of the exiled has been a special problem for almost 23 years. It is simply unbelievable how the Western protagonists accepted the Kosovo-Metohija's Albanians to violate almost all of their civilizational values, such as freedom, human rights, inviolability of private property, the right to personal security, etc. There are many examples of this, and one of the most severe is the pogrom, primarily of the Serbian population, in March 2004.

*Eliminating the consequences of the aggression* represents a serious military strategic, moral, economic, political and every other problem for our country. In addition to human casualties and material destruction, the subsequent problems, as a consequence of the use of depleted uranium, the targeting of facilities with harmful substances, etc, have recently come to the fore. It is a good circumstance that the increased attention has recently been paid to this issue at the state level. Eliminating the consequences of the aggression encompasses many problems, including the following ones of a military strategic character: recording victims and helping their families, caring

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<sup>12</sup> The author of these lines had a number of official meetings with KFOR Commanders and regularly initiated the issue of returning parts of our Army and Police to Kosovo and Metohija. The interlocutors confirmed that this was planned by Resolution 1244, but emphasized that it was a "political issue". These conversations were reported to the highest state leadership, but there were no results.

<sup>13</sup> An interesting assessment was made in mid-November 2017 by the former US ambassador at Belgrade, W. Montgomery about the fact that "it would be difficult for Trump to show where the Balkans is on a map". This means that it is necessary to present the real facts about the problem of Kosovo and Metohija to certain foreign factors.



for the injured, eliminating the consequences of material destruction, decontamination from depleted uranium and other harmful substances; resolving the post-conflict syndrome among the Army members; protecting the Army from various insinuations, etc.

*The realistic qualification of the attack by the NATO forces on FRY*, as well as the final analysis of the causes, course and consequences of the aggression at the level of the official state bodies, represents a great problem because in our society there are no relatively harmonized answers to some essential questions, such as: the character of the war, the key cause, whether and how the crisis could have been resolved differently, which security, economic, geopolitical, geostrategic, legal and other consequences of the aggression are, etc. After the end of the war many views have been expressed about the causes, course and consequences of the NATO aggression against FRY.

The former Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladislav Jovanović told the media that, back in 1991, the US ambassador at Belgrade at that time, Warren Zimmerman, threatened him that “if there is armed violence in Kosovo, Serbia will be accused of it, and then bombed”.

The famous German politician Willy Wimmer said: “Kosovo as a country was planned from the end of the 1980s and its sole purpose is to be the US aircraft carrier on earth. The war against Yugoslavia in 1999 was illegal. For the conflict resolution, we have to insist on the original Resolution 1244 of the UN SC, as it was written in 1999.”<sup>14</sup> In addition, his letter to the German Chancellor after the meeting in Bratislava in May 2000 was also known, when he emphasized that the meaning of the NATO war against Yugoslavia is the “correction of mistakes from the end of World War II”.

In the search for the reasons of the war, Professor Miroljub Jevtić states: “Let the statement of the US Vice President at that time, Joseph Biden, serve as characteristic. He said that Kosovo should be given independence because it will be an example for the Islamic world”.<sup>15</sup> On the other occasion, Jevtić states that the following is mentioned as reasons for the aggression: firstly, the fact that they consider us “little Russians”, secondly, the fact that Kosmet contains great wealth and, thirdly, the fact that Albanians gave Americans Camp Bondsteel. Having stated that all those three moments are not crucial, he states: “That is – Islam”.<sup>16</sup>

A similar assessment is made by Professor Srđa Trifković: “The US policy in Southeast Europe, during the past two decades, was in favour of aspirations of the allegedly pro-Western Muslim communities along the geographic line that leads from Turkey to northwest towards Central Europe. This policy was based on expectations that meeting Muslim ambitions at the secondary Balkan scene would improve the position of the United States in the Islamic world as a whole...”.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> D. Vujičić, Vili Vimer: *Kosovo je američki nosač aviona na zemlji*, *Novosti*, 25/02/2019, Beograd, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> Miroljub Jevtić, *Kosovski žeton*, *Politika*, 18/08/2011, Internet: <http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/Sta-da-se-radi/Kosovski-zeton.sr.html>, (downloaded: 10.07.2014.)

<sup>16</sup> Miroljub Jevtić, *Amerikanci teraju Srbe da budu mali Rusi*, *Politika*, 10/02/2019, Beograd, p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> Srđa Trifković, *Zelena transverzala ugrožava Srbe sa obe strane Drine*, *Geopolitika*, number 107, 2018, p. 70.

Professor Ratko Marković, the head of the Yugoslav delegation at the negotiations in Rambouillet (from February 6 to 23, 1999), unequivocally asserts that this event was “a phase in the implementation of the decision made before it to separate Kosovo from Serbia by attacking Serbia, and to oust S. Milošević from power in Serbia...”<sup>18</sup>

The so-called KLA was treated as a terrorist organization in the West. However, a change occurred after Richard Holbrook’s meeting with the KLA leaders, on June 24, 1998, in Junik. The background of this change is noticed by Živadin Jovanović, the Minister of Foreign Affairs at that time, who quotes the British Defence Attache John Crosland during his testimony in the Hague, when he stated: “Bill Clinton, Richard Holbrooke and Madeleine Albright decided to change the regime in Belgrade and that the KLA should be a tool to achieve such a goal...”<sup>19</sup>

The former UNPROFOR Commander in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canadian General Lewis MacKenzie, says that the NATO aggression against Serbia in 1999 was a huge mistake of the Alliance. “1999 was the year when NATO marked its 50th anniversary, and there was no enemy in sight. That is why your country was bombed”, said MacKenzie for “Novosti”.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the fact that on March 22, 1999 the NATO Council made a political decision on the aggression, and on March 23, Secretary General Javier Solana transferred the authority to General Wesley Clark to initiate the operation, he still waited for the final order from the US. “...Washington called at 5:31 p.m. Hugh Shelton was on the line, who conveyed to me the final order from the top of the US National Command...”<sup>21</sup>

The famous US intellectual Noam Chomsky has talked about the Yugoslav crisis several times. Thus, concerning the reasons for the NATO aggression he stated: “Some people guess real reasons for the NATO bombing ... Strobe Talbott, who was in charge of diplomacy during the war, wrote a preface to the book on the war by his colleague John Norris .... ‘Yugoslav resistance to wider trends of political and economic reforms - not the agonies of the Kosovo Albanians - best explains the NATO war’. On the basis of the extensive documented information that exists in the West, it is already clear that the ‘Kosovo Albanian agonies’ cannot be a motive for the NATO bombing. However, it is interesting to hear from the highest level that the real reason of the bombing was that Yugoslavia used to be the last European bastion that resisted the political and economic programmes of the Clinton Administration and its allies”.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Ratko Marković, *Tri krupne laži o navodnim pregovorima u Rambujeu*, Politika, 10/02/2019, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Živadin Jovanović, *1244 KLJUČ MIRA U EVROPI*, Beogradski forum za svet ravnopravnih, Srpska književna zadruga, Beograd, 2018, p. 35.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.pravda.rs/2019/3/10/bivsi-general-unprofora-nato-agresija-je-bila-najveca-greska-ovo-surazlozi-zbog-kojih-je-srbija-bombardovana/>, 10/03/2019.

<sup>21</sup> Vesli Klark, *Moderno ratovanje*, Samizdat B-92, Beograd, 2003, p. 223.

<sup>22</sup> Noam Čomski, *Jugoslavija, mir, rat i raspad*, Samizdat, Beograd, 2018, p. 191.

The economist Mladen Kovačević makes similar remarks: "... Strobe Talbott wrote that the bombing of FRY, i.e. Serbia, was not the consequence of what was happening in Kosovo and Metohija, but because they could not convince Milošević to accept the liberal model of reforms that were accepted by all neighbouring countries".<sup>23</sup>

Oliver Richmond, Professor of international relations from the University of Manchester, said: "The NATO intervention in Kosovo is inexplicable from the point of view of observing the structure of territorial sovereignty of a state - a key premise, and also a limitation of the global geopolitical order established after World War II. At the same time, Kosovo is a failure of the policy of international interventionism..."<sup>24</sup>

Václav Klaus, the former President of the Czech Republic, made an interesting assessment of the character of that war and blamed NATO for the exodus of Albanians, saying "that they started fleeing from Kosovo and Metohija only with the first NATO bombs and that this 'key fact' shows that we cannot talk about the alleged primary goal of NATO to prevent a mass refugee wave".<sup>25</sup>

The Russian historian Tatiana Grachova has noticed: "In relation to Russia, the same scenario that was used in Yugoslavia and Iraq is taking place. Bush called Yugoslavia a model with a reason".<sup>26</sup>

The former US ambassador to FRY, William Montgomery, in a special RTS programme (March 11, 2007), on the anniversary of Slobodan Milošević's death, admits: "The aggression against Serbia was aimed at making Kosovo an independent state".

The whole problem related to the Kosovo-Metohija crisis Professor Milimir Stepić views as follows: "The Kosovo-Metohija issue is interpreted both as democratic and demographic, as historical and current, ethnic and economic, social and civilizational, religious and ideological, political and legal, and as related to resources and development - and it has always in fact been predominantly geopolitical".<sup>27</sup>

At the end of his book, General Smiljanić states: "Forgetting the NATO aggression and giving up the struggle for Serbian Kosovo and Metohija would be the greatest sin of modern generations of the Serbian nation".<sup>28</sup>

Within the realistic qualification of the attack by the NATO forces on FRY, it is also important to identify the key cause of the aggression. It is obvious that this was not the situation in Kosovo and Metohija. The manipulation about that situation could possibly serve as an excuse for the use of force. The key cause of the aggression, at the time of marking the 50th anniversary of NATO, is the effort to give this Alliance a

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<sup>23</sup> B. Crnjanski Spasojević, *Mladen Kovačević: U dužničko ropstvo gurnuli su nas nazovi eksperti*, Novosti, 26/10/2014, Beograd, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Tanja Vujić, *Kosovo je promašaj politike međunarodnog intervencionizma*, Politika, 28/04/2018, Beograd, Internet: <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/402781/Kosovo-je-promasaj-politike-medunarodnog-intervencionizma>, 30/03/2019.

<sup>25</sup> Internet: [https://www.vreme.com/arhiva\\_html/vb5/3.html](https://www.vreme.com/arhiva_html/vb5/3.html), 30/03/2019.

<sup>26</sup> Tatjana Gračova, *Sveta Rusija protiv Hazarije*, Sveta Rusija, Beograd, 2009, p. 65.

<sup>27</sup> Milimir Stepić, *Kosovo i Metohija –postmoderni geopolitički eksperiment*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2012, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Spasoje Smiljanić, gen. quote. p. 483.

new meaning of its existence and expansion, which has created the conditions for the increased manifestation of the geopolitical supremacy of the leading countries of the Alliance.

## Conclusion

On the basis of the presented facts, it can be concluded that the main hypothesis has been confirmed, as follows: the research of the military strategic problems related to the Kosovo-Metohija crisis is necessary in order to discover new experiences that are important for the security and defence of the country in the present and future times.

This paper, like many other analyses, was intended to contribute to a better understanding of the complex Kosovo-Metohija problem. It is obvious that there is a need to strengthen the efforts to resolve the Kosovo-Metohija crisis by an integral approach<sup>29</sup> of all available national capacities in the country and abroad, towards the influential world power centres and Albanian factors, in order to find the best possible solution. At the same time, one should not act hastily, but constantly implement well-founded, well-intentioned initiatives.

Furthermore, one should constantly refer to the Resolution 1244 (it can only be imagined in what way Albanians and those who support them would have reacted if this international document had supported their aspirations). In addition, in public discourse it should be emphasized that our state forces did not commit any ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and Metohija.<sup>30</sup>

Since it is unequivocal that the NATO aggression against FRY in 1999 was, to put it mildly, unacceptable - and everything that has arisen as a consequence of that act was also wrong, and it refers, mainly, to the attempts to establish an independent state of Kosovo.

The NATO aggression in Yugoslavia in 1999, the events after that time, as well as the current situation, show that war, unfortunately, remains a real option. Although war is the greatest evil for most humanity, those factors that see good business and opportunity to achieve some other selfish interests in war constantly survive. This fact imperatively imposes the obligation to smaller countries to keep taking care of their defence and security. In addition to the preparation for defence from classical armed force, we have been recently facing other forms of wars, such as: hybrid, asymmetric, network, information, psychotronics, experimental, media, etc.

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<sup>29</sup> In more detail: Branko Krga i Danijela Bjelja, *Integralni pristup rešavanju kosovsko-metohijske krize*, Zbornik radova, Diplomacija i bezbednost, FDB, Beograd, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> The impact of the Hague Tribunal on the entire evaluation of the 1999 events deserves a special analysis. Namely, the convicted representatives of the YA certainly did not commit any crimes personally. At all levels of our military education, students are taught how our territory and citizens are defended, and they do not attack or commit ethnic cleansing.

For smaller non-bloc countries, such as FRY, and now Serbia, it is very important to understand the geopolitical context in which it implements its defence and security, as well as to have relevant intelligence data at its disposal. This should enable the establishment of a real geopolitical code that would show the country's strengths and weaknesses in relation to potential opponents.

The very important experience and lesson is also reflected in the fact that one should try to solve internal problems, such as Kosovo and Metohija, by political means. In doing so, it has to be taken into account that there are always factors who would like to provoke armed conflicts, to attribute their sins to others, to present themselves as victims and to obtain foreign aid. Unfortunately, this was seen in the resolution of the Yugoslav crisis several times. Therefore, it is essential to prevent "the spiral of violence". It is very hard to stop such a process and, as a rule, it negatively reflects on the state that would like to preserve its territory, sovereignty and independence by legitimate means.

In this paper, several important military strategic problems have been discussed. There are much more of them. Therefore, expert analyses are still needed on such an important event as the NATO aggression against FRY in 1999, in order to get new convincing answers to many significant questions. At the same time, the representatives of our country have a mitigating circumstance - they only use the truth. The scientific and educational institutions should be mainly involved in these serious tasks, in which the University of Defence has an extremely important role.

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## *S u m m a r y*

The research shows the key elements of the NATO aggression against Yugoslavia in 1999, whose military and strategic aspects have produced various political consequences over a longer period of time. The military intervention has intensified and multiplied various political problems that had been present even before it took place. All of these problems were present during the aggression and were visible after it, as well. The consequences of the military intervention have placed a serious burden upon the Serbian governmental officials, who have to seek

an adequate solution to these problems, but more importantly, to find causes of these historical and political issues. If the governmental efforts prove successful we can expect solutions that can bring long-term stability to the region, both in military and strategic aspects.

*Key words: Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbia, aggression, NATO, war, 1999, military strategic problems, defence*

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