

TERRITORY AS A MILITARY ASSET

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***Abstract:** Territory is one important military asset. When it turns to have the characteristics of an ethno-territory than is especially familiar to the members of one ethnic kin. As such it is after the people and armed assets, the most important pillar. It may serve as a military base, but beyond that, it also may serve as a safe footstep for the armed members of an ethnic group. Here in this study, are presented many cases when a specific territory is used not just as a safe base for the military, but also as a hinterland.*

***Keywords:** Territory, cross-border, ethnic, element, military, army*

The basic characteristics of the territory are size, quality, and geographical position. By the way, the geographical factor in international relations has two basic elements: state territory and international geographical position. It is defined by the imaginary withdrawal which passes through every point of the border, either land or water, and goes further into the airspace. With the development of the military industry and technology, these features and elements become more and more sensitive and important.

In line with strategic standards, borders should be as difficult to overcome as possible for self-propelled guns and other military vehicles. This is often the case with borders on lakes, rivers, seas, and other water barriers, as well as borders set on the tops of mountain ranges. But, there have long been no suitable territories in the world to which state territories could expand. They can only do so at the expense of the territories of other states. It is more or less the same when it comes to ethnic

territories. One ethnic group can't expand its territory without harming the other's living space. In the cases of wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbian troops undertook "ethnic cleansing" campaigns on the cross-border territory of the two countries and dominated important territories as lines of communication.

Territory as an element of political power may be more important due to the mentioned and other qualitative characteristics, and less as a space of a certain area. Not only the land but also the seas and oceans are areas suitable for military action, in this case for the action of rocket launchers. The possession of unimpeded access to seas or international rivers can also be a significant feature of military power.

The boundaries of state territories during the historical periods that preceded the emergence of nations and the industrial mode of production were not given much importance. The emergence of nations, national consciousness, and markets served as the basis for the "territorialization" of societies. It has become desirable that the borders of states include territorial economic units, such as cities and their economic hinterlands or industrial basins.

The territory should possess "strategic depth", so much appreciated by military skill theorists and military practitioners. Even states that possess vast territories tend to occupy with sudden military attacks and surround, block and isolate. Israel is one of the states that have territories of very shallow depths of this kind. On the other hand, if the space is such that the depth can compensate for handicaps that create boundaries that are not drawn by geostrategic requirements.

The mentioned strategic importance of owning large territories has started to decline since the development of military aviation, missile weapons, satellites, and other aircraft technologies. The prevailing opinion is that the land army has priority in military campaigns compared to the importance of other branches of the armed forces. In this respect, when it comes to the territory, air surveillance with the control of troops on the ground can probably be distinguished substantially.

From a military point of view, the impassability of borders and territory can be a "sword from the blade": natural obstacles, which at one stage of the war may favor the activities of forces conducting tactical defense operations, and a handicap for forces under tactical offensive, regardless whether the observed forces are defending or attacking at the strategic level.

Several locations on Earth make a significant contribution to the political power of the countries under their control, primarily because of the importance of military and later also of civilian transport. These include the Strait of Gibraltar, the Panama Canal, the Suez Canal, the South African Cape of Good Hope, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, the English Channel, and many others territories of strategic importance.

The American Admiral and historian Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914) considered that the rule of the sea, and especially the important narrow waterways, was the counterbalance to the rule of the key continental Eurasian mass.¹ His ideas had a great influence, first of all, on the policy of the American President Theodore Roosevelt, who greatly contributed to the United States becoming one of the world's naval powers. Many wars will prove that territorial waters gained more and more military importance.

The violent nature of territorial disputes makes territorial issues salient because of the natural tendency of humans to occupy and defend territory.² According to Kohama, territories seized in war are to tip the post-war power balance in favor of the party that has gained them. Territory about the war, above all, is a valuable military asset. Consequently, the importance of the territory close to the border is indisputable when it comes to its value as a war asset able to determine military developments.

¹ Mahan, A. T., 1890. *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*. Boston: Little, Brown

² Kohama, S., 2019. Territorial acquisition, commitment, and recurrent war. *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 19(2), p.263.

An army that, from the territory of one state, enters to take control of the territory of another state, relies on methods that suit best depending on the circumstances. The connotation of regional, or even wider international relations dictates the "transparency" of the armed forces active in a conflict. Somewhere the war takes place openly knowing clearly who is fighting, while somewhere it takes segments of hybrid warfare. No matter from what armed forces the danger comes, especially in conflictual ethnic environments, grievances cannot be ignored by not allowing constructive conciliatory politics to operate. Where there is a lot of dissatisfaction, control over the territory is always debatable.

Control over a specific territory does not in itself mean security for the government that has the authority if in this territory the conditions are not created for a normal circumstance where various layers of political supporters have a chance for contributing to political life. The respect for the rights of the political opposition shows the real condition of freedoms and the nature of the regime. In conditions where political opponents, especially those organized for ethnic causes are left without enough room for action, then the space for action has to be found where possible, most of the time in the nearby cross-border territory.

The political opposition, which is forced to find shelter elsewhere, will no longer seek its rights by dealing with conventional political means, as this will be insufficient to regain or achieve the particular political goals. Found as a refugee in the surrounding countries, persecuted opposition will try to restore its former rights in the country from which had been expelled by elevating its action to other organizational aspects, such as armed formations, by creating military units capable to fight the regime.

Many political-military organizations that will later find themselves as power holder, may have previously been forced to operate in conditions of illegality or even totally in exile, therefore will see the territories of other countries as an

opportunity to reconsolidate and strengthen their capacities. This is especially evident when along with political-military activists, the refugee civilian population also acts. This population for sure constitutes the main human resources of future armed formations.

Developments from the past are proving enough that the complete domination over the situation within the country can never be considered stable, in conditions when the political opposition has been expelled abroad. Lack of desire to find a political compromise, in this case, is presented as a very weak element of national security among others. Therefore, in rare cases, as we have witnessed during modern conflicts, the various regimes and governments in power may have even tried to integrate the forces expelled abroad, but for sure because the full victory either was too far or was taking shape of a Pyrrhic victory.

One such case is Tajikistan, where the end of the civil war was seen as possible only when the government showed the will to integrate the expelled opposition as partners in political and security structures. This case will be discussed more in the second chapter of this study, within the issue of cross-border cooperation between the Tajik ethnic populations.

However, in the civil wars of recent decades, Tajikistan is only one of the cases when the political-military opponents of the regime in power, will use the border territory of the other country (in this case Afghanistan), as a space that can be organized, respectively as a territory from which military actions are launched.

In all these wars, where the neighboring territory is used as a means of war, the support will be strong in cases when the cross-border territory is also a common ethno-territory inhabited by the same ethnic group. When the support of the political stakeholders across the border is added, then this is a serious concern for governments that are not inclined to solve problems by political means. The case of the Kosovo War clearly shows that the great repression of the Belgrade authorities

on the Albanian population of Kosovo will reflect in the establishment of military bases of the Kosovar resistance in the cross-border territory of Albania, where this was possible due to a wide connotation of circumstances and primarily because of the ethnic solidarity factor and sympathies for the cause.

The serious dissatisfaction among the oppressed Albanian population, whose ethnic territory where they form the majority is divided into different countries, did not leave much room for the problems to be addressed exclusively by peaceful political means. Here stands the origin of the subsequent armed uprisings after 1999, a period when peace had already been restored in Kosovo itself and the political institutions and security as well had been established under the international protectorate.

Armed uprisings in the Presevo Valley and Macedonia could have been prevented if the issue of suppressing the rights of ethnic Albanians was seen as interconnected with the overall situation of the Albanians. However, following the deployment of international troops in Kosovo, international actors involved in the region failed to see the dissatisfaction of ethnic Albanians outside Kosovo as a serious problem. On the other hand, with Kosovo already liberated from the repressive authorities of Belgrade, politico-military organizations for ethnic rights found a secure support background despite the limitations that may have existed because the main security authority was the international peace troops.

The integration of the population into political life and other economic and social aspects also guarantees sustainable national security. The oppressed will try to find the necessary space for action. Unfortunately, the cases when security has not been seen through the prism of respecting rights related especially ethnic rights, have reached even levels of almost unbearable tragedies unseen since World War II.

Rwanda in this regard presents one of the most tragic cases. To make matters worse, the tragedy in Rwanda will also serve as a threat to political stability

and national security, in virtually all surrounding countries. From the very beginning, the Tutsi ethnic resistance to the ruling Hutu regime in Rwanda will find Uganda's cross-border territory a starting point. From a logical military point of view, RPF launched a war from Uganda, simply because there was no opportunity left for the Tutsi to be organized in Rwanda itself. On the other hand, the Tutsi had a historical relationship with several ethnic groups in Uganda, which has served as an auxiliary element for RPF, even though the Ugandan authorities were officially against the use of its territory as a military base, as governments often say, to defend themselves internationally.

But things were not easy for any Ugandan government concerning this issue. As more anti-Tutsi violence erupted in Rwanda, therefore more Tutsis fled to Uganda by creating a contingent of refugee warriors. The case against the fleeing Rwandans has not always been the same. In the past, the presence of refugees has been viewed with admiration by the dictatorial regime of Idi Amin, who saw the refugee population as a potential human resource for his troops. This was especially evident because of the suspicions he had about certain segments of the Ugandan population, more precisely because of the dilemmas over loyalty to the regime.

Various developments nevertheless create a kind of "tradition" of Tutsi refugee presence in Uganda. The military organization of this refugee population will take more and more concrete forms. In 1989 a very serious attack will be launched on the authorities in Rwanda. A year later, it is estimated that the army of refugee fighters consisted of 10,000 armed men. In the late 1990s, French intelligence reports already confirmed that RPF troops were able to defeat the Rwandan Army which was considered weak and poorly organized.³

³ Adelman, H., & Suhrke, A. (Eds.). (1999). *The path of a genocide: the Rwanda crisis from Uganda to Zaire*. Oxon: Routledge, p.160.

RPF presented a military force that was a real concern for the Hutu authorities in Rwanda. At the same time, the Hutu-dominated government in Kigali created more paranoia over ethnic Tutsis, hence encouraging even more inter-ethnic violence, initially through organizations formally not legalized by the authorities, but as time was going the “official” involvement was more open and direct.

As developments will prove clearly, RPF calculated well in all circumstances in broader the regional framework. In this regard, they not only looked at the situation in Rwanda in the sense of attacking the Hutu regime at moments when they considered it militarily weak but also took into account the circumstances in Uganda itself. The operations were planned in cases where there was a significant dispersal of Ugandan troops, especially on the occasion of the Ugandan National Day celebrations, when the army was deployed inland to secure the celebrations.

Of course, the RPF presence in Uganda was politically illegal but it was not hidden. Because of the earlier contributions to developments in Uganda, the government has been keeping a close eye on the RPF’s presence. During this time, the authorities in Kigali saw all of this as a direct Ugandan intervention in Rwanda, based on the fact that RPF troops were moving freely, as well as the fact that there were some non-Rwandans within the formations of RPF.⁴ The first military leader of RPF Fred Rwigyema was previously Chief of staff of the Ugandan army.⁵

The former colonial powers France and Belgium, as well as Zaire as a regional power, initially not only sided with the government in Kigali, but their help was also crucial in stopping the RPF's military rush.⁶ Without this assistance, the

⁴ **Adelman, H., & Suhrke, A.** (Eds.), 1999. *The path of a genocide: the Rwanda crisis from Uganda to Zaire*. Oxon: Routledge, p.42.

⁵ **Prunier, G.**, 2009. *Africa’s World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe*. Oxford University Press, p.13.

⁶ **Guichaoua, A.**, 2015. *From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990–1994*. University of Wisconsin Press, p.23.

Rwandan government would not even have sufficiently prepared military capabilities to stop the RPF. However, these alliances will change their form over time, and pro-Tutsi sympathy will prevail against the earlier support for the Hutu-dominated government which will increasingly surface as a persecutor.

A great obstacle to the RPF plans was the fact that they were not allowed to establish their bases in neighboring territories in Burundi. Indeed, President Pierre Buyoya did not allow Burundi territory to be used as a military base, but this did not prevent Burundian ethnic Tutsis from joining the RPF in Uganda.⁷ This at the same time made the ranks of the RPF more congested, while on the other hand speaks of homogeneity in the political determinations of the Tutsi population. Ugandan territory was used also by Burundian ethnic Tutsis.

This homogenization will have the opposite effect of homogenization among the Hutu political circles, which will lead to the harsh nature of the confrontation in 1993 and 1994. Ethnic extremism affirmed its priority in economic, social, and political life. In such circumstances, there is not much room left for moderate political attitudes, hence armed confrontation almost remains the only means to determine the future.

When in April 1994 it became known that the military advance of the RPF was becoming unstoppable, the Hutu military authorities in Kigali began systematic executions of moderate politicians, including the Prime Minister of Hutu identity, Agathe Uwilingiyimana. The Prime Minister was executed on April 7, as an act of revenge the day after the assassination of President Juvénal Habyarimana.⁸ This also made it impossible to transfer the command over Rwanda's armed forces to a moderate female prime minister.

⁷ Guichaoua, A., 2015. *From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990–1994*. University of Wisconsin Press, p.32.

⁸ Newton, M., 2014. Famous Assassinations in World History: An Encyclopedia. Santa Barbara ABC-CLIO, p.591.

The assassination of the Prime Minister was also the end of the illusion that there is a political solution for Rwanda. Uwilingiyimana was succeeded as prime minister by Jean Kambanda, a Hutu hardline politician.⁹ In Rwanda there was no room for moderation, pushing the various strata of the population to identify with the "with us or with them" style.

The assassination of key politicians in the country will bring with it the horror of what will be known as the "Rwandan Genocide", In 100 days up to a million people will be killed.¹⁰ The victims were mainly Tutsis but also moderate Hutus. At the same time, this will disrupt any social order in the country. The armed structures of the country will be involved in committing the Genocide. This circumstance will be used by the RPF to reverse the military initiative and defeat the Rwandan troops composed of Hutu, thus ending the horrific days of genocide.

The RPF victory in Rwanda created new circumstances in the wider region having an impact on neighboring countries. The RPF motivated by its victory will see itself as a regional factor. Together with its Ugandan allies, RPF will continue to change the wider region by military means. Initially attacking the Hutu bases in the cross-border territory in the east of Zaire, the RPF will soon find itself as a determining factor in what would later turn into the First Congo War. Another reason for the high Rwandan motivation to intervene in Zaire was to aid the ethnically associated Banyamulenge population.¹¹

Infiltration in Zaire will cause President Mobutu's regime to fall in less than 7 months. This has been almost unlikely, as it initially seemed that RFP troops now the RPA as Rwanda's official army, along with troops from Uganda and Burundi, targeted only cross-border territories where they essentially had no ethnic interest.

⁹ Herr, A., 2018. *Rwandan Genocide: The Essential Reference Guide*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, p.196.

¹⁰ Ubaldo, R., & Totten, S. (Eds.), 2011. *We Cannot Forget: Interviews with Survivors of the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, p.1.

¹¹ Byman, D., 2001. *Trends in outside support for insurgent movements*. Santa Monica: RAND, p.37.

Due to widespread involvement, the war will also be referred to as Africa's First World War. President Mobutu's various enemies will find themselves in an alliance that will also encourage the regime's internal opponents.

Following the defeat of troops loyal to President Mubuto, the new forces, led by the Laurent-Désiré Kabila, will change the name of the country to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 1998, when the new President would attempt to oust foreign armies among whom the RPF was one of the most authoritarian forces, the Second Congo War started.

But what did the Wars in Congo prove? The RPF was able to rise a well-prepared and operationally very strong army. In a frantic flight, Rwandans deployed their troops from Goma in eastern Congo, further to a territory deep in Zaire inland. Prunier reveals in his book facts about the international cooperation that the RPF had after taking power in Rwanda. The U.S. Department of Defense itself cooperated with the new government in Rwanda. In 1995 the U.S. Army started a training program for the Rwandan Army. RPA officers visited the United States as well as U.S. Army personnel visited Rwanda.¹²

Rwanda is a very emblematic case where as a consequence of ethnic violence the destabilization of a relatively small country may bring wars in the huge region involving many countries. A stable political situation and national security are not just sovereign issues that remain ineffective from developments in neighboring countries. Located deep inside the African continent, Rwanda with its tragedy will bring unpredictable domino effects to a large part of the continent, on a scale that the African continent had not seen before.

War can no longer be considered isolated. National Security cannot be considered at the right level if it does not consider neighborhood developments.

¹² Prunier, G., 2009. Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe. Oxford University Press, p.126.

Refugee influxes often feed new conflicts. Displaced populations are inevitably seeking a way to restore their presence in their homeland from where they have been driven. Failure to resolve the issue of the persecuted population always carries with it a potential for ethnic war.

No country can rest with internal stability if the country nearby to it is subject to an armed conflict. That is why the creation of military alliances is very important. As early as 1873, Clausewitz, when talking about the rise of Rome, mentioned alliances as the main cause of this rise.¹³ Of course, when we make any analogy with Rome, we mean the longevity of institutional stability largely attributed to alliances, which have protected the Empire from negative influences coming from outside.

Regarding the active insurgencies since 1991, surveyed by RAND's National Security Research Division (NSRD) and published in 2001, out of the 74 active insurgencies, 44 of them received support that was significant for their success. Looking deeper into those statistics, 21 insurgencies received support from refugees and 19 from the diaspora.¹⁴

The governments supporting the guerrilla formations are very often motivated by geopolitics, but this motivation goes deeper when the ethnic solidarity and grievances are in question. The ethnic territory, no matter of international borders, no doubt serves as a haven and is of essential value to the success of any armed rebellion or full-scale war. Ethnic bond is a dense motive for helping members of the same ethnic identity especially when they are oppressed by regimes dominated by other ethnic groups. But in some situations, the sheltering of the military formations is also driven by some wider constellations.

¹³ Von Clausewitz, C., 1873. *On War*. London N. Trübner Co., p.231.

¹⁴ Byman, D., 2001. *Trends in outside support for insurgent movements*. Santa Monica: RAND, p.2.

In the case of Lebanon which hosted various Palestinian groups because the government was either too weak to defeat or expel them from its territory, either often appears to be restrained to not disturb inter-sectarian relations among the local population. The Lebanese Muslim population was more expected to sympathize with the Palestinian cause, although the Palestinian resistance to Israel itself was structured as secular and rather assembled over the ethnic cause.

The desire for ethnic domination in a certain territory, especially when it comes to the involvement of more than one country, is today also challenged by the international political system and by international law. This has prompted certain governments to use camouflage methods in their efforts to side with ethnic groups in another country. In this case, many elements make the difference, from the language the camouflaged army speaks to how it is perceived by the local population.

When the Russians took control of Crimea, it looked like a phantom army, disguised and without insignia, was invading the territory. The troops without insignia take over the institutions of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea on February 27, 2014.¹⁵ There were not many clear signs that Russian official troops had crossed the interstate border, on the other hand, an “unknown” army was silently surrounding the Ukrainian army barracks, and was taking military control over the territory.

The invasion of Crimea was done quite cautiously, initially covering every room where Russia would be accused of occupying a territory that until then recognized as part of another country. "Little green men" in unmarked green uniforms created confusion and prevented the first political reactions regarding the invasion of Crimea. They were the special forces of the Russian army, and for a long time they created confusion by appearing as local forces of "self-defense".¹⁶

¹⁵ RAND, 2017. *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, Santa Monica: s.n., p.86.

¹⁶ De La Pedraja, R., 2018. *The Russian Military Resurgence: Post-Soviet Decline and Rebuilding, 1992-2018*. Jefferson: McFarland, Incorporated, Publishers, p.264.

In a press conference in early March 2014, the Russian President said that there are no plans to annex Crimea and that there were no Russian troops there.¹⁷ According to him, these troops are the local forces. Although journalists noted that it was Russian uniforms, the Russian President insisted that in all post-Soviet countries the uniforms were the same and could be bought anywhere.¹⁸ Nearly two months after the start of the occupation of Crimea, Russia was officially denying that these troops are parts of the Russian Army. The same scenario was used in the eastern parts of Ukraine.

The official acknowledgment of the presence of the Russian Army in Crimea surfaced only after everything was over as far as control over Crimea was concerned. Russia's ethnic victory over Ukrainians in Crimea was a major Russian territorial victory. In the eastern parts of Ukraine, Russia was more cautious by not acknowledging the official presence of its troops, but instead by placing control over the territories under the name of local militia forces, which clearly either came or were supported by Russia. Territorial control was soon followed by the proclamation of breaking from Ukraine of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics,

RÁCZ named his work about Russia's hybrid war in Ukraine "Breaking the Enemy's Ability to resist". According to him, despite its partial failure in East Ukraine, Russia's hybrid war was devastatingly effective.¹⁹ Ukraine itself seemed to be initially unprepared for this kind of camouflaged war. The element of surprise played an important role. On the other hand, the fog of contradicting information often undermined the impression of Russian seriousness to occupy territories.

¹⁷ RAND, 2017. *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, Santa Monica: s.n., p.14

¹⁸ Schreck, C., 2019. *From 'Not Us' To 'Why Hide It?': How Russia Denied Its Crimea Invasion, Then Admitted It*, Prague: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

¹⁹ RÁCZ, A., 2015. *Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist*. Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, p.67.

Ukrainians were shown to be more prepared after the hybrid phase ended and the war took on elements of the conventional battlefield.

There is no doubt that the plans of many war planners, especially the way Crimea was invaded, might seem appropriate to copy it. Crimea with its ethnic characteristics, where the interaction between the armed forces and the population loyal to them was crucial, at the same time shows how the conflicts in such "ethnic" environments are gradually emerging from conventionality.

The territories of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were also partially occupied by a camouflaged army during the 1990s. But there the war which was being designed and undertaken by the political center in another state recognized another nature of camouflage. Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) while still presenting itself as a military force of a multiethnic federation first came out openly as a party to the ethnic divisions, and later at once the troops who were guarding the JNA held positions, began to appear with other insignia and continued the war.²⁰ The iconography of insignia associated with Ethnic-Serb heraldry: double-headed white eagle, various sleeve badges with incorporated chetnik skull and crossbones, Serb tricolor chevron with a cross and the four Cyrillic "S", etc.²¹

Official Belgrade was trying to give the message to the international community that there were left no more troops controlled by Serbia in the territories of the two countries which were already members of the UN. Various facts not only on the ground but also of a financial nature up to the highest commanding accountability, speak of a satellite army. Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) and (Serb Army of Krajina) SVK may have had their insignia, but in essence, they were structures created by a combination of JNA units and various armed territorial formations under the control of Serbian political circles.

²⁰ Keryo, A. J., 2020. *The Fourth Way: A Comprehensive Humanitarian Economic System to Save the World*. Conneaut Lake: Page Publishing, Incorporated

²¹ Thomas, N., 2006. *The Yugoslav Wars Slovenia & Croatia 1991-95*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, pp.59-60.

This kind of control of the war from a political center abroad, through troops wearing local uniforms, as in the case of Eastern Ukraine, is certainly thought out to avoid the consequences of a possible international reaction. The presence of foreign troops is likely to be condemned by the international community, as this presence carries with it the elements of occupation by a foreign force.

On contrary, determining what local armed troops represent, often takes time and is easy and may be presented as a local uprising, thus camouflaging the occupation with a civil war. Once the cross-border territory is crossed, even though it is a military action, it will be quickly forgotten as an action. The “media” primacy, and then possible diplomatic pressure, will deal with the action of the troops in the territory they have put under control. The identification of the armed forces leads to the public revelation of the political project.

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