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## MILITARY ASPECTS OF THE BREAK-UP OF YUGOSLAVIA

### Abstract

The break-up of the SFRY in 1991 led to a significant reshaping of the region's political landscape. Four of the six former Yugoslav republics subsequently joined NATO, enhancing the geopolitical stability in the North Atlantic Alliance's vicinity. Given the intricate socio-political dynamics in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, the affiliation of these former Yugoslav republics with NATO undoubtedly contributes to regional stability. Conversely, in the prevailing political climate, the Russian Federation, leveraging its influence among the Bosnian Serbs and within Serbia, is introducing destabilizing factors to the area.

**Keywords:** Yugoslavia, NATO armed conflict, break-up of the SFRY, stabilization, armed intervention

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia held a unique position on the political map of Europe prior to 1989. Its vast expanse, stretching nearly from the Aegean Sea to the Alps, meant that its geopolitical significance in the political landscape of the Old Continent at that time was profound. While the SFRY formally adopted a socialist system (distinct in many ways from other nations within the so-called "people's democracies"), it maintained a neutral stance following the 1948 disagreement between its leader, Josip Broz-Tito, and Joseph Stalin. Even after relations with the USSR improved after Stalin's death in 1953, Yugoslavia refrained from joining either the Comecon or the Warsaw Pact<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://blog.tagesanzeiger.ch/historyreloaded/index.php/3920/briefe-die-geschichte-schrieben/>, accessed: 9/18/2021.



For clear reasons, the federal army, officially termed the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA, *Југословенска народна армија/Jugoslovenska narodna armija*), was particularly cherished by Marshal Tito, who served as the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces until his passing in 1980. His influence was pivotal in both the strategic and operational facets of its evolution. However, the 1948 split with the Kremlin posed significant challenges. The Yugoslav People's Army found itself isolated from Soviet resources, and strained relations with the West hindered arms imports from the US or the UK. It was only after 1953, with the normalization of ties with NATO nations, that Yugoslavia began to acquire military equipment from the West, bolstering, among other things, its naval capabilities. The US supplied artillery and navigational tools, enabling the completion of the *Split* destroyer (after a staggering 20 years), while the UK sold two relatively modern W-class destroyers, which were commissioned as *Pula* and *Kotor* under the Yugoslav flag.<sup>2</sup> After Stalin's death, the thawing of relations between Belgrade and Moscow facilitated arms purchases from the USSR and the acquisition of production licenses domestically. The primary producer of military equipment was the *Crvena Zastava* factory in Kragujevac, supplemented by the Rijeka and Kraljevica shipyards and the Mostar aviation plant<sup>3</sup>. By the late 1960s, the Yugoslav People's Army was designed to counter potential threats from all directions. Its general staff formulated defense strategies against potential aggression from either the Warsaw Pact or the North Atlantic Alliance. For obvious reasons, a joint invasion of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia by these military blocs was deemed implausible. 1968 marked a significant shift, particularly with the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia and the quelling of *the Prague Spring*. It is worth noting that the Yugoslav leadership had previously endorsed the Soviet intervention in Hungary in 1956, which had elements of a civil war, unlike the more peaceful *Prague Spring*. The audacity of the USSR and its allies (excluding Romania) in August 1968 deeply unsettled Belgrade. Not just Marshal Tito, but most of Yugoslavia's political elite believed that under certain conditions, Soviet forces, along with their Hungarian or Bulgarian counterparts bordering the SFRY, might initiate a similar incursion. An ethnic conflict could potentially provide the pretext. It would not be far-fetched to put forward the thesis that the apprehension of a Soviet intervention played a crucial role in preventing the escalation of national disputes, thereby preserving Yugoslav unity until the mid-1980s.

These anxieties prompted a re-evaluation of the SFRY's defense approach. The Yugoslav General Staff deduced that defending against multi-pronged aggression (from Hungary, Bulgaria, possibly Romania, and from the sea) would be unfeasible. Memories of the spring of 1941, when attacks from nearly all sides – led by the Third Reich and its allies – swiftly overpowered the Yugoslav army, were still fresh<sup>4</sup>. The memories of those events led Yugoslav generals to adopt the thesis that the resistance of the regular army to such a multi-directional aggression could only be of a delaying nature. It was assumed that major cities like Belgrade and Zagreb would likely fall to invaders within days. Such grim realities led the Yugoslav People's Army to introduce, in the early 1970s, a new war doctrine

<sup>2</sup> Z. Freivogel, *Jugoslovijski niszczyciel Split*, "Okrety Wojenne" 2021, No. 5, pp. 65–67.

<sup>3</sup> M. Davor, *JNA u agresji na Republiku Hrvatsku*, Zagreb 2002, p. 10 et seq.

<sup>4</sup> D. Vogel, *Das Eingreifen Deutschlands auf dem Balkan*, in: *Das Deutsche Reich und Zweiter Weltkrieg*. Bd 3. Hrsg. G. Schreiber, B. Stegemann, Stuttgart 1984, p. 428 et seq.

termed “universal people’s defense” (Serbian: *Opšta narodna odbrana*, Croatian: *Opća narodna Obrana*). The doctrine posited that once the primary defense lines of the regular army were breached, the focus would shift to guerrilla warfare, with broad-based support from the Yugoslav populace, drawing on lessons from the Second World War. The SFRY, in a move that was globally unprecedented, began preparations for this type of irregular warfare against potential invaders even during peacetime. By the early 1980s, the SFRY’s Territorial Defense boasted around 800,000 first-round reservists and could be augmented by thousands more trained individuals when necessary. Notably, defense training was mandatory for school and university students, as stipulated by a law passed by the Federal Parliament in 1974<sup>5</sup>. The Yugoslav Territorial Defense, unlike its Polish counterpart of the time, was fully equipped with light weaponry and even armored personnel carriers. Interestingly, the division of the JNA into military districts did not align with the administrative divisions of the SFRY<sup>6</sup>. Instead, the Yugoslav Territorial Defense was territorially linked to individual republics. This arrangement raised secessionist concerns, with Marshal Tito himself reportedly expressing reservations towards the end of his life. However, this setup laid the groundwork for the future armies of the SFRY successor states. By the 1970s, the JNA, much like its founder Marshal Tito, had aged, and by the early 1980s, the army was in dire need of modernization. JNA General Staff officers recognized that the army’s divisional structure was outdated and, more alarmingly, could jeopardize the core of the ground forces if faced with a superior adversary in full-scale combat. In simple terms, large troop formations could become easy targets for the enemy, especially when airborne. Such a scenario was seriously considered by the Federal Ministry of Defense. Consequently, by the late 1980s, there was a transition from a divisional to a brigade structure. These new, smaller brigade units were granted increased tactical and operational independence. While conscription remained, the JNA was gradually moving to contract and professional military service. For instance, in the Air Force and National Air Defense, out of 30,000 officers and soldiers, only 4,000 were conscripts, as of 1990<sup>7</sup>. A similar trend was observed in the Navy. A pressing concern was the ethnic composition of the Yugoslav People’s Army. This issue was of constant concern to Marshal Tito who consistently ensured that its makeup, particularly among officers and non-commissioned officers, mirrored the ethnic distribution of the Yugoslav population. While the composition among soldiers largely reflected the ethnic demographics, the Yugoslav general staff displayed disparities. Specifically, in 1989, Serbian conscripts constituted 31% and JNA generals of that nationality 50%. Croatian conscripts were nearly 19% and generals 14%. Among Slovenes, there was a balanced representation of 7% each (ironically, in terms of proportionality, Slovenes were the most numerous in the JNA generalship). Macedonians had a similar proportion (6% to 7%), but

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<sup>5</sup> <http://mojustav.rs/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Ustav-SFRJ-iz-1974.pdf>, (accessed: 9/27/2021).

<sup>6</sup> There were three primary military districts within the JNA: The 1st Military District, headquartered in Belgrade, covered Serbia, eastern Croatia, and parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The 2nd Military District, with its headquarters in Zagreb, encompassed most of Croatia and Slovenia, as well as parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The 3rd Military District, based in Skopje, was responsible for Macedonia and Montenegro, excluding the coast. Separate from these was the Coastal District, which covered almost the entire coast. The command headquarters for this district was located in Split. – G.E. Curtis (ed.), *Yugoslavia: a country study*, Washington, D.C. 1992, p. 201 et seq.

<sup>7</sup> T. Ripley, *Conflict in the Balkans 1991–2000*, London 2000, p. 14.

the most striking ratio among Montenegrins was 2% conscripts to 12% generals<sup>8</sup>. It is therefore hard to overlook that almost two-thirds of the JNA generals in the last year of peace in Yugoslavia were Serbs and Montenegrins. This suggests that, despite Marshal Tito's efforts and those of his close associates, the situation was not much different from the reality of the royal Yugoslav armed forces before the Second World War. The consequences of this, as is widely known, proved disastrous in the spring of 1941. However, it would be remiss not to mention that Croats held the highest positions in the SFRY armed forces until the end of the existence of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991. For instance, Colonel General Anton Tus was the commander of the Air Force and Air Defense of the JNA from 1985 to 1991. In 1991, he left the Federal Army to become the first-ever Chief of General Staff of the armed forces of his native Croatia. Fleet Admiral Sveto Letica was the JNA Deputy Chief of Staff for Naval Affairs in the mid-1980s. Upon retirement, he highlighted the growing nationalism among the peoples of the SFRY. Recalled to active duty in 1991, he became a co-founder of the Croatian Navy<sup>9</sup>. In 1990, the JNA's combat capability varied, and it is worth noting that it was undergoing significant reconstruction, which would not be completed until 1995. The Yugoslav Navy was in the best shape, having essentially completed the replacement of ships with the third post-war generation by the end of the 1980s. The fleet's core comprised four missile frigates of the Soviet Koni-class, with the first two ships acquired from the USSR and the subsequent two constructed under license at the Kraljevica shipyard. The surface force was further enhanced by ten Soviet-made Osa-class missile boats and six indigenous Rade Koncar-class vessels of the same class. Additionally, the fleet had 14 large torpedo boats of the Soviet Hornet-class, a dozen minesweepers, landing ships, and patrol vessels. Six missile corvettes were under construction. The Yugoslav fleet's submarine force consisted of 11 vessels, six of which were small and ideal for coastal operations. The naval air force boasted 80 combat aircraft (MiG-21 and Jastreb) and 37 helicopters. Furthermore, two squadrons of naval infantry and defense brigades, a landing brigade, and 25 coastal artillery batteries reported to the Fleet and Coastal District command. The naval personnel primarily came from Dalmatian and Montenegrin coastal residents accustomed to maritime work. The Yugoslav fleet could operate effectively given the favorable geographical conditions of the home coast. The numerous islands and bays provided ideal conditions for operations by small ships, both surface and submarine, some of which could hide in the sea-carved rocks. Additionally, there were coastal artillery positions, both gun and missile, in many strategic locations. It is also worth noting that the JNA Navy maintained a significant river flotilla on the Danube, comprising around 40 ships. Operationally, it reported to the commander of the First Military District in Belgrade<sup>10</sup>.

The land army comprised 140,000 officers and active-duty soldiers in 1990. Within 24 hours, this number could be increased to 250,000 by calling up first-choice reservists, bringing the total to almost one million. The ground forces had more than 1,500 tanks in their equipment inventory, but only about a third of them were the relatively modern

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<sup>8</sup> L.J. Cohen, J. Dragovic-Soso, *State Collapse in South-Eastern Europe*, West Lafayette Indiana 2007, p. 306.

<sup>9</sup> <https://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=11749>, (accessed: 9/29/2021).

<sup>10</sup> K. Kubiak, *Działania sił morskich po drugiej wojnie światowej. Studia przypadków*, Warszawa 2007, p. 732.

Soviet-made T-72 class and its M-84 counterpart, produced under license. The JNA also had around a thousand infantry fighting vehicles of Soviet origin. Infantry small arms were exclusively from domestic production, though some were based on Soviet prototypes. By the end of 1990, the JNA's ground troops were undergoing a reorganization which, as is well known, was never completed. In addition to other factors, this significantly affected their combat readiness<sup>11</sup>.

The state of the Air Force and National Air Defense was dire. Paradoxically, they had excellent logistical facilities but simultaneously possessed outdated equipment, especially in terms of flying apparatus. When over 100 MiG-21s were acquired from the USSR in the 1960s, having been tested in the Vietnam War, there was no consideration for updating the flying equipment for many subsequent years. However, by the late 1980s, these fighters had become severely outdated. The JNA's primary air base was situated near the Bosnian town of Bihać in Željava. It is no overstatement to say it was among the largest of its kind in Europe. Some aircraft hangars were chiseled into the rock, and the base was expertly camouflaged. Underground facilities could store thousands of liters of aviation fuel. Located in a remote, hard-to-reach area, aircraft taking off from this base could easily monitor the entire SFRY airspace. Regrettably, as the 20th century approached its final decade, the primary issue for the JNA air force was the aircraft themselves. Until the early 1960s, Yugoslav aviation primarily relied on American-made aircraft, later replaced by approximately 120 of the aforementioned Soviet-made MiG-21s. In the subsequent decade, there were attempts to develop a versatile combat aircraft of domestic production. Collaboration with Romania was also sought in this endeavor. However, these efforts ultimately led to a dead end. The resulting designs, including the Galeb and Orao, were best suited as training and combat aircraft. In 1990, the air force had approximately 400 combat aircrafts, but only 18 of these, specifically the MiG-29s imported from the USSR, could be deemed modern. Furthermore, the air force maintained a fleet of around 200 helicopters. With a personnel strength of 32,000 officers and soldiers, this branch of the SFRY armed forces was predominantly professional, as previously mentioned<sup>12</sup>.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the JNA was viewed as a formidable force. Its potential was believed to rank it between 5th and 6th among the armies of Europe. The evident decline of the USSR in the latter half of the 1980s, combined with the structural economic and social crises in the so-called "people's democracy" states, prompted the JNA General Staff to re-evaluate potential external threats to the SFRY. Intervention by Warsaw Pact states in Yugoslavia's internal matters was deemed highly improbable. Conversely, the notion of potential interference by certain NATO countries in Yugoslavia's internal affairs, especially in supporting ethnic-based separatist movements, was gaining traction. The JNA leadership, predominantly consisting of generals and admirals of Serbian or Montenegrin descent, was resolute in their intent to forcibly prevent the disintegration of the SFRY, which had been unfolding since 1990/1991. This stance was championed by the then SFRY Defense Minister, Army General Veljko Kadijević. While the JNA generalship was not unanimous in this regard, advocates for a peaceful resolution of the conflict among

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<sup>11</sup> R. Niebuhr, *Dead of teh Yugoslav People's Army and the Wars of Succession*, "Polemos" 2004, Vol. VII, No. 13–14, p. 91 et seq.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.vojska.net/eng/armed-forces/yugoslavia/airforce/>, (accessed: 9/30/2021).

them such as Chief of Military Intelligence Admiral Stane Brovet were in the minority<sup>13</sup>. The Yugoslav People's Army was deteriorating alongside the SFRY. This decline coincided with Belgrade's intensifying disputes, initially with Ljubljana, followed by Zagreb and Sarajevo. For numerous professional soldiers within the JNA, the break-up of Yugoslavia and the subsequent conflicts often posed a personal dilemma: choosing between their sworn oath and their ethnic allegiance. It would not be far-fetched to assert that, in most instances, ethnicity was the determining factor. Nonetheless, there were notable paradoxes. For instance, one of the heroes of the Croatian War of Independence was the Albanian-born General Rahim Ademi<sup>14</sup>.

The eruption of violent civil conflicts in the SFRY caught Western European countries off guard, as they were living in what Francis Fukuyama termed the "end of history" utopia. While a detailed account of these somber events is well known and would exceed the scope of this article, it is pertinent to highlight a few significant episodes that have influenced the military landscape of the post-Yugoslav region to this day. The JNA disintegrated rapidly. The initial departure of Croatian and Slovenian officers and soldiers created staffing voids that proved challenging to fill. This became evident in the autumn of 1991 during skirmishes in the Split area, where the nascent Croatian navy successfully fended off superior federal fleet forces<sup>15</sup>. Before its official disbandment in 1992, the JNA increasingly became an army championing Serbian interests. Some of its units, particularly those based in Bosnia and Herzegovina, integrated into Serbian irregular forces, often disregarding international armed conflict norms. Three primary post-1991 conflicts in the former SFRY stand out, with two remaining unresolved. The Croatian War of Independence, concluding in 1995 with Operation Storm (*Oluja* in Croatian), is the sole conflict that reached a resolution. Consequently, Croatia regained full sovereignty over its former Yugoslav territory. This military action occurred amidst unsuccessful mediation efforts by Western nations and Russia. Assisted by advisors from the former National People's Army of the GDR, the Croatian Army executed Operation Storm in August 1995, achieving comprehensive success, not only militarily<sup>16</sup>. Croatia, while rebuilding its territories devastated by the war, began its political and military integration into the Western world, culminating in the successful accession to NATO (2009) and the EU (2013)<sup>17</sup>. It is worth stating openly that this decisive move made by the Croatian government did not, to put it mildly, arouse the enthusiasm of the European Union. This is particularly puzzling considering the EU's apparent leniency towards Serbian aggression, including evident war crimes like the Dubrovnik shelling in the autumn of 1991. This reluctance was reflected in the allegations of war crimes levelled against Croatian generals which, in most cases, were not proven. However, the fact that they were put forward made Croatia's accession to the EU more difficult and

<sup>13</sup> <http://arhiva.glas-javnosti.rs/arhiva/2000/06/16/srpski/F00061501.shtm>, (accessed: 9/30/2021).

<sup>14</sup> [https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rahim\\_Ademi](https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rahim_Ademi), (accessed: 9/30/2021).

<sup>15</sup> K. Kubiak, *Działania sił morskich...*, pp. 730–731.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.friedenskooperative.de/friedensforum/artikel/deutsche-waffen-im-einsatz-im-krieg-auf-dem>, (accessed: 3/22/2023). Furthermore, NVA specialists were crucial in training the Croats, as the armaments exported to Warsaw Pact countries had slightly different specifications from those received by other nations, including Yugoslavia, cf.: <https://www.nd-aktuell.de/artikel/163605.der-groesste-waffenschmuggel-aller-zeiten.html>, (accessed: 3/22/2004).

<sup>17</sup> <http://webarchiv.bundestag.de/archive/2010/0824/dasparlament/2008/32/Beilage/002.html>, (accessed: 10/2/2021).

protracted<sup>18</sup>. While the somewhat delayed and unclear actions of both NATO and the EU regarding the Croatian-Serb conflict might be open to criticism, the conflict in the former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been a profound embarrassment for both these Western organizations. The sieges of Sarajevo and the Srebrenica massacre stand out as particularly dark chapters in the conflict, which began in 1992. The siege of Sarajevo spanned from 2 April 1992 to 29 February 1996. During this period, around 14,000 residents of the city, which was bombarded by Bosnian Serb forces from the surrounding hills, lost their lives<sup>19</sup>. Thousands of regular and paramilitary Bosnian Serb troops terrorized a city of over 300,000 residents for more than three years, disregarding consecutive UN resolutions on the issue. At the same time, numerous ships from NATO countries, including three aircraft carriers, were stationed in the Adriatic Sea as part of Operation Sharp Guard. Additionally, dozens of NATO aircraft patrolled the skies over the former SFRY day and night, aiming to uphold the arms embargo on the nations that emerged post-Yugoslavia's break-up<sup>20</sup>. These forces had the capability to swiftly neutralize the Serb forces bombarding Sarajevo, which lacked air support, in just a few hours. Regrettably, it took an extended period, the capture of UN observers by the Serbs, and further civilian casualties before NATO nations finally authorized decisive air strikes against Bosnian Serb positions around Sarajevo (Operation Deliberate Force), leading to the delicate Dayton Peace Agreement<sup>21</sup>. A particularly notable tragedy was the massacre committed by the Serbs against Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica. Consequently, Bosnian Serb army troops under the command of General Ratko Mladić, along with Serbian paramilitary units, massacred over 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys within a span of twelve days (11–22 July 1995). This occurred despite Srebrenica being designated a UN “safe zone”, overseen by a battalion of the Dutch army led by Lieutenant Colonel Thom Karremans. Despite the intricate situation in and around Srebrenica, Dutch troops were anticipated to protect Muslim civilians. The Serbs executed Bosnian men and boys right before their eyes. Furthermore, the Dutch troops were disarmed, and the Serbs threatened to eliminate them if NATO intervened. These incidents subsequently became the focus of legal proceedings in the Netherlands, which ultimately acknowledged the nation's responsibility (albeit limited to 10% – sic!) for the tragic events in Srebrenica<sup>22</sup>. Neither the battalion's commander nor his officers faced criminal charges before a military tribunal, even though their actions displayed evident cowardice in the face of the enemy<sup>23</sup>. These sorrowful events were, surprisingly, not prominently discussed in Poland and other Central European nations in the context of their NATO accession aspirations, even though they should have prompted reflection on the Alliance's efficacy. Reflecting on the conflict in the former Yugoslavia after over a quarter of a century, it is evident

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<sup>18</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4263426.stm>, (accessed: 10/3/2021).

<sup>19</sup> R.J. Donia, *Sarajevo. A Biography*, Ann Arbor 2006, p. 323 et seq. Cf. also: [https://www.icty.org/x/file/About/OTP/War\\_Demographics/en/slobodan\\_milosevic\\_sarajevo\\_030818.pdf](https://www.icty.org/x/file/About/OTP/War_Demographics/en/slobodan_milosevic_sarajevo_030818.pdf), (accessed: 10/4/2021).

<sup>20</sup> K. Kubiak, *Działania sił morskich...*, pp. 734–735.

<sup>21</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20160314010216/http://planken.rg/balkans/chronology/unprofor/1995>, (accessed: 10/4/2021).

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-49042372>, (accessed: 06.10.2021), cf. also: M. Nowicki, *Europejski Trybunał Praw Człowieka Wybór orzeczeń 2011*, Warszawa 2012, Rozdział 13 – Palić vs Bośnia i Hercegowina.

<sup>23</sup> Criminal liability in such a case is provided for by the Dutch Military Criminal Code – [https://www.dna.sr/media/17733/wetboek\\_militair\\_strafrecht.pdf](https://www.dna.sr/media/17733/wetboek_militair_strafrecht.pdf), (accessed: 10/6/2021).

that the tragic events that initiated in the late 1980s in Kosovo also culminated in this former autonomous district. From the autumn of 1998, within Kosovo, the Serbian authorities began purges targeting Albanians. The Albanian minority was not blameless either; its illicit paramilitary organization, UÇK, committed acts of terror against not only the Yugoslav Federation's state institutions but also Serbian civilians<sup>24</sup>. Although both sides bore responsibility for the escalation of the conflict, Western countries, led by the US, placed almost exclusive blame on the Serbian side. Furthermore, US Defense Secretary William Cohen and NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana contended that to avert a humanitarian disaster, there was no need for a UN Security Council resolution to authorize the operation<sup>25</sup>. After the Serbian authorities declined the ultimatum presented by Western countries in March 1999 during the Rambouillet negotiations, the North Atlantic Alliance initiated *Operation Allied Force*. This operation involved extensive airstrikes against Serbian governmental and military targets, aiming to compel the Serbian government to concede on Kosovo, effectively detaching the region from Serbia. The Alliance commenced military operations on 24 March 1999. The advantage on NATO's side was overwhelming. The Alliance deployed more than 250 combat aircrafts to the operation, against which only 15 MiG-29 fighters from the Serbian side could offer a reasonably equivalent resistance<sup>26</sup>. Given such a significant advantage, the outcome of this confrontation was predictable. Finally, on 2 June 1999, after over two months of bombing military targets and critical infrastructure in Serbia, Belgrade accepted NATO's conditions. Several tragic errors occurred during the Operation Allied Force. Allied aircraft bombed the embassy of the People's Republic of China in Belgrade, and there was shelling of civilian targets in Serbia, including a passenger train. Approximately 500 Serbian citizens, not affiliated with the force structures of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, were killed. NATO forces lost only two aircraft during this operation: an F-16 and an F-117. Only the latter was shot down by Serbian anti-aircraft defenses. The F-16, however, was lost due to a technical malfunction<sup>27</sup>. The political consequence of this action was the declaration of an independent Kosovo in 2008. Such a move would have been impossible without the presence of peacekeeping forces in this region of the former Yugoslavia and the backing of NATO and the EU for Kosovo's emancipation process. Not only did this set a potentially dangerous precedent for the entire continent, but the North Atlantic Alliance and the European community also inadvertently fostered a failed state in the heart of Europe. The situation in both Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina remains tense, with the potential for escalation. These tensions are now seemingly exacerbated by the actions of the Russian Federation. The repercussions of NATO's military intervention in Yugoslavia in 1999 were as profound as the political outcomes. Indeed, during the North Atlantic Alliance's air attacks, Russian air defense specialists were on the ground, analyzing the performance of NATO aircraft and their tactics. This analysis facilitated enhancements to the existing S-300 air defense missile

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<sup>24</sup> J. Tomaszewicz, *Terroryzm na tle przemocy politycznej*, Katowice 2000, p. 179.

<sup>25</sup> <https://histmag.org/Nielegalne-ale-moralne-Operacja-Allied-Force-przyczyny-i-konsekwencje-18428>, (accessed: 22/3/2023).

<sup>26</sup> M. Marszałek, *Sojusznicza operacja "Allied Force". Przebieg – ocena – wnioski*, Toruń 2009, p. 67 et seq.

<sup>27</sup> W.K. Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo and the Future of Combat*, New York 2001, p. 9 et seq.



system and informed significant modifications to the S-400 system, which was in development for series production and is now regarded as best-in-class<sup>28</sup>. It is evident that, drawing from the 1999 experience, the Russian army has established an effective A2AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial) defense system. Without neutralizing this system in the early stages of operations, conducting air operations would likely result in substantial losses. Conversely, the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War suggests that this system has notable vulnerabilities or that it was only state-of-the-art until the mid-second decade of this century<sup>29</sup>.

The break-up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia significantly altered the power dynamics in the southern part of Central Europe. The subsequent accession of most of its successor states to NATO (excluding Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia), coupled with Albania's membership, essentially made the Adriatic an internal sea of the North Atlantic Alliance. Geopolitically, this meant that NATO undeniably benefited from the break-up of the SFRY. However, the military value of this expansion is arguable. None of these republics, with the exception of Croatia that has three main types of armed forces, possesses significant military potential. In the event of a conflict, they would likely seek support from other NATO countries. Moreover, Montenegro, Croatia, North Macedonia, and Slovenia, along with neutral Austria and Serbia, are not considered military powerhouses. Yet, the unresolved issues in Kosovo and the lingering instability in Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be potential flashpoints in the region. As such, NATO's presence in this part of Europe serves as a pillar of political stability. It is challenging to hold an optimistic view that the intricate situation in the post-Yugoslav space will see marked improvements in the near future. This pessimism is deepened by Serbia becoming a battleground for the competing interests of the European Union, the Russian Federation, and the People's Republic of China. Furthermore, given the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War, the Kremlin likely has vested interests in fueling tensions around Kosovo and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This, by extension, indirectly impacts even those former SFRY states that are now part of the EU and NATO. Additionally, Victor Orbán's government's policy, which ardently supports the Hungarian minority (particularly in Serbia), is underpinned by aspirations to "reverse Treaty of Trianon". Given these circumstances, there is no denying that the EU and NATO memberships of Croatia and Slovenia, and the NATO memberships of Montenegro and North Macedonia, contribute to the stabilization of these nations. They also influence the balance of power and the competing interests of major players in the remaining former Yugoslav states.

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<sup>28</sup> [https://wiis.org.pl/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=254:tlo-wyboru-rosyjskiego-s-400-triumf-przez-turcje-opinia-wiis-nr-2-2019&catid=24&lang=pl&Itemid=160](https://wiis.org.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=254:tlo-wyboru-rosyjskiego-s-400-triumf-przez-turcje-opinia-wiis-nr-2-2019&catid=24&lang=pl&Itemid=160), (accessed: 10/9/2021).

<sup>29</sup> <https://missilethreat.csis.org/defsys/s-400-triumf/>, (accessed: 3/22/2023).

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