

Necessity for a Grand Strategy _____

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Abstract

Articulations of notions such as “infringement of sovereignty”, “national union”, “national strategy” or “power capacities” should be done with great prudence by Albanian policy makers. Declarations of Albanian actors have also a direct impact on the behavior of international factor. Declarations of this nature must be filtered first in the “laboratory” of a national – or even grand strategy. Albanian national power determines the behavior of states such as Albania and Kosovo. National power is the most popular “currency” for communication in International Relations. Each state uses its power to secure its interests in the international arena. The nature of this struggle for power can only be examined through an analysis of power competition with other nations. No nation can punch above its weight in international relations first and foremost without considering alliances. In this context, this article aims to shed light on the weight of a small state in

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the international arena, which can be determined by a national strategy. This article concludes that the Albanian geopolitical space need a Grand Strategy and small countries like Albania and Kosova must harmonize their foreign policy with its strategic allies.

Keywords: *national power, power capacities, hegemonic power, strategic allies, grand strategy*

1. Introduction

This article was initiated by the recent political discourse of Albanian political actors, who talk about terms such as “national sovereignty”, “national union”, “national strategy” or “power capacities”, without conducting first a thorough analysis of the current position of Albania and Kosova respectively. Both discourses are related to the declarations made by Albanian political actors and to the attitudes of the international factor that come by because of “intemperance” in such statements - mainly due to the lack of knowledge and the lack of an assessment of the capacities. Only the design of a grand strategy would then allow the correct use of these notions and would then provide a track to be followed.

In both cases it is a negotiation crisis. In the internal context, the crisis has reached its dominant point involving internal and foreign political actors, but also the public in general. Externally, it is related to the statements of the two top leaders of the Albanian states for another alternative if the negotiations with Europe stop or do not proceed at the expected pace. In terms of communication, the crisis seems to extend between the internal and the international factor. In its most simplified form, the problems created by this crisis are related to the comportment of respective political elites towards the international factor, mainly towards alliances and strategic allies.

Recently the two top leaders of the Albanian states (Albania and Kosova), perhaps addressing the international factor (EU), declared that indifference or delays in integration towards the Albanian states is promoting another alternative, apart from the perspective of a future within the EU structures. In another form, the alternative of a national union was articulated. The statements of the Albanian leaders on the matter in question attracted the reaction of the international factor. The reaction from NATO came two days after the declaration, from Russia four days later and from the EU after six days. Of course, there were also reactions from neighboring countries: Serbia, Greece, Northern Macedonia, etc. Reactions from Serbia came first in a laconic form from President Vucic and then a rather threatening “declaration of war” from the Serbian foreign minister. The question arises: Were the speeches of the Albanian leaders productive in the way of

diplomatic behavior? Did they consider the respective national powers? Is there a grand strategy facilitating or enabling this union?

The union of nations in the “international game” - in search of a “precedent”

Since the World War II, it was difficult to find precedents for the phenomenon of national unification. The conferences of Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam during the World War II tried to preserve or bring under the influence of the winners the states that were considered sovereign until the war. Apart from the birth of new states from the decadence of colonialism in Europe, there were no unifications of states, but developments of going under the umbrella of two superpowers due to the security dilemma.

After the Cold War, political scholars analyze two moments. First, the unification of Germany and the “unification”/annexation of Crimea. The first was successful because it was agreed by the great powers and Germany itself represented such power capacities that influenced the behavior of the major powers. The union of Crimea with Russia, which continues to be considered annexation, has been accompanied by categorical positions against this action and a powerful economic embargo. The case of Crimea is a “precedent”, but the international factor considers it a violation of the international law (Zagorodnyuk, 2023).

In contrast, all other cases - always after the Cold War - are those of the creation of new states as a result of the disintegration of “modern empires”: the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. In each of the “peaceful” or “violent” cases, the process of recognition of new states has passed through the process of recognition or international treaties. The international factor – i.e., the great powers - even in these cases have aimed at not disrupting regional balances and balance of power (Roeder, 2012:15). As a concept and reality since 1815 (Congress of Vienna), balance of power has changed little even in modern times. According to Kissinger (1957), the great European and world powers connect the balance of power with the security dilemma itself, which even for a long time does not seem to change (p. 28). All the “new countries” were small countries and not powers that could upset the balance in Europe or the world. Meanwhile, in every case, the behavior of the political elites has been coordinated or approved by that of the great powers.

Many dilemmas arise when designing and then implementing a national strategy. Even for what we have seen in all these years, obviously such a strategy has been missing. Chaotic movements with colossal expenditure of energy, making and remaking of history, have been present in the political scene of both Albanian states. As for the other “distributed” half, there was never any debate. The absence of such a grand strategy - the fruit of the logical consensus of all factors

- remains one of the biggest disadvantages of Albanian politics. More concretely, three specific moments of a major strategy - national interests, national power (resources) and the way elites behave towards them and towards strategic allies - are the columns of a grand strategy. Any strategy that is currently in place and named “national” has failed to address aspects of the national strategic character such as interests, potentials, alliances, developments and perspectives, which would have a nationwide impact.

2. Literature review

Buzan & Wæver (2010), among many researchers of international relations, believe that at the base of the behavior of states lies the capacity of national power (p. 377 – 395). According to Morgenthau (1968), national power - one of the central subjects of the study of international relations - is the ability of a nation to realize objectives of its national interests in relation to other nations. It includes the capacity to use or threaten to use force by influencing others to secure national objectives (p. 25). Based on the power capacities, countries in the world today are categorized into hegemonic powers, great powers, regional powers, small powers, and small countries.

Currently only the US is a hegemonic power. Russia is a great power with strong military potential, but its economic potential does not allow it to emerge as a hegemonic power. China is a great power with strong economic potential, but due to its military arsenal (i.e., its limitations) it is not comparable to the US's and Russia's strength. Britain and France are great powers, but with military and economic potentials not comparable to the first three. Hegemonic powers and great powers possess nuclear arsenal. Germany and Japan are powerful economies but do not possess military potential - not because of impossibility but because of limitations imposed on them since World War II. Regional powers rank after hegemonic powers and great powers.

Continuing this reasoning, Buzan & Wæver (2010) in “Region and Powers” make the following list: one hegemonic power (USA), five great powers that are also members of the UN Security Council and 13 regional powers. Italy and Turkey are cited as regional powers in our region. Other countries are either “minor powers” at best or simply “small countries”. While countries classified in the first three categories do not have issues of survival, other (i.e., small) countries fight for their survival and modify their behavior to avoid security risks.

According to Schwarzenberger (1952), “Power is the capacity to impose the will on others by relying on the capacities of effective power in cases of non-compliance” (p. 74). National power has several elements that political scholars

classify in different ways. Morgenthau (1968) classified them into two categories - permanent and temporary ones, while Kugler & Organski (2018) preferred to classify them into natural and social ones. Palmer, Perkins, Charles O. Lerche, Abdul Said and James H. Wolfe define them in two types: tangible and non-tangible or in very articulate language in “soft powers” and “hard powers”.

In a more detailed form, power capacities are defined by geography, natural resources, economic development and industrial capacities, technology, military power, ideology, leadership, governing quality, national character and morality, diplomacy, etc. To continue the analysis, we can also rely on Toje (2010) who simplifies the definition of power into economic, military and soft power and states that “the three forms of national power are inseparable from each other” (f. 67). Without economic power no nation can develop its military power and without the latter no nation can play an active role in international relations. Should the countries ignore this trinomen, they will get into difficult and intricate situations.

3. The Balkans, Albania and balance of power

The Balkans, an area of 550,000 km² and a population of 55 million, consists of thirteen countries. None of the Balkan states can be classified as a great power. Only Turkey, referring to the above criteria, is evaluated at the level of regional power (Buzan & Wæver, 2010, p. 54). Other states are divided into the category of small powers or small states. Their economic and military powers do not rise to the level of regional or great powers. To clarify this presentation more precisely, the concept of national power becomes necessary.

Economic power is the most important form of national power. It presupposes the ability of a nation to meet its own needs and to control the behavior of other states through economic means. Economic tools in foreign policy are considered in the current period the most vital tools that a state can use to influence the actions and behavior of other states. Perkins (2001) in his book “International Relations” states that “no state can become a military power, even a great power, without having adequate economic power” (p. 44). According to Wolfe (2008), “economic power is inseparable from military power, because it is one of its basic components in the conditions of modern war; moreover, economic power can also be considered military power but in an easier reduction” (p. 15).

What about the Balkans? Referring to the CIA Fact Book 2016 we can find the economic power capacities for countries in the region. For analytic purposes, Italy is also included, which ranks 12th, while the other countries are as follows: Turkey – the 13th; Greece – the 57th; Bulgaria - the 76th; Serbia – the 81st; Croatia – the 84th; Slovenia – the 98th; Bosnia – the 111th; Albania – the 121st; Macedonia

– the 125th; Kosova – the 145th; Montenegro – the 153rd. The position of most of the countries in the region and obviously Albania cannot be evaluated in terms of the size of a “small power” economy, but simply a “small country” with no weight or influence on regional geopolitics.

Military power is one of the most important forms of national power. It is considered essential to the nation’s security objectives. And for every state, security is the most vital element of its national interest. In fact, it is at the same time the main concern of every nation for its security. The possibility of the violation of a nation’s security through war and aggression by other nations is always considered as a distinct possibility and thus every nation gives priority to its security. To maintain its security from possible dangers, every country will need an army. Military power is considered the key tool for the security and territorial integrity of any nation. What about in our region? Based on the global power index 2016, Albania ranks 115th out of 125 countries under consideration. A position not laudable even on a regional scale. In this context, Turkey ranks 8th, Italy 10th; Greece 28th, Croatia 68th, Serbia 83rd; Albania 115th, Slovenia 111th, Bosnia 120th, while Italy ranks 10th; Romania 43rd and Bulgaria 67th.

So, in the context of military power, our country remains a “small country” and far from being categorized a “small power”. Meanwhile, our neighbors are in more favorable positions in the ranking. The current trend of increasing military power is dominated by the neighbors. Difference in power goes in favor of our neighbors. According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, military spending for 2016 is as follows: Italy 27.3 billion; Turkey 14.9 billion; Greece 4,973 billion; Serbia 710 million; Croatia 695 million; Albania 147 million and Kosova 51 million. Being positioned as a member of NATO does not change the balance of power in the region, because the countries mentioned above are also members of the alliance, except for Serbia.

Soft power is another important form of national power. It signifies the power of thought and the image of the nation. The role of propaganda and “smart” negotiations in international relations is a well-known fact. These tools are used by states to ensure a desired change in relation to the behavior of other states. With the use of formal, informal, public and cultural diplomatic means, a state always tries to influence the opinion and leaders of other states. The ability to influence others through communication constitutes the psychological part of a nation’s national power. Nye (2005) describes soft power in his book “Tools for Success in World Politics” as the possibility that “. . . a country can achieve the desired results in world politics because other countries – admiring its values, using its example, aspiring to the level of prosperity and well-being – want to follow it” (p. 75). In this sense, it is also important to set the agenda and draw others into world politics and change their behavior not only through force or economic sanctions. The soft

power – getting others to help you achieve the goals you want – brings people and states closer together rather than coercing them.

National Power is the most popular “currency” for communication in International Relations. Each state uses its power – or at least one of the forms we mentioned above (economic, military, diplomatic ones) – to secure its interests in the international arena. It is this feature that makes us see international relations as a process of power competition. The nature of this struggle for power can only be examined through an analysis of power competition with other nations, closer or further away from the region. The role that a nation plays or can play in international relations, can be judged by assessing its power. From this point we come across the fact that the interest in maintaining and increasing national power is the primary interest of any nation in the path for survival. National power is the means of fulfilling the needs and aspirations of a nation. As such, it remains essential that based on national power we can assess the importance and weight of a country in international politics.

Beyond the “genius” that a leader can display, what gives weight to his/her positions and statements is the power of the nation. No nation can punch above its weight in international relations outside the context of alliances and allies. National strategies balance the weight and role of political elites. Nonserious attitudes towards allies puts a state in danger of survival.

4. A paradigm for small states

Within a unique context of circumstances, each nation designs or not its own grand strategy for its existence. In relation to the small countries, to secure national strategic interests, a quick incursion into history distinguishes the way they approach the objective through only three alternatives. The small number of alternatives - only three - on the one hand seems to limit the choices and on the other hand helps a country to face few dilemmas. However, having only three alternatives is not a very comfortable position, as there are limited opportunities to weigh, evaluate and decide. Owing to their capacities, countries with early and contemporary history can easily select their alternative within this paradigm. It is geography, history and geopolitics that are the columns of such orientation. According to circumstances, alternatives of selection evolve with each other and are intertwined, but do not change the outcome of the choice. Mitrany (1975) presents these alternatives: alternative of neutrality; alternative of joining powerful alliances and alternative of partnership with a powerful regional or global country.

The behavior of a small country with the big international actors cannot be a precedent. Located in the heart of Europe, Albania is traditionally required to

maintain its sovereignty to follow a security policy based on the idea that the country is secure when it manages to anticipate and avoid threats to its survival. In the above three alternatives, this objective seems to be achieved by following the alternative of alliances and partnerships. Neutrality is attained from the tendency to choose. It is estimated that after a long time Albania and Kosova are finally in their natural positions when it comes to alliances and strategic partners.

It is the duty of the political elites, mainly their leadership, to always take into consideration the fact that existential strategic interests are linked to these two types of alternatives. Avoiding this direction endangers the existence of the country. Limiting the policies with the allies is dangerous. The use of the term “sovereignty” is reliable and safe when articulated only within this context. “The elites cannot have the monopoly to question strategic alliances and partners (Mitrany, 1975:44). The elites, through diplomacy and various forms of cooperation, are asked to encourage the reduction of distances with Washington, Berlin, London, Paris, Rome and Brussels (NATO & EU), without excluding the good relations with neighbors.

Articulating the concept of infringing sovereignty or exceeding the recognized position of sovereign space requires maturity and responsibility. According to Hart (1974), these are considered major terms defined within a grand strategy (p. 334), and major terms are related to key issues. Major issues are further related to important actors, factors and processes. Small countries find it impossible to move or shift the strategic lines. Partners and alliances give the chance for small countries to be positioned smartly at the negotiating table along the powerful nations in a direct or indirect way. Alliances provide benefits, but also obligations. Alliances are respected and countries are just links in a chain. Respecting the alliance strategy is very important for the implementation of the national strategy.

Behavior with strategic partners should be conducted with expertise and cannot be conducted by “heroes” or “rhapsodes”. Albania and Kosova have needed a relatively long time to find their natural strategic partners. Since the formation of the Albanian state, Albania, as a small state, tried all three alternatives of preserving sovereignty: neutrality, allies and alliances. The specter of “finding” allies has moved from neighboring countries to the steppes, but also to the Far East, and in every case, unfortunately, it was rewarded with disappointment and the risk of losing sovereignty precisely because of the wrong choices. It was never able to solve its own national issue. A country like Albania not only did not have the power capacities, but also lacked the combination of national strategic interests with natural strategic allies.

Failures were closely attached to the behavior of the elites. Interests of elites “weighed” more than the vital interests of the nation. The preservation of sovereignty and the national issue is based as much on increasing power capacities

as on the manner of behavior with partners. In the current international context, Albania has found its vital strategic partners: the USA and powerful western European countries. It is crucial that the national feeling harmonizes with the rapprochement of these partners. It cannot be the competency of any leading elite to thwart or change this equation with its behavior.

Does the lack of this strategy affect a common national vision? At a time when we are one of the most dispersed nations where approximately half of the country is in its natural territories and the other half is scattered around the world, is there a common strategy that orients and harmonizes the parts? Apart from the flag, the anthem and the national football team, is there a generator of feelings and ideas that unites people of the same language and origin? A nation without a strategy is a ship without a compass.

The term “strategy” is often used in every field: security, defense, environment, culture etc. These types of strategies formally have not been missing. But it is about something more - about national strategy. It is the idea of what Colin Gray, Robert Art, Christopher Layne, Hew Stracan and many other dominant voices in international studies call “grand strategy”.

In our case, this term can be articulated as “grand strategy” or “national strategy”. According to the above authors, this strategy covers the most fundamental issues of the nation, in times of peace, crises and conflicts, and is related to the most vital interests of a nation. The Grand Strategy harmonizes all types of strategies: security, defense, politics, diplomacy, economy etc. In terms of the necessity for a grand (national) strategy, Hart (1974), one of the most prominent theorists and historians of strategy, states the following: “Grand Strategy in the modern world is the art of managing a nation’s resources and representing its interests, in times of peace and war, without time limits. It reflects an uninterrupted history, creation and work of generations, orientation for the future (p. 333). So, the national strategy is not a strategy against anyone else, but a strategy to preserve and promote national interests in the present and the future.

5. In lieu of a conclusion: temporary diversion to devise a major strategy

It is a fact that the political elites of the Albanian states individually represent only separate parts of the nation (Albania up to 30-35%, Kosova up to 20-25%), i.e., no more than 50-55% of the entire nation. In this way, both Albanian states can only formulate and execute state strategies. Therefore, it is necessary to devise a national strategy. In the meantime, the debate related to this topic can be deepened and expanded, and everyone’s contribution helps at least to raise awareness of the issue.

First, political parties as temporary actors in the history of a nation find it difficult to assess the mission as part of a larger strategy. The grand strategy enables ambitions for unlimited action. Political elites have historically dominated strategic actions giving advantage to political tactics. Fluctuations or even avoidance for policymakers in assessing resources, allies, and strategic alliances indicate major differences between tactics and strategy. Electoral tactics have dominated grand strategy even though tactics without strategy are just “noise before defeat” (In the words of Sun Tzu, military strategist and philosopher, “Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat”.) Although a grand strategy, as Luttwak (1976:33) says, reduces the risk of chaotic decisions by the ruling elites, the latter still avoid the initiative for devising a strategy.

Second, the grand strategy, contrary to the appetite of the political elites, defines the space to “play”. The strategy inspires the elites and the leadership to “play” at the tactical and operational level in order to realize the grand strategy, knowing the strategic vision. It limits to a repairable level the errors or damages of the elites or leadership. No one can rise above the strategy because it embodies national interests, resources and power. The wrong game, even temporarily, at the strategic level, does not limit the damage made by the leaders or elites, but expands the impacts at the national level.

Third, grand strategy is a Clausewitzian trinity: interests - power (resources) - strategic behavior towards allies or alliances. However, this does not fit the ethics of leaders that show themselves as “historic” and “omnipotent” figures that do not respect the standards. Unfortunately, in our history there are many examples of the elites exposed to the limits of power arrogance, not respecting the “level of the game” being played in the international arena: they often ignore this strategic trinity, do not properly recognize national power and resources, are not mature enough to harmonize their behavior with the geopolitical context and endanger relations with allies and strategic alliances for narrow political interests.

Fourth, strategy guides strategic leadership behavior. Leaders, to win political battles at the operational level at the tactical level, do not hesitate to mix the levels, and ignore strategic objectives, i.e., national interests. Although history shows that sooner or later the game at these levels turns into a boomerang, this does not prevent players from challenging the strategy and considering themselves “strategists”.

Fifth, grand strategy, as stated by Gray (2018), helps securing and managing the country’s strategic resources by overseeing their distribution (p. 74). On the contrary, any elite that avoids such a strategy “suffocates” in matters of the moment and wastes power resources, on which the future relies. Frequently, political elites limit their vision at the electoral (4-year) term, and they abuse with these resources

which should in fact be “heavy columns” in the foundations of the nation. There is no list of the strategic assets and there is no strategic vision of their management from generation to generation; this data should be an alarm bell for the need for national strategy. We know what we miss today, but we have a hard time thinking what the next generation will miss. The strategy seeks to guide the nation even after 25, 50 or 100 years.

Sixth, the political elites in our country have built their political action, mainly in denying everything achieved before. This is contrary to dimension of the grand strategy which is a systematic and valued approach to the national interest that reflects the continuous contribution in the past, present and future of all actors. Political elites - as temporary actors - have the chance to permanently contribute to or temporarily damage the nation’s strategic interests.

Seventh, the strategy minimizes or avoids the historical “tipping points”, which unfortunately in our history as a nation and later as a state appear whenever the ruling elites change. The tendency to start eras from the “zero level” seems like such an attractive trend for these elites that don’t worry much about continuity. In these conditions, the grand strategy must face the conjunctural interests of the political elites, who are ready to reach the boiling point at any time.

In conclusion, these are just some of the moments that show why political elites avoid coordination to devise a grand strategy. But this avoidance can only be temporary because the drafting of a strategy comes as a necessity to unify and protect the vital interests of the nation. This is necessary because every delay creates such obstacles that – in case a state doesn’t act accordingly – it can easily become part of someone else’s strategy.

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