

Security Challenges in the Balkans



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Historical Perspective

An enduring fixture of international affairs is the fact that, throughout the history of the world, nothing is static. Empires, countries, communities, and nearly entire civilizations have risen and declined while others became engaged in an endless struggle for power within and among social and political identifiable structures.

It is not surprising, then, that two historical lessons spring to mind when considering these socio-political fluctuations. The first recalls the old Chinese proverb which reads, “One who studies the past, knows the future” and the second observation, attributed to Hegel, asserts that “We learn from history what we do not learn from history.”

Indeed, these truisms have echoed continuously throughout the ages of different cultures and peoples located in every geopolitical region. The experience of the Balkans from antiquity to modernity demonstrates both evolutionary and revolutionary developments of triumph and calamity with broader significant strategic implications.

More specifically, among the numerous memorable historical regional phases, mention should be made of the Byzantine Empire (330 – 1453), the Serbian Kingdom (929 – 1389), the Ottoman Sultanate (1354 – 1922), and the Balkan Wars (1912 – 1913). Subsequently, over a century ago, on June 28, 1914, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne and his wife, Sophie, were assassinated in Sarajevo. This tragic attack perpetrated by Gavrilo Princip, a young Bosnian terrorist, triggered a series of escalated diplomatic and military moves in Europe and beyond that contributed, at least partly, to the outbreak of World War I.

One of the resulting outcomes of the “War to end all Wars” was the formation of the “Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes,” who regained control of Kosovo. And on December 1, 1918, Yugoslavia was established over the territories formerly inhabited by the Austrian and Ottoman empires.

It should be noted that the Albanians in Kosovo claimed that their minority rights were not implemented by the Serbs in the inter-war period. The Serbs, on the other hand, charged the Albanians of fermenting discontent in Kosovo. During the Second World War, Albania was annexed by Italy and later was occupied by Germany. Moreover, Berlin established a puppet government in Serbia, Croatia joined the Axis powers, and Slovenia became under German influence.

In 1945, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was established and the Communist party of Yugoslavia was elected into power. That year, the United States recognized the new republic under Josip Broz Tito. Interestingly, in 1948, Yugoslavia was removed from the Cominform (a coordinated body headed by the Soviet Union for communist parties in Europe) as the result of disputes with Moscow. By 1953, Marshall Tito was named President of Yugoslavia and ten years later became president for life. He died on May 4, 1980.

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union and Communism in Eastern Europe, Croatia and Slovenia declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 and Bosnia-Herzegovina also broke away from the federal republic in 1992. In response to these developments, the Serbian military invaded portions of Croatia and Bosnia resulting in the ethnic cleansing and bitter hostilities between the antagonists. The costly Balkan wars led to the signing of the Dayton Accord in 1995, which outlined a future peace process involving Croatian, Bosnian, and Serbian leaders. By March 1998, hostilities began in Kosovo between the ethnic Albanians and Serbs and a year later, NATO launched a 78-day air attack on Serbian targets. On February 17, 2008, Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence from Serbia but tensions between the parties remained high.

Sadly, some ten years later, the deep-seated mistrust in the region has risen again. A recent example of this challenge occurred on January 16, 2018, with the assassination of Oliver Ivanovic, a Kosovan Serb leader of the civic initiative, Freedom, Democracy, Justice (SDP) by an unknown gunman. This attack took place on the day that talks to normalize relations between Kosovans and Serbs, mediated by the European Union (EU), were to be held. This scheduled meeting was predictably aborted. NATO, which has maintained a peacekeeping force in the region since 1999, following the Kosovan War, has urged all the parties to show constraint and return to the negotiating table.

To be sure, NATO's overall impact in the Balkans has been positive with regards to establishing early warning systems, and intelligence gathering to prevent political crises, upholding the rights of the people to return to their homes, and providing emerging regional democracies with incentives for reforms. Moreover, Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, and Slovenia are currently members of NATO and other states of the former Yugoslavian country are, to varying degrees, closer in association with NATO as well as the EU. Other countries with historical relationships and current interests in the Balkans such as Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and Turkey, are already members of the alliance and are continuing to support NATO mission in Europe and around the globe.

Another significant aspect of security concerns in the region is the challenge of terrorism and the efforts to combat non-state actors such as al-Qa'ida and the Islamic State, to mention a few. For instance, Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia are continuing their participation in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and are engaged in multiple counter-terrorism activities, including introducing legislation, law enforcement border security, countering the financing of terrorism, combating violent extremism, and participating in international and regional cooperation.

An Academic Context

Since the 1960s, our academic work related to security concerns in general, with a particular focus on Europe, consisted of extensive seminars, research, and publications. It is noteworthy to mention the work of the Institute for studies in International Terrorism of the State University of New York; the Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University; the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) at Georgetown University; the Institute of Social and Behavioral Pathology, the University of Chicago; the Terrorism Studies Program, the George Washington University; and the Inter-University Center for Terrorism (IUCTS), administered by the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies and the International Law Institute.

Thus, several of the above mentioned institutions, together with European-relevant bodies, have co-sponsored, and collaborated in developing various inter-disciplinary programs. Several examples illustrate the nature of such activities. On November 14-18, 1978, the Aspen Institute located in West Berlin organized a scientific international conference on security issues during the Cold War, including relevant Balkan topics.

Another academic initiative was co-sponsored by CSIS; the Polemological Institute at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands; and the Institute for Peace and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg. These institutions developed a course on “Political Violence: History, Theory, and Future”, held at the Inter-University Center of Postgraduate Studies at Dubrovnik in then Yugoslavia, January 25, 1980. The empirical base of the course included topics such as wars, revolutions, guerrilla warfare, and terrorism.

Among other numerous, relevant, and cooperative activities, mention should be made of a conference on “Turkish-U.S. Partnership in the Year 2000 and Beyond” held on June 21 through 22, 1999 at the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) in Istanbul that focused *inter alia* on peacekeeping, peace enforcement, peace building, and NATO enlargement in the Balkans.

More recently, other events dealing with Balkan Security challenges are notable. The first was a simulation exercise entitled “Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Promoting Prevention and Resilience” held in Skopje, November 7-9, 2017. This activity instructed participants to deal with a realistic scenario that responded to a crisis situation. The exercise was led by the Partnership for Peace Consortium (PfPC), Combating Terrorism Workshop Group (CTWG), and co-hosted by the Republic of Macedonia, the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United States Embassy in Macedonia.

The recent titled “Security Challenges in the Balkans: Quo Vadis?” was held at the International Law Institute on December 19, 2017. The panel included the following speakers: Ambassador Pjer Šimunović (Republic of Croatia); Ambassador Haris Lalacos (Greece); and Ambassador Vasko Naumovski (Republic of Macedonia); General (Ret.) Alfred Gray (Former Twenty-Ninth Commandant of the United States Marine Corps, Senior Fellow and Chairman of the Board of Regents at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies); Professor Don Wallace, Jr. (Chairman of the International Law Institute); Professor Yonah Alexander (Director of the Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies and Senior Fellow at the Potomac Institute); and Professor David Kanin (Professor of European Studies at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University and former senior analyst at the CIA).

Most recently, an Ambassador’s Forum on “Balkan Security Challenges: Past Lessons and Future Outlook” held on March 1, 2018 at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies included the following diplomats: Ambassador Floreta Faber (Republic of Albania); Ambassador Vlora Citaku (Republic of Kosovo); Ambassador Stanislav Vidovič (Republic of Slovenia); Ambassador Nebojša Kaluđerović (Montenegro); Richard Prosen (Office of European Security, Political, and Military Affairs at the U.S. Department of State); Professor Don Wallace (Chairman at the International Law Institute); and

Professor Yonah Alexander (Director of the Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies and Senior Fellow at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies).

To be sure, aspects of Balkan security appear in numerous previous IUCTS publications, including reports entitled “The Refugee Crisis: Humanitarian and Security Implications” (2016), “NATO’s Strategy: Continuity or Change?” (2017), and “Europe: Quo Vadis?” (2015); journals, such as the *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, and *Terrorism: An Electronic Journal and Knowledge Base*; and in a myriad of books, such as *Terrorism in Europe* (2015), and *The Islamic State: Combating the Caliphate without Borders* (Co-authored by Professor Yonah Alexander and Dean C. Alexander, 2015).

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Finally, the views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the institutions associated with our academic work.

Ambassador Pjer Šimunović
*Embassy of the Republic of Croatia*¹

It is a privilege to be able to address an issue very topical for Southeast Europe, as well as for a wider community of transatlantic democracies, which are formulating the crux of their security and foreign policies through instruments we have at our disposal in the shape and form of the European Union and NATO. The region in question is full of inviting opportunities, it is a land of promises, but it also entails some dangers and some developments which may become critical if adequate attention is not paid to them.

In the very first place, when I refer to an adequate attention, I have in mind measures and policies, conducted by the countries of the region and by the relevant external actors, leading to a full European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries in the region, to their membership in the EU and NATO. This is the best way to get this region fully stabilized, fully at peace within itself and with the wider world. Basically, by spreading the European and the Euro-Atlantic area of stability, very much embodied in the EU and NATO enlargement process, we are establishing security and prosperity of these countries and of Europe as a whole.

Obviously, when you look at the region of Southeast Europe, or the Balkans, there are different issues at play. For the sake of our discussion, within the limits of my short intervention, I would like to focus on a couple of critical developments worth taking note of in order to be able to address them meaningfully.

In this regard, against a background of some inherent contradictions existing in the region and stemming, very much but not exclusively, from the legacy of conflicts in the 1990s, which have left some residual traces having an unfortunate potential to degenerate, some additional factors have come into the play.

After the known upheaval of the 1990s, there was basically a decade of exemplary stabilization, normalization, reconciliation. The level of reconciliation achieved in this particular region, albeit imperfect, has been, as it still is, a remarkable achievement, this has to be kept in mind. Because in a relatively very short span of time, a number of violent conflicts has been replaced by a cross-border cooperation; the nations and individuals are not only talking to each other but cooperating economically, socially, culturally, and politically. Notably, the cooperation has always been very prominent on a project of getting into the EU and NATO, where the interests of the countries of the region have been strongly converging.

After what was almost a decade of promising normalization, of openness, of healing the wounds of war and animosity, we got a sliding back, certainly not sliding back all the way, but we have lost some dynamics of that reconciliation, normalization and cross-border cooperation. Something happened that stopped the positive trends and reversed them up to an extent.

¹ Presentation at an event on “Security Challenges in the Balkans: Quo Vadis?” held on December 19, 2017 at the International Law Institute.

Having said that, I would like to be absolutely clear: what we have now still remains a very remarkable achievement in relation to the background provided by the developments of the 1990s.

We have seen that a lot of negative trends coincided with the economic crisis, which hit the countries of the region badly, before they would be able to return to economic growth, surely exacerbating a number of lingering disputes and issues, providing a fertile ground for them to come alive yet again. While the crisis has been one of the most important setbacks in its own right, depriving citizens and the countries of their planned and desired economic development, it has also brought up to the surface, it has crystalized, some residual contradictions and grievances, impacting domestic and foreign policies, undermining inter-communal relations in particular, many of them stemming from the conflicts of the 1990s, some stemming from before that. It has also been adding some new elements to that.

These residual contradictions within the region coming up to the surface have been coupled with some notable intrusions from the outside, happening on an unprecedented scale. Let me concentrate on them. These intrusions have been made possible, up to an extent, also by a relative lack of vigorous, robust engagement from the part of the West at the time. The basic lesson learned would be: if the EU, with all the instruments it has at its disposal, particularly in terms of its enlargement, and NATO, in terms of keeping its door open, are not present in the region in a credible, robust manner, then somebody and something else will be filling the gap.

Against the background of some inherent contradictions in the region, we have seen a whole range of Middle Eastern influences intruding deeply into the region, exemplified also by their most extreme expressions, by a violent Islamic fundamentalism. Some 1,000 people from the Western Balkans have joined the fight in the Middle East, have joined the ranks of Daesh/Islamic State or al-Qa'ida or other extremist groups, with a few hundred of them having lost their lives, a few hundred having returned, and a few hundred still in the Middle East. In terms of the political landscape, socially as well as security-wise, this is a very serious danger indeed. It has materialized in such a clear and present form relatively recently, but it has not come out of the blue, it has come out of a longer-term exposure and intrusion from a whole range of Middle Eastern influences, intruding chiefly, but not exclusively, into the indigenous Muslim population. This remains politically, as well as security-wise, one of the major concerns in the region.

The other concern worth addressing stems from the policies of Russia. Russia is present in the region in some unprecedented proportions. It can be observed using all the instruments at its disposal to exercise and extend its influences and gain leverage, be it though diplomacy, intelligence, propaganda, investments, defense cooperation... Russia establishing such a prominent foothold in the region in pursuit of its interests works against the idea of integrating the whole region into the European Union and NATO.

In such a situation we may look at the region as being very much 'a contested battleground', with different forces fighting for the soul of the countries in the region and for the future of the region, whether it will be more in Russia's camp, whether it will be more linked to different Middle Eastern forces, or it will become a fully integrated part of the EU and NATO.

My final point, when it comes to proposing a realistic and favorable way forward, would be to emphasize yet again the importance, and a renewed urgency, of European and Euro-Atlantic integration as the best, proven and available instrument of stabilizing, enriching and reconciling the region of Southeast Europe.

Ambassador Haris Lalacos
Embassy of Greece²

The first thing that I did when we had the transcript of the National Security Strategy presentation made by President Trump (December 18, 2018), was to go through it very quickly and see if the word Greece was in it and then if the names of neighboring countries, countries of direct importance to us were there; and they were not, despite the fact that other countries, perhaps bigger countries, were named repeatedly. A staff member actually made a list of how many references were made of China, Russia, Iran, etc. I do not know if this is a good sign or a bad sign, I would tend to think that it is a positive.

In the 1990s, I am sure that many of the countries in our region would have been named there by name. I am not terribly upset that we were not named in this 58 page document. Perhaps this is for the better. Also, perhaps in a way it is positive that the Balkans, as a region, is not a tier one concern for the Washington foreign policy and security establishment as it used to be certainly until the late 1990s and maybe until September 11th. Things changed then. I was in Washington back then as well and I was covering for the embassy as a counselor the Balkans and other things, but the Balkans were the bulk of it. It was very important, especially for a Balkan country like Greece. Then, after September 11th, things changed.

But things changed also for another reason. There was considerable progress in the Balkans. There are things that we should not forget or play down marked improvements that have occurred and have taken place in the Balkans since.

When we are talking about the Balkans, definitions vary. Which countries are we talking about? When I was growing up in Greece, in the 1960s for instance, when we talked about the Balkans that was - starting from the south - Greece, Turkey which has a European part in the Balkan Peninsula, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania, and Romania. We had Balkans games in all sports and Balkan festivals. The Balkans for us was the first measure of comparison as a country; not the European Union, not NATO. These are our immediate neighbors, those are the countries with whom we are related, despite the fact that politically, we belonged to different groups and camps.

And then after 1991, again people would start to talk about Southeast Europe because Balkans became almost an obscene word at the time. I never believed that we should abandon our terminology for the sake of political correctness. And hopefully this is gone for good now.

But when we talked about the Balkans in the 1990s and later on, we included more or less the entire peninsula. Now, when we talk about the Balkans, we mostly refer to the Western Balkans six countries, sometimes grouped under the W6 heading, which again, I am not sure if it is desirable to do, but it reflects a shifting configuration with respect to Euro-Atlantic integration.

² Presentation at an event on "Security Challenges in the Balkans: Quo Vadis?" held on December 19, 2017 at the International Law Institute.

However, we do see in Washington lately a relative resurgence of interest about the Balkans, mostly about the western Balkans, the six countries which are not yet fully integrated into the Euro-Atlantic structures. And this discussion, this concern about the Balkans is almost always security related and, almost exclusively, there is a defensive approach to it, especially in this capital. Interest in the Balkans goes hand-in-hand with concern about possible growing influence by Russia in the region. Of course, the operational conclusion of this discussion is nearly always the same: that we have to advance Euro-Atlantic integration. This is a premise that I think is widely accepted, and certainly accepted by my country. However, I need to stress, that often it is used as an excuse by not only certain governments in the area but by friends of the Balkans of certain countries outside the region to forego the full compliance with the responsibilities and criteria that NATO and EU membership entail. Both organizations have what is called conditionality and again, we believe that it is the future of all the countries to be fully integrated in NATO and the EU, provided that they fulfill the criteria.

We believe that there is more stability now in the Balkans than in the past, although the situation is certainly not at the desirable level. And I think that what has mostly contributed to this improvement is the process of European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

However, security challenges still exist and should not be overlooked. Because the Balkans is such a vast, diverse, and dear topic – especially for people from the region, and certainly for me - I could talk for a long time. Let me try to limit myself to the security challenges in the region, which is the topic of this meeting.

First of all, we have inter-ethnic tensions in the Balkans, I do not have to elaborate on that. They are always a source of concern. Also, there is a problem with the maturity of political institutions in some countries. We have nationalist rhetoric, which never completely subsided and we have nationalistic political platforms groups, which are very dangerous in a region that is burdened first of all by a living memory of conflict – conflict in the region was recent – but also it is a region burdened with a heavy historical load.

There are narratives of unfinished business. And although this is understandable from an intellectual or romantic point of view, in almost all of the countries and in almost all the ethnicities in the region and perhaps outside the region as well, when it comes to being a guiding principle for policy, this is a problem. We have to make sure that this stops being the case.

When we talk about immediate security challenges in the region, perhaps number one is extremism – political extremists and fundamentalist extremists – and second is organized crime.

Everybody knows about foreign fighters from Balkan countries who ended up fighting in Syria and Iraq. And they are perhaps the best example of growing fundamentalist extremism in the region. It is a complex phenomenon. We have to see its causes. But at first glance, it is a curious thing that people from the Balkans, from this part of Europe, a corner of Europe but still European, they would leave their countries and go to fight for the so-called Islamic Caliphate in Syria or Iraq. Why should they do that? Of course, money is part of it but it should not be seen as the only

explanation. It is not only an economic reason, there are other reasons. There is infiltration by other countries, not from the region, among segments of the population. There is an ideological element there in the minds of many people. And let us not forget that we are basically talking about foreign fighters who, almost all of them, come from the part of the Balkans which was most of the time, until the emergence of modern states, under Ottoman rule. And in the Ottoman Empire, you had the millet system. It was system where your religion largely, if not exclusively, determined your affiliation, your identity, what became an ethnic identity along the way. I am not saying this is good or bad, but it is something that exists here and has not been fully eradicated from the collective mindset of the people in the region. So, it is important to keep all of these things in mind when trying to explain why you have hundreds, perhaps 500 people from different countries in the region leave and go to Syria or Iraq and fight with ISIS or al-Qa'ida formations.

What happens with them now that ISIS has been largely defeated militarily in the region, is that many of them are returning, some of them are returning with families, and certainly indoctrinated. Who knows what they will be doing once they are back? We saw that ISIS operatives are not limiting their war in the Middle East, they are bringing the war in the form of terrorism, terrorist attacks in Europe, in North America, and in many other countries. It is something to be concerned about.

Also, organized crime. Organized crime started in the region and is becoming a real factor after 1991. At the beginning it was a way to fill in a vacuum, especially a vacuum in the security apparatus of some countries – in some countries more, in other countries less. And of course, there is always corruption, that was not a post-1991 phenomenon only, but it is certainly there. Organized crime is a concern also because it is more and more linked to extremism, terrorism, inter-ethnic tensions. Groups exchange funds, weapons, logistical support, etc.

Challenges are regional, challenges are transnational in the Balkans, and we have to follow the regional approach, but work has to start at home. It is important not to use the regional approach as an excuse to postpone or sidestep needed reforms in each and every country. The European integration and the criteria provided by the European Union are certainly important in this respect, but they are not a panacea. The work has to start at home and the element of ownership is extremely important here.

To overcome the shortcomings, we need to have solutions in a number of areas. Solutions that should be bilateral, trilateral, or wider region-level. And for that to be successful, we absolutely need to see the establishment and sedimentation of a culture of compromise and a culture of dialogue in the region. The reassuring factor that we see is that all nations want the same thing: future stability and prosperity, rule of law, democratic institutions. They see that as best being served within the Euro-Atlantic framework.

There is a growing realization that current security challenges are common to all the countries, to all the people who live in the area. There is a growing regional cooperation to counter these threats. There are many regional groupings, some older and some newer. Just to give you an idea of growing regional cooperation when it comes to security, on December 18, 2017 there was a meeting in Thessaloniki with the chiefs of police of four countries. It was a Greek initiative going back a couple of years ago. The other three are the three northern immediate neighbors of Greece. This started as a meeting of the foreign and interior ministers and it has become more specific now, with operational work at the levels of chiefs of police.

Ambassador Vasko Naumovski
*Embassy of the Republic of Macedonia*³

The few issues that are mentioned for this program on “Security Challenges in the Balkans: Quo Vadis?” include organized crime, Islamic terrorism, the refugee crisis, political turmoil, and economic instability. I would say that these are only additional issues to the existing concerns that have been alive in the Balkans for the past years or even decades. The issues that we are reviewing today are in fact only additional concerns that can destabilize the region. We do have concerns which have been security challenges, like inter-ethnic issues in the Balkans, religious issues, border disputes, certainly historical debates, etc. All these issues, as I said, are completing the picture of concerns in the Balkans.

Nevertheless, we should not look to the past and instead look to the future to see how to overcome these concerns and at the same time to deal with new threats. Islamic terrorism and the refugee crisis are probably the two issues that have defined our concerns in the past few years, especially the refugee crisis. We are all aware that more than one million refugees have passed through the Balkans in the past two years, although the Balkans and the countries in the Balkans have not been the final destination for them. But it was up to us to deal with this problem. Final destinations include Germany, Scandinavian countries, and other countries in Western Europe. Nevertheless, it was the countries from the Balkans, starting from Greece and all the other countries in the north that had to deal with this issue.

I must say that especially in the first months, there was not enough awareness in Western Europe about this issue and not enough cooperation between the countries and their agencies and governments. After all, the reasons for these refugees coming into Europe were not part of the activities of the countries in the Balkans. Or, if you want to put it more directly, the Balkan countries did not create the mess in Syria and that region. Nevertheless, we are the ones who are suffering the consequences.

The refugee crisis brought to light different concerns, like the terrorism threat. Unfortunately, having the terrorist attacks in Nice, Brussels, and Paris, we were able to see that part of the individuals who were committing those attacks infiltrated into Europe through these waves of refugee crises, disguised as refugees. They were able to enter the European countries and later commit terrorist attacks and this only emphasized the need for greater cooperation between the security and counterterrorism of the European countries. We still need to stay alert and prepare for the potential crisis in the future.

Also, there is the threat of Islamic terrorism, as it was mentioned before. There is part of the population in the Balkans that is of Islamic religion and we do face a problem of so-called foreign fighters. So, citizens of the countries in the Balkans are fighting in the battlegrounds of the so-called Islamic State. It is a significant problem for us knowing that most of them have already returned or will return in the coming months or years. That is why we need to increase the cooperation between the countries in this

³ Presentation at an event on “Security Challenges in the Balkans: Quo Vadis?” held on December 19, 2017 at the International Law Institute.

area, too, and be aware that our countries may also become targets of these terrorist attacks.

Also, I would like to just mention some other areas of concern which pose security challenges for our countries. Some of them were already mentioned in the previous discussions, like the influence of Russia and the potential to destabilize the region. Although, most of the Balkan countries have never been formally part of the Soviet bloc and have never had especially close relations with the former Soviet Union, there is a tradition of cultural links between Slavic countries. Unfortunately, some of our countries have been targeted in order to be destabilized. Very often the targets include areas of society that are able to destabilize the whole country or region. For our country, it was, for example, inter-ethnic relations or the political relations. Fortunately, we have been able to overcome these threats but we are not sure if they will stop in the future.

An issue that is related to this is the NATO enlargement and the still unclear role of NATO in the Balkan, or if you want to say also globally. So the hesitation of NATO for the enlargement process and also the current process of the European Union enlargement, which is not existing in the past years. The European Union has even renamed its own commissioner which used to be named Enlargement Commissioner and now it is called Commissioner for Enlargement Negotiations. Meaning that we can negotiate for enlargement, but there is no enlargement. And until the end of the current European Union Commission term, there will be no enlargement for new member states. So, it creates additional frustration for the people in the nations of the Balkans knowing that the European or the Euro-Atlantic future is not fully secured. And it is also creates an atmosphere where other centers of influence may be invited to come into the region.

The rise of nationalism, which is still another concern, is not only a problem for the countries of the Balkans, it is a problem for Europe in general. But, given the history and traditions in the Balkans, it is always something that is a continuous threat for our region. It is often said that the Balkans are producing more history than we can consume. So we do have history for export. Very often historical disputes have the potential to create instability in the whole region. And if you look at the bigger picture, the European picture, we see a rise of nationalism and extreme right-wing political parties in many European countries.

It was somewhere in the mid-1990s where some of the Western European academics were trying to create a process in order to Europeanize the Balkans, before Europe is Balkanized. I am afraid that leaving the Balkans outside the European Union and NATO for too long, not only creates a potential to create new instabilities in the region, but also spreads the “disease” to other countries in Europe.

Overall it is a picture of different challenges, most of them related to the security. But I would say that with greater cooperation between the governments in the region, greater involvement of the European Union and NATO, and greater involvement of the United States, we will be able to overcome these challenges. The role of the USA has varied in the past decade, unlike the period in the 1990s where we were able to see clear involvement of the United States in the region. In the last decade we are not seeing much of it as if the U.S. has delegated this responsibility to the Europeans.

Ambassador Floreta Faber
Embassy of the Republic of Albania⁴

It is probably a good time to talk here in Washington on the issues in the Balkans and the EU and our cooperation between each other. There is always an impression when we speak with others that they believe the Balkans are much worse than they are. We come from an almost 30 years of history where countries came out of totalitarian regimes. In the 1990s, it was not a time that we like to go back to and for a good part of our history countries were fighting each other. And today, we are in a completely different relationship with each other and we are all countries that have different aspirations.

Relationships between the countries and societies have generally suffered through the years from the lack of trust with each other and even inside ourselves we have lack of trust in our institutions. We have come to realize that working together in peace and security, and cooperation, and Euro-Atlantic prospect and agenda is what countries would be looking for.

There are a number of issues in the region today, which come internally and externally. I would like to go through some of them and present our perspective of the development in the Balkans and our Euro-Atlantic perspectives. The rise of nationalism is probably one of the most prominent security threats today in the region. In the western Balkans, in the last year, we have seen several episodes and issues. I will mention a train, which came from Serbia to north Mitrovica, Kosovo with names written in many languages “Kosovo is Serbia.” We had recently (January 16, 2018) one of the Kosovo Serbian politicians, Ivanovic, who was killed in the middle of the day. We had, in April of 2017, a situation in Macedonia where people came inside the parliament, threatening members of the parliament, and trying not to let them form the new government. These are just a number of episodes that show the vulnerability of society sometimes. There are moments when we go back and believe that we continuously need strong support and strong messages from the EU and the United States, and a strong cooperation, and getting past those episodes, and past our 1990s history and work together in the future for peace and security.

The second threat is a number of issues, especially with our institutions. The weak rule of law, the weak democracies, and non-resilient societies, which we all face on the daily basis. As you might be familiar in Albania, Albania’s democratic institutions were characterized on a very highly dependent and influential judicial system. We believe that focusing on improvement and radical change of the judicial system is something that will give a chance to the country to bring back the trust of the people in the rule of law and judicial institutions. For these reasons, last year the Albanian government worked strongly on changing the complete infrastructure of the judicial system. We changed one-third of the constitution, we changed a big number of laws. We are going through a vetting process of judges and prosecutors; over 800 of them will be a part of this process, which started in 2018. We believe that this reform is needed for the Albanian people. It is part of the EU requirement and is part of bettering the country as a NATO member.

⁴ Presentation at an event on “Security Challenges in the Balkans: Past Lessons and Future Outlook” held on March 1, 2018 at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies.

But first and foremost, it is part of the process we need internally in order to increase the stability, not only in our country, but in the region.

As I mentioned two main threats coming internally from issues inside the countries, and also the nationalism that has increased lately in each of our countries. When it comes to external issues that have a strong effect, I will mention especially violent extremism and its related aspect, the return of foreign terrorist fighters and also the meddling of third powers in the region.

Violent extremism is related with a number of phenomenon and even though we do not see an increase in the ideology and the effect of violent extremism. The new effect now in the region is the return of foreign fighters and how they become part of the society. There are issues socially and legally in accepting them back. In countries like Albania, for example, we have set a number of structures in order to ease their return. We have a national strategy on countering violent extremism (CVE) since November 2015, an action plan from 2017-2019 that has a holistic approach on how to have a normal acceptance of those people, sometimes they have to face legal issues, sometimes they have to face economic or social issues. We have decided to open a center that we call CVE center, so we have a place where people have education and training. Also, talking especially with young people so they do not get bothered from the ideology and effect from outside and from foreign fighters that return. We hope that this will also serve as a hub in the future in increasing cooperation between the countries. Albania was not part of the migration route coming from the south, but we gave our support together with EU and NATO, especially working with Greece and Turkey, in order to give support and effect for easing the process.

In confronting those issues in the region, we believe that a long-term answer and solution for the situation in the country especially is the increase of cooperation between all the countries in western Balkans. It is not simply the government; it is strengthening of the institutions and educating young people, working more on all the projects, on economic perspective projects, mobility of people from one country to another.

We also should look at all our EU perspectives, individually as countries and jointly all together. As we are in different stages of EU memberships – two countries, Montenegro and Serbia, have opened the negotiations. Albania, we hope to have a good support for opening the negotiations in 2018. Because we are all required to reach a certain stage of building our institutions and cooperation, but we believe we should be a strong part of the table in talking with EU and not left aside especially in Euro-Atlantic cooperation.

Last year, with a new government here in the United States, we saw that messaging from the United States was very positive in reaching the calm in the region. The visit of Vice President Pence and his meeting with all the leaders in the region was a very positive step towards working with our region. But in the moment where we see, when I mention third parties, you have all the influences today from Russia, China, Turkey, everyone is trying to see their sometimes political or economic or different influences. We believe that each of our countries are strongly committed to our values and building democracy and democratic institutions.

We believe that having stronger presence of the United States will make a positive effect and when we see presence, meaning with all type of activity politics and messaging, having more economic interest also in the country.

Another chapter we look at all together also is the NATO open-door policies, which we view as giving a very positive effect in our country. Albania strongly supports membership of Montenegro and we have been in the way also supporting membership of Macedonia. We believe strongly that NATO and Kosovo should have an institutionalized relationship. The relationship with NATO is a support for building our institutions, having better relationships in between the countries in the region. And as I mentioned also, we hope that the open-door policy from Europe comes earlier than 2025 as we have started hearing some dates now. Every country has its own level of development in regard to EU membership accession, but we believe that Europe and each of the countries should look at the western Balkans not simply as some additional countries to the EU but also as an alliance which strongly gives a positive effect economically, in security, in working all together in the future for Euro-Atlantic relationships.

Ambassador Nebojša N. Kaluđerović
*Embassy of Montenegro*⁵

We have the title “Balkan Security Challenges: Past Lessons and Future Outlook.” If we want to talk about past lessons, that would be really an endless story. If we want to talk about security challenges, so many of them. And if you want to talk about future outlook, there are a variety of them. But I think that we can agree that all of the lessons that we learned from...let us start from the dissolution of Yugoslavia. You know every country in the Western Balkans has its own narrative. And we all have our most important historic dates, which is sometimes difficult to be confirmed in reality, and I dare say that there is no single historical moment that all of us cherish that could be a starting point for a common future outlook. But the processes that we have been through after the dissolution of Yugoslavia and all the wars that we have been through unfortunately really draw some lessons that we have to consider while thinking about our future.

The ambassador of Kosovo said that she had five passports, explaining the region. If I tell you that I lived in four countries and I represented three of them, that I thought really could never have happened 30 years ago, it simply explains by itself the complexity we lived and that we are now and even more in the future that we are facing.

I think that there is something that we have now in common. I would say, on the lessons learned, that it is a European, Euro-Atlantic future of the region. We think in Montenegro that is the only answer to most of the challenges that we have been facing today. And there are, as I told you, quite a lot of them.

Speaking about my own country, Montenegro has managed to become one of, in the meantime, one of the most economically developed countries now in the region. Let us say maybe one would not agree with this, but we consider that we are leaders in the processes that are taking place. As a matter of fact, out of 33 chapters that we are negotiating in the European Union, we have opened 30 of them, two of them closed. We hope that we will open all of them this year and start the process of closing of specific chapters.

How demanding that process is, let me just remind you when Croatia started negotiations in 2005, I was ambassador in New York and a colleague of mine from Croatia was just appointed as a Chief Negotiator and he went to Croatia and he told me that “those guys in Brussels invented some benchmarks for us.” And that was really the first time that the European Commission, the European Union asked Croatians to put some benchmarks in certain chapters. So they started. Several years after that, when we opened negotiations with the European Union, if I tell you that we have Montenegro in only two chapters, 22 and 23, that generally deal with the rule of law, that we have 83 interim chapters – not opening nor closing ones – interim chapters that we need to fulfill to go towards the process of closing the most important ones, I would say that simply shows how complicated and how demanding that process is.

⁵ Presentation at an event on “Security Challenges in the Balkans: Past Lessons and Future Outlook” held on March 1, 2018 at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies.

I was the national coordinator for NATO for three years and we went through similar processes of reforms, adopting standards. I can really tell you that was not an easy task. But where there is a will there is a way, and you must have really clear and strong leadership to go towards that.

In the meantime, we succeeded last year in becoming a member of NATO. Let me just tell you that in the end of February 2018 we had an excellent meeting at the level of minister of defense –Minister Predrag Bošković and Secretary of Defense Mattis – as the first one of that kind in the capacity as a new member of NATO.

Our next imperative goal is European Union integration, which is really more demanding because there are so many things that we need to go through and some of them are really painful. It goes together with all of the countries in the region regardless of the level of negotiations where they are now.

The challenges facing every single country have been, I would say, totally described in the strategy for Western Balkans published months ago. We had recently, a visit of Mr. Juncker, he visited the whole region, and there was a meeting today in Bulgaria, in Sofia, and I will try to finish my statement with that.

I am not going to talk about my own thoughts and understanding of the strategy because I would be rather critical with regard to some aspects, but in general terms, we are encouraged by the recently published EU strategy. Though, we believe that the will from the side of the European Union to cherish individual results is something that we need to take care of. Every country, in our view, needs to be judged by its own merits. And we have shown that this is a system that works, throughout negotiations of Montenegro in regard to NATO. We are the only country now admitted to NATO – the only one before us was Spain, it happened you know when. Although we could have really different thoughts about the time framework, 2025.

But when Juncker, a couple of years ago, said that no one would be admitted to the European Union by 2019, that provoked so many reactions in the region, you know, saying you do not really need to say it that way because we need to have perspective on political points of view, psychological, whatever. And now, the other way around, I said, “Okay, guys, you might think about 2025.” And then the critics would say, “Why do we really need to put that? We need to ask the people and the countries to go through all the reforms and when they are ready then we will think...” But I think it is good, no one confirms that but it is an idea that if we go through all the reforms that we are all going through, we might get there.

We strongly, therefore, believe that our membership in NATO has largely contributed to the stability in the region. We have chosen NATO as a security umbrella. Among other things you know, throughout recent history, we have unfortunately not been able to formulate and to establish regional security arrangements. The only way for us was towards NATO and the European Union.

Our position in regard to Macedonia is that we would like to see them as soon as possible in NATO and hope that the negotiations that are taking place regarding the name issue will be resolved. And resolving that will allow Macedonia to grow further. It is a complicated situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We would like to see more

institutional changes that would allow Bosnia and Herzegovina to go towards the negotiating process both in NATO and the European Union. We see new perspectives for 6 Balkan Security Challenges in Serbia and Montenegro as well within the context of the European Union integration, and I would share thoughts but with Stanislav about the possibility of NATO integration for all the countries in the region.

Therefore, my message for this panel is actually an invitation to both the European Union and NATO to keep an open eye. I do not want to go into the recent past, but you know once this country was not very much interested in some events when the dissolution of Yugoslavia started, but when they jumped into that in 1995, they were able to at least stop the war. And in some other cases, it is important to have the United States of America and European Union present there. The synergy of two of them is welcome as well.

We all know the famous sentence by a wise man. I would really like to see my region, at least for the time in my life, producing history that we can easily consume. And that is a task that we think should be made throughout the European Union and Euro-Atlantic integration processes.

Finally, let me just share with you a couple of things. I got some information from the capital that today there was a very important meeting organized by the Bulgarian Presidency in Sofia. President Borisov hosted a meeting with all of the leaders from the Western Balkans and Mr. Juncker, Commissioner Hahn, and Mogherini, and the first impressions were really positive ones regarding the future of the region.

We do have a lot of problems. As you know, we have some issues with neighboring countries. Two of them are regarding demarcation and some border issues – I would call them issues rather than problems – and we hope that the first one is going to be resolved very soon with Kosovo, and we did our best and we really did try to help even some internal problems to be resolved in the best possible way.

So the ideas now are on reforms and we all need to go through additional reforms, as I said some of them are not really easy to go through; good neighborly relations; and to try to get closer to each other, building infrastructure. Stanislav mentioned the ideas and forums that we are all participating in and I hope that we will get soon some concrete results.

And the main message regarding this important strategy that was published recently, or messages are two-fold. First, it shows a kind of clear perspective for the Western Balkans and I close that clear and said renewed perspective of the Western Balkans towards the European Union that is really the perspective is there and we know that. And the second one is that the European Union has again an enlargement policy, I do not want to say high on their own agenda, but again, I would say higher than a couple of years ago. We all know what the problems are in the EU. Nobody knows how the European Union will look in five years from now or ten years from now, in 2025. We hope they are going to be there. Strengthen maybe institutional changes to a certain extent. It is important for the European Union to be there. And finally, to have the whole Western Balkans truly become a part of the whole of Europe.

Professor David Kanin

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First, I would suggest that the interventions from outsiders affecting the Balkans since the wars of the 1990s are anything but unprecedented. The Balkan region has been, is, and will continue to be subject to intrusion by stronger powers. The enforcement by force of the priorities and ideologies of those powers is central to the history of the region.

In that context, there are a couple of myths that have grown about the Balkans.

One is that it is an area of primordial ethnic hatred and dispute, whether the issue is Serbian-Albanian, Serbian-Croatian, or involves Macedonians, Bulgarians, and Greeks – take your pick. The idea is that they have been engaged in bloody identity-based disputes forever. This throws everything backwards and posits some sort of basic operating condition. I would suggest that all of the conflicts involving the various nationalities are problems of modernity that date from the late 18th century. Again, interventions by outside powers related to and affected by these conflicts are not unprecedented. The problems around these issues remain unsettled, no matter Western declarative insistence on the existence of “final statues.”

A second myth holds a mirror to the first. This is the idea that the Balkans is an area where there exists a tradition of multi-ethnic cooperation that from time to time has been tarnished by the advent of ill-intentioned leadership. Bad actors – Slobodan Milošević for example – for a time threatened or destroyed elements of this cooperation, but international stewardship now is helping reestablish it. This myth, in my view, comes partly from a misunderstanding of the millet system, which has already been mentioned. The Ottoman Empire’s management of its non-Muslim communities enabled parallel economic, social, and cultural communities organized by religious authorities who had much say over cultural, educational, political, and even tax policy – not just religion. So communities developed in parallel; people of different faiths might live next to each other but they often had separate means of securing their resources and security. This baseline condition survives to this day and fundamentally defines the trust networks that have so far successfully thwarted western policy prescriptions and academic orthodoxy.

A third myth, more centrally concerned with the current outsiders who have imposed themselves on the region, is that there exists a universal applicability of western institutions, democracy, and law that produces transparency, good governance, and, of course, democracy. This system supposedly is universally applicable. The problem is to enable the region to develop mature Western-style institutions. This myth is part of a global teleology, a belief in a purposeful democratic endpoint to political and social development. This involves a caricature of Western institutions and their history. The current imposition of a supposed Euro-Atlantic answer to everything serves as a means of work avoidance ensuring there is no consideration of the weaknesses of Western institutions and the possibility of different approaches to Balkan problems.

⁶ Presentation at an event on “Security Challenges in the Balkans: Quo Vadis?” held on December 19, 2017 at the International Law Institute.

One element of this involves the point that was raised before regarding organized crime and corruption. We use these terms to talk about the bad things that undermine transparency, reconciliation, rule of law and other slogans we use to underscore what we claim must happen in the region. The epithets of “corruption” and “organized crime” represent phenomena that are subsets of a general informality that is opaque, sometimes violent but necessary. People engage with informal economic and security organizations to protect themselves when they realize that formal political structures cannot or will not perform those functions. In the Balkans – but not just the Balkans – this is an indelible condition.

There exists work on this topic regarding Central Asia that is better than anything I have read on the Balkans, perhaps because the former region has suffered less imposition of Western teleology than has the Balkans. Anthropologists are researching the relationship between formal government and economics and informal activities that they recognize are strengths of supposedly weak states. I can provide references to anyone interested in this work.

An issue related to this involves something that is not a myth, but rather a central condition in the Balkans – the bedrock difficulties of transportation and communication. In this region, whoever controls placement and construction of roads, pipelines, and other infrastructure developments, becomes stronger than those who do not benefit from these physical development projects that development. These elements of opaque informality central to those projects will continue to be important.

It is true that the Balkans suffer from less instability now than in the 1990s, but that is a very low bar. It is worth remembering the optimistic claims about how things have been getting better coming from Western voices during the Congress of Berlin, the Cold War and since. During the 1980s, some Western practitioners and academics were confident that things would “continue” to get better in the Balkans just before Yugoslavia collapsed. So, yes, things are less unstable now but – as it has been pointed out already – dangers still exist. We will not see the 1990s again; the next set of problems will be different. I do not know how they will look, but basic structural instability will persist. This is true in particular in Bosnia, which is not a subject for today but on people’s minds, in Kosovo, also not a subject today but also on people’s minds, and regarding the issue of Macedonia, which is represented very well here today.

There is more optimism right now regarding the issue of Macedonia’s name than has been the case for many years. In my view, it is important that this gets settled next year, largely because of rising expectations.

More generally, today’s discussion reflects a fluidity regarding exactly who is in the Balkans and who is not. During the Cold War, for us in the U.S. Greece was not in the Balkans. It was in NATO and the Western Alliance, as was Turkey. The term “Balkans” itself was more of a geographic expression than a strategic marker because of the Soviet-American division of Europe and the existence of Yugoslavia. The collapse of Yugoslavia is a strategic loss, given the partitioned space that has replaced it. Those developments have brought “the Balkans” back as a geostrategic concept.

Since the end of the Yugoslav federation Croatia has gotten out of “the Balkans.” It is in the EU now, as is Slovenia. What Hans-Dietrich Genscher wanted to happen has happened. Croatia and Slovenia can say they have always been Central Europeans.

Greece, meanwhile, is back in the Balkans, not just because of the name issue but because the Cold War is over and Athens has engaged in Balkan issues, often in a positive manner. Greek investment in Macedonia was one of the things holding it together in the 1990s, even with the dispute over the name. Even during the financial crisis of 2008 and after, things did not entirely fall apart in Macedonia or in Bulgaria, in part due to Greek investment.

If there is to be a solution to the Balkans’ chronic problems, it will be regional, not Euro-Atlantic. I do not believe that membership in the EU will solve any of the issues raised today.

In part, this is because the issues of identity that were settled for much of the rest of Europe in 1945 were not settled in the Balkans. Let us remember there is another myth about Europe. The story told is that Europe used to be the great powerhouse of the planet. Everyone had to listen to Europeans because they were strong. Then this Europe destroyed itself in the 20th century. After 1945 it had to deal with its new smallness, with its being dwarfed by the giants on its flanks. Europe’s surviving elites created a new myth that, having learned their lesson, Europeans now were wise and humane. The promised to help those they once ruled to avoid Europe’s mistakes. The message was that everyone still had to listen to the Europeans who now had become so evolved. The Europeans created courts to try human rights violators and otherwise adjudicate and express Europe’s righteousness. I do not believe these courts or other elements of “Europe’s” self-celebration have not contributed to reconciliation in the region. They will not provide solutions to conflicts that simmer just below the surface of an apparently stable Balkan present.

I do believe there is possibility for improved security and economic and political relationships in the region if these come from people in the region. There have been notions of a possible Balkan federation since a proposed by Serbia’s King Alexander Obrenović in the 1860s. Tito and Georgi Dimitrov discussed something like this in the 1940s. Serbia’s President Alexander Vucic recently has articulated a vague proposal for regional consultations and some sort of an arrangement among Balkan countries. I hope this idea leads to more serious discussions, and that folks in the Balkans, will stop avoiding the hard work of constructing regional relationships that optimize the transportation, communication, economic, and social potential of the region. Unless solutions and conflict management come from the inside the Balkans it is not going to come.

Richard Prosen

*Office of European Security Political, and Military Affairs (EUR/RPM), U.S. Department of State*⁷

First, a bit of background perhaps on me. I cover transnational threats and related issues for the office that handles OSCE and NATO foreign policy issues at the U.S. Department of State. My principle focus is on terrorist-related threats and challenges, and I address these issues primarily from a training and capacity-building lens, as well as an information-sharing perspective. I also hold the international biometrics portfolio for the State Department's Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. My remarks today will highlight current threats and trends, and then supply an overview of recent counterterrorism efforts undertaken with partners from several Western Balkan countries.

Evolving Threat

As recent attacks in New York City, Barcelona, Mogadishu, London, and Kabul (to name but a few) remind us, terrorism is a significant and long-term threat impacting all corners of the globe. Because no region, country, nor community is immune to this common threat, we must work together to craft effective policies, national action plans, and programs with which to respond. We have come a long way since 2014, when foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) were streaming into Iraq and Syria, and ISIS was spreading like a pestilence across the region. The Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS has made extraordinary progress in working with partners in the region and around the world. ISIS no longer controls any territory in Iraq, and nearly all of the populated territory ISIS once held across Iraq and Syria has been liberated.

Parallel to these military victories, the civilian sector has also made great strides. In 2014, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2178, and last year the UN adopted UNSCR 2396 on Foreign Terrorist Fighters (Returnees and Re-locators), which requires nations to robustly share information, including biometrics, on known or suspected terrorists, establish *inter alia* watch-list databases, and cooperate internationally to prevent FTF movement. These and other measures have made us all safer. Yet as we defeat ISIS on and off the battlefield, the group has adapted – we must adapt too.

How has the FTF threat changed over the last three to four years? We estimate up to 40,000 FTFs traveled to Iraq and Syria from at least 115 countries. That includes at least 6,000 FTFs from the West, and we assess at least 1,500 of those Western FTFs have returned home or have relocated to third countries, including within Southeastern Europe. Since operations in Iraq and Syria began in 2014, the ISIS fighting force has been reduced significantly. Our steady pace of battlefield victories has shattered the ISIS narrative of invincibility. Yet we are seeing signs of adaptability and resilience on the

⁷ Presentation at an event on “Security Challenges in the Balkans: Past Lessons and Future Outlook” held on March 1, 2018 at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies.

The opinions expressed herein are the author's alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Defense, or the United States government.

part of ISIS and its affiliates. We have seen battle hardened terrorists return home, to Europe and elsewhere, to carry out deadly attacks.

There is also the alarming trend of homegrown violent extremism. ISIS's prolific use of social media has expanded its reach, allowing the group to radicalize others to violence and to give advice on how to conduct attacks. Terrorist attacks are being carried out by individuals and small cells inspired by ISIS – but who are not acting on the group's orders. These smaller-scale, individually-planned attacks often involve soft targets like hotels, tourist resorts, and cultural sites. We have seen this deadly trend in places like Berlin, Jakarta, London, Manchester, Nice – tragically, we saw it last year in New York City. We are working with governments and non-governmental partners around the world to counter ISIS' influence, terminate cycles of radicalization, and prevent recruitment. ISIS online media has seen significant declines since its height in 2015, with the most dramatic decreases occurring over the last five months. The loss of territory and voluntary efforts from the private sector – like those by Twitter, Facebook, Google, and Telegram – have degraded ISIS's media capabilities.

Addressing New Threats & Challenges

Let me highlight a few general measures that will be crucial as we confront increasingly decentralized threats, along with the return of FTFs and their families.

First, we need to work with partners to enhance border security. We have accomplished much on sharing biographic information, biometrics, as well as Passenger Name Record (PNR) and Advance Passenger Information (API) data. However, we need to do more to ensure that all states can and do collect this information, and use it effectively to track and thwart FTF and terrorist movements in full compliance with UNSCRs 2178 and 2396. After 9/11, the United States steadily improved its information-sharing measures. Over time, we successfully reduced barriers that inhibited our interagency colleagues from collaborating with each other. We are stepping up our efforts with our foreign partners to dismantle potential stovepipes that block effective and appropriate information sharing within and between governments. The United States now has information-sharing agreements with at least 60 international partners to identify and track the travel of suspected terrorists. Equally important, more than 60 countries, plus the United Nations, have contributed over 43,000 FTF profiles to INTERPOL's databases. Strengthening our shared resources empowers global law enforcement authorities to identify and disrupt FTF transit networks.

Second, we need to continue strengthening our criminal laws related to terrorism and increase the capacity of law enforcement authorities to investigate and prosecute violations of criminal laws related to terrorism. Nations have improved in prosecuting various FTF offenses. A good example comes from the region we are focused on today, the Western Balkans – a key transit route for FTFs heading to Syria and Iraq, or back home again. Since 2015, the U.S. government has increased cooperation with partners in the Western Balkans and Turkey to help improve capabilities to counter the FTF threat and interdict the flow of returning fighters to Europe. In the past few years, 131 people have been convicted under newly-passed FTF legislation in Southeastern Europe, and there are now about 33 more defendants indicted or on trial, all in Kosovo.

Third, we must address family members of FTFs who are returning home. Some of these returnees may have committed crimes in the conflict zone, in which case a law enforcement response may be appropriate. Some may themselves be victims of ISIS – particularly young children, who have witnessed and been forced to participate in traumatic violent acts and been indoctrinated with extremist ideology. Efforts must be made to rehabilitate and reintegrate such victims back into society. The United States looks forward to addressing this specific issue via the Global Counterterrorism Forum’s FTF Working Group, where we have launched a recent initiative with the Netherlands focusing on family members of returning FTFs.

Fourth, we need to make greater strides in amplifying the voices of our networks of local partners. We understand that those who come from and are closest to the conflict are the most credible voices to counter terrorist propaganda. The defeat of ISIS will not occur on the battlefield alone. The State Department has several initiatives underway to address the threat of messages promulgated by ISIS and other violent extremists. We have worked with partner governments to create a network of messaging centers that expose, refute, and combat online terrorist propaganda. These centers harness the creativity and expertise of local actors to generate positive content that challenges the nihilistic vision of ISIS and its supporters.

Finally, we need to confront homegrown violent extremism. We need to understand more fully what drives people to become homegrown violent extremists. How can we best intervene to dissuade or prevent young adults from becoming terrorists? The United States and the Kingdom of Morocco are leading a global effort under the auspices of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) to address homegrown terrorism. Launched in November 2017, the initiative aims to analyze the common traits among attackers to help develop proactive policies and programs, while reviewing potential underlying systemic gaps within and between national and local governments impeding their success in thwarting these types of threats and plots. The goal is to formulate good practices and concrete recommendations for useful intervention programs.

Turning now to recent counterterrorism efforts, I would like to provide a brief snapshot of scenario-based counterterrorism-related seminars (or tabletop exercises (TTXs) – that I have helped orchestrate over the last several years. I am sure most, if not all, are familiar with the concept and practical dimensions of tabletop exercises, or TTXs. But to summarize, TTXs are scenario-based brainstorming exercises aimed at spurring participants to develop strategies, plans, and policies to confront current and future challenges based on a simulated situation within an interactive environment. The case studies we have utilized include real world data placed into a fictionalized context. A group that I co-chair, the Partnership for Peace Consortium’s Combating Terrorism Working Group (CTWG), has achieved success in conducting an innovative TTX methodology under Chatham House rules, or on a not-for-attribution basis. Our TTXs allow participants to challenge common assumptions, while engaging in open, honest dialogue on the challenges their communities face.

What are the merits of TTXs? Well, in short, TTXs help operationalize counterterrorism strategies, plans, and policies (i.e., testing theories and security frameworks through practical application), identify gaps and/or possible overlaps within security architectures, better flesh out training requirements, bolster multi-stakeholder linkages and societal resilience, and promote interagency and international collaboration.

Over the last several years, the CTWG has carried out a number of TTXs focused on addressing real world FTF challenges and terrorist threats, including homegrown violent extremism. Starting in 2015, we beta-tested the first TTX at the Marshall Center in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, and in 2016, executed three TTXs dealing with issues related to the migration crisis and building societal resilience. Two TTXs were conducted in-country working directly with host nations Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, and the third hosted by the Marshall Center. In 2017, we conducted two more TTXs – both exploring reverse FTF flows – one in Macedonia and the other at the Marshall Center. For 2018, in addition to focusing on building and launching a NATO CT TTX capability, we plan to hold a regional TTX focused on FTF challenges within Central Asia and the region. This TTX will take place in July at the Marshall Center, where we will invite various participants from Central Asia and beyond.

In conclusion, the terrorist threat is constantly evolving, and we must remain vigilant against an ever-adaptive ISIS, its affiliates, and an al-Qa'ida on the rebound. We must also update our toolkit to ensure we have the necessary capabilities to confront an increasingly decentralized, self-directed enemy. We have found that promoting, developing, and implementing counterterrorism TTXs are useful in promoting societal resilience, international security, and sustainable collaboration. By harnessing the energies and talents of our societies and by cooperating across borders, we can and will overcome the threats we collectively face.

Academic Centers

Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies (IUCTS)

Established in 1994, the activities of IUCTS are guided by an International Research Council that offers recommendations for study on different aspects of terrorism, both conventional and unconventional. IUCTS is cooperating academically with universities and think tanks in over 40 countries, as well as with governmental, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental bodies.

International Center for Terrorism Studies (ICTS)

Established in 1998 by the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, in Arlington, VA, ICTS administers IUCTS activities and sponsors an internship program in terrorism studies.

Inter-University Center for Legal Studies (IUCLS)

Established in 1999 and located at the International Law Institute in Washington, D.C., IUCLS conducts seminars and research on legal aspects of terrorism and administers training for law students.

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