

The International Institute for Middle-East and Balkan Studies (**IFIMES**) in Ljubljana, Slovenia, regularly analyses events in the Middle East and the Balkans. **Saffet Akkaya**, Colonel (Retd), Phd Candidate at the International Relations Middle East Technical University, Ankara/Turkey and Member of IFIMES International Institute has presented his views of the current situation in regional security. His article entitled "**US MILITARY BASES IN ROMANIA AND BULGARIA AND THEIR POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS ON REGIONAL SECURITY**" is published in its entirety.



**Saffet Akkaya**, Colonel (Retd)  
Phd Candidate at the International Relations  
Middle East Technical University, Ankara/Turkey  
Member of IFIMES International Institute

## **US MILITARY BASES IN ROMANIA AND BULGARIA AND THEIR POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS ON REGIONAL SECURITY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is evident that, almost two decades passed after the end of cold war period, and the world is divided into two main camps to name; the Centre and the Periphery. At the beginning of this article, it may be useful to look at the position of the states like Bulgaria and Romania from a broader perspective, which once were the members of

the periphery in the Communist Block. Throughout the new reformation and restructuring phases of the global age, new world order has dictated certain unnamed rules that are vital for the future of global order and mankind. Current world order is completely different and the political, geographical or cultural principles of the cold-war era to classify the states into different groups are not relevant anymore. Description of south, north, west, second world, and third world has changed dramatically. Centre is composed of economically and militarily strong states, basically the representatives of hegemonic liberalism, no matter at which geographic location they occupy on the planet. On the other hand, Periphery is made by the states who were once the members of Second (communist block) or Third Worlds and some other states that are excluded from the centre for cultural, religious or ideological reasons. Now, there is a struggle among the peripheral states, trying to be a member of centre at all costs. The expansion of NATO and EU towards east to the expense of old Soviet territories in general and Russia in particular, need to be evaluated through the principles of a broader security perception.

### **REAL EXISTING LIBERALISM**

The bi-polar system has been replaced by multi-polar power structure after the demise of Soviet Union. Addition to U.S as the super power of cold war era, new powers have emerged such as, European Union, China, Japan and Russia. Even India and Brazil can qualify for such a classification. This new multi-polar system affords a reduction in the intensity of ideological or power rivalry and boosts the regional politics that will impose less pressure on the periphery states and encourage them to change location. Another common feature of the multi-polar centre is that there is no ideological rivalry among them and they all share a wider consensus on liberal economic system. Mainly based on this consensus, a “security community” has been created which minimizes the danger of war between the members. Since they do not need to compete with each others militarily, the members of security community possess a good advantage in International Political Economy and they can handle any challenge more easily. The military coalitions in first and second Gulf Wars and Afghanistan campaign are good samples for those quick and successful military collaborations. Such coalitions show the general nature of security relations in a future world dominated by the Centre which has the ability to isolate any aggressor that threatens the present political and economic order. For the sake of their economic interests based on liberal rules, Neither China, nor Russia have proved rigid reactions even against the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and have felt obliged to accept this de facto situation limiting their resistance to some soft-balancing diplomatic manoeuvres.

Parallel to these uprooted changes in global age, a new sort of military organization, structure and a military culture is developing in the Centre that promotes the position of USA as the hegemonic power controlling the technology, financial resources,

nuclear and conventional arsenal and international institutions. During the Cold War era, the teachings of liberalism were represented by the Americans in a robust mode to assure security in defense of both its global achievements and to respond a possible threat by Soviet Union which was not solely military but also ideological, social and economic. But in late 1980s, a new security agenda emerged questioning the position of military-political issues as the centre of security concerns. Turbulence has started to surround the world politics, and in this new term, unlike the cold war era's dogmatic military issues, security concern began to face a wider spectrum including economic, environmental, social aspects. In this respect, successful liberalism became a strong movement to securitize a wider spectrum of economic, societal, political and environmental issues as well as traditional military ones. This relatively broad security agenda consists of five dimensions. Military security; includes the defensive and offensive capabilities of the states and their perceptions on each others intentions. Political security; concerns the organizational stability of states and the systems of the governments. Economic security; promotes access to the resources and markets that are vital to sustain the welfare and the power for the states. Societal security; explains the traditional patterns of language, culture, religion and national identity for societies. Environmental security; concerns the local and planetary biosphere where all humans depend on without any discrimination. These five sectors do not operate independent from each others, but tied strongly to each others.

The position of Romania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Poland and some other ex-soviet states hosting US bases in Central Asia can be explained from a broader perspective of new security perception of global age. Being the military partner of an organization does not provide full confidence to the states to feel themselves in security, and other four aspects of a broader security concept need to be fulfilled accordingly. The pre-cold-war political, social and ideological descriptions have changed and peripheral states seem ready to sacrifice their national and regional concerns to join the Centre.

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### **FOOTPRINTS OF AN EMPIRE**

Parallel to above mentioned factors, the history of the U.S. military presence overseas is intimately connected with the growth of the United States as a world power. Military victory in two world wars enabled the United States to assume the controversial role of "global policeman" rebuilding war-damaged societies and containing communist expansion. By the end of the 1950s, as the gap grew bigger between the victor states of WWII, approximately 1 million American troops and family members resided on overseas bases in the world.

In his book "Nemesis: The Last Days of American Republic", Chalmers Johnson draws the framework how United States turned into an Empire in the post-cold war era from the point of its military bases spread out all over the world. In order to

perceive the justification of the US bases in Romania and Bulgaria, it will be useful to give some details of these bases that sum up to a number of 735 with the figures of Pentagon. According to Johnson, the interesting point is that there are 38 large and medium sized military facilities –mostly air and naval bases, spread all over the globe and this is almost the same number of British Empire's 36 naval bases and army garrisons at the very beginning of 20th century. If we go one step backwards, we face almost the same numbers (37) of Roman Empire at its most glorious days in the 2nd century AD. It seems that the principles of geo-strategic realm for world supremacy do not change a lot and the optimum number of major citadels and fortresses to dominate the world is somewhere between thirty-five and forty. The worldwide total of U.S. military personnel including those based domestically, is 1,840,000 supported by an additional 473,000 Defense Department civil service employees and 203,000 local hires. The overseas bases contain 32,327 barracks, hangars, hospitals, and other buildings and 16,527 more that are leased. The size of these holdings are recorded in the inventory as covering 687,347 acres overseas and 29,819,492 acres worldwide, making the Pentagon easily one of the world's largest landlords.

### **WHY DO US NEED BASES IN BALKANS**

**Balkans** have been the most volatile and troublesome part of Europe particularly after the dissolution of Ottoman Empire starting in 19th century. And afterwards, Balkans has been a non-coherent region in economic, political and cultural senses and parallel to the demise of Soviet Union, Russian influence has decreased whilst the western influence has increased gradually. In the first couple years of the new millennia, US and EU proved reasonable efforts to integrate Eastern Europe and Balkan countries with NATO and EU. In year 2004 together with other 5 countries, Romania and Bulgaria joined the NATO which was the largest growth in NATO history. Actually these two countries were spending huge efforts to join both NATO and EU since the end of cold war, and as a solid indication of their intention, from the very beginning they supported the US operations in Iraq and Afghanistan with no reservations contrary to some of other states in Europe. As we clearly see in the official statements of the leaders of both countries they foresee the future of their countries in integration with political, economic, societal, cultural and military aspects with the West. In addition, the two countries' elites perceive U.S. assistance as crucial to enhance their economic transition into market capitalism and they hope that stronger strategic ties with Washington will pave the way to further economic and financial cooperation and to an increase in U.S. investment.

From a military point of view, it is easy to justify the requirements of these bases. According to US military authorities the 20th century military philosophy that mass equals commitment is not true in the 21st century and the important thing is not the size of the force you have, but what you can do with it and the aim is to make the forces strategically more effective and agile. The American forces in Europe will be in



three types of bases. The first type is main operating bases, installations like Ramstein Air Base, Germany, and U.S. Naval Station Rota, Spain. These bases will remain hubs and have American forces assigned to them. The second are called forward-operating sites that are called "light-switch operations" meaning all troops arriving have to do is turn the lights on and operations can proceed. Examples of these bases are Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo, Camp Eagle in Bosnia, and Incirlik Air Base in Turkey. The bases established in Bulgaria and Romania are also the same type. The third type of bases is called a cooperative security site that could be as small as a fueling agreement or as complicated as a few American contractors ensuring facilities ready for US troops to operate. Within this context, the security challenges for Europe no longer lie to the east but to the south and southeast. The orientation of NATO towards the Middle East and Africa requires forces that can deploy quickly using a combination of inter-theater aircraft, sealift, and rail movement. Given the volatility of these outlying regions, deployment times must be measured in days, not weeks. Turkey, Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria appear best sited for power projection posture to the Middle East, whereas Italy, France, and Spain provide superb access to the Mediterranean Basin and Africa.

### **US BASES IN ROMANIA**

In December 2005 an agreement signed by Romania and the United States on the activities of the American forces stationed on the Romanian territory that assigns four locations for the U.S. troops, namely the army ranges at Cincu, Smardan and Babadag as well as the Mihail Kogalniceanu airfield. The total personnel number will be 1700 and the units will be named as Joint Task Force-East (JTF-E). The Cincu range covers 104 sq km and the location benefits from nearly 100 km of roads which is authorized for carrying out tactical applications involving firing live ammunition by infantry companies and battalions, artillery battery and division. Shootings can also be made from all types of launchers and by aviation as well as by helicopters as tests conducted by the plants manufacturing weapons and ammunition. The Smardan army range, is located in the eastern Galati county and it covers 8,500 hectares and can accommodate 600 persons. The Smardan range is used for training shooting by infantry and tanks, artillery groups, special shooting from heavy infantry weapons, training for launching offensive and defensive grenades, shooting from the chemical troops' weapons, shooting at ground targets from helicopters and planes, bombing from warplanes for horizontal and vertical targets. The Babadag range is located in the eastern Tulcea county, covering 2,700 hectares and able to accommodate 250 persons. It can host live ammunition shooting by infantry and tank companies, by artillery sub-units, special shooting from heavy infantry weapons, launching of offensive and defensive grenades, and shooting at ground targets from helicopter and plane weapons. The Mihail Kogalniceanu airfield is 3,500 meters long and 45 meters wide and it has a concrete runway. The MK base can accommodate 900 persons and has the required facilities for the flight management and administrative

management, buildings for the personnel accommodation and offices, hangars for the airplanes and warehouses.

### **US BASES IN BULGARIA**

In April 2006, Bulgaria and U.S. signed an agreement for the use of several military facilities on Bulgarian territory. The U.S. military units deployed to Bulgaria will be known as Joint Task Force-East similar to Romania according to the Defense Cooperation Agreement between the United States and Bulgaria. Following bases will be allocated to US forces.

Bezmer Air Base in Yambol Province;  
Novo Selo Shooting Range (NSTA) in Sliven Province;  
Aitos Logistics Center in Burgas Province; and  
Graf Ignatievo Air Base - LBPG in Plovdiv Province.

Under the agreement, no more than 2,500 U.S. military personnel will be located at the joint military facilities. Most training rotations will have small numbers and will be of short duration. Possible types of units are armor, mechanized infantry, airborne infantry or light infantry. The type of equipment they will use will depend on the unit and the training requirements. The treaty also allows the US to use the bases "for missions in third country without a specific authorization from Bulgarian authorities," The Bezmer Air Base is expected to become one of the major US strategic airfields overseas, housing American combat aircraft.

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### **REACTIONS TO US BASES IN EASTERN EUROPE**

High level military and civilian officials in both Romania and Bulgaria have repeatedly asserted on the importance of this military cooperation. They comment that, this agreement will add value to the strategic level security because of the commitment of US to both countries. They also declare that this strategic partnership with the US is a strategic investment for their countries and will adequately encounter new risks and security threats for the future.

On the other hand, some European authorities, particularly the leaders of left-wing political parties, assert that the U.S. military bases in Bulgaria and Romania intend enhancing the U.S. potential to interfere in the developments in Balkans, the entire south of Europe and the Mediterranean in a way, contradicting the security and economic interests of Europe. They are simultaneously intended to provide a new instrument to the U.S. hegemonic policies in the Middle East and the Gulf, which is a key offender of the centers of tension and the alarming humanitarian crises in the region, as well as of the explosion of terrorism, spreading worldwide. On the other

hand, growing U.S. efforts, in order to achieve a monopoly control over the Middle East natural resources, represent a serious menace to the European and Mediterranean security. Russia particularly shows a good deal of reaction not only to the bases in these two countries but also to the missile defense systems deployed to Poland and Czech Republic, saying that US and EU are using diplomatic and informational cover to hide their real plans. Russian officials state that despite their closing the bases in Vietnam and Cuba, West and NATO keep going one way and this may initiate an arms race in ballistic missile systems and force them to make certain decisions.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

As expected, the positive trend in political and strategic relations between the U.S. and the two southeastern European countries of Romania and Bulgaria are continuing and the post-communist elites in both countries have proved more enthusiastic and an eager response in supporting U.S. policy in the region. This initiative in establishing U.S. military presence in the two countries signals the consolidation of the new American geo-strategic initiative in the Black Sea region and will have important consequences for the European Union and U.S.-Russian relations. Moreover, it also confirms that Washington now seeks small, flexible bases for the possible deployment of forces in Europe, instead of Cold War-style bigger, permanent facilities. This is precisely why Romania and Bulgaria are considered ideal partners by Washington and the Black Sea region provides excellent power projection towards the heart of the Middle East, Caucasus and Balkans. It is also the region which connects the Caspian Sea oil- and gas-rich zone with the eastern Mediterranean Sea, an area of crucial importance for the European Union's energy needs. In this respect, the military superiority of US in Black sea region is vital for the global position of the US. In case US consolidates its position in Black Sea region it will surely possess some opportunities such as; increasing its role in Caucasus, new opportunities on Georgia and Armenia, availability of initiating new policies on Turkey, and consequently an increasing influence on Turkish straits.

Among the statements welcoming the US military presence in Balkans and Black Sea region, following words of President Basescu of Romania are the most interesting ones. He says; "It is clear that the United States seems to be more interested by the instability in the Black Sea area than the Europeans are. They have already understood the importance of the Black Sea for the security of Europe." This statement signals that the leaders of Black Sea and Balkan countries may show positive attitudes for further US involvement in the Black Sea region. The position of Turkey and the cooperation among Turkey, Russia and other countries in the Black Sea region and the peripheral states is very important for the stability in the region. In last decade, Turkey's foreign policy cornerstones are also being tested by

international role players in order to acquire some benefits and interests based on Turkey's geo-strategic location.

The decision makers in Turkey should keep in mind that the balance established on Black Sea and Turkish Straits is a vital cornerstone for the security not only of the country, but also for the region and future relations with Balkan and Black-Sea states, and Turkey has no luxury to attempt any step to deviate from its traditional stable foreign affair policies. In this respect, Montreux Convention is one vital factor to preserve the interests of coastal states to Black Sea, and also to abstain from being a potential area for any future conflicts in its periphery such as Balkans and Caucasus. Turkey, with its unique geostrategic position sitting at the heart of these three geographic locations has managed to become a peninsula of peace and stabilization throughout the cold war era. Based on the principles of Lausanne Treaty, Turkey has succeeded the Montreux convention to the favor of coastal states, particularly of Turkey and Russia. History taught us that stability and peace in the region is based on the balance established on the principles of lessons learned throughout the history, and concessions given to foreign powers at strategic level for some economic and military interests may turn out to be a challenge for peace and security in Black Sea region for coming years.

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International Institute for Middle-East  
and Balkan Studies (IFIMES) – Ljubljana

Directors:

Bakhtyar Aljaf

Zijad Bećirović, M.Sc.

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Mednarodni inštitut za bližnjevzhodne in balkanske študije  
International Institute for Middle-East and Balkan Studies  
Tivolska 50, p.p. 2795, 1001 Ljubljana, Slovenia

