

Smart Defense: A Contemporary Model for the Common Security of Albania and Kosovo

Nen/Kol. Pellumb HIDRI (Dokt)

Prof. Assoc. Dr. Blendi LAMI

Abstract

This paper analyzes the evolution of the defense concept from a traditional approach to the new concept of “Smart Defense,” with a particular focus on Albania and Kosovo as key security actors in the Balkan region. Initially, the paper explores the foundations of traditional defense, which relied heavily on national sovereignty and military power as the primary means of protection against external threats. Through historical and doctrinal analysis, the limitations of this approach are examined in addressing a new security environment characterized by increasingly complex, asymmetric, and transnational threats. The paper highlights the key factors driving the transformation of the global security landscape, including technological advancements, cyber threats, global terrorism, and geopolitical shifts. In this context, the concept of “Smart Defense,” promoted by NATO, is introduced as an integrated and innovative approach to addressing modern security challenges. By analyzing bilateral and regional cooperation between Albania and Kosovo, the potential of this approach to build a joint defense architecture based on the effective utilization of resources and technology is discussed. A detailed comparison between the traditional approach and “Smart Defense” highlights the advantages of the latter in enhancing effectiveness, coordination, and collaboration among states. Through case studies and practical examples from the region and beyond, the paper explores the successful applications and challenges encountered in adopting this strategy. Finally, the paper

identifies the key challenges faced by Albania and Kosovo in fully integrating the “Smart Defense” concept and provides strategic recommendations for adapting defense policies to meet the demands of the contemporary security environment.

Key words: *Smart Defense, traditional defense, security challenges, geopolitical shifts, cyber threats, military power, transnational threats*

Introduction

In recent decades, Albania and many other countries in the world have experienced profound changes in their concept of defense and security. Traditionally, defense has been seen as a direct task of the armed forces to protect national sovereignty and territory from external threats. In Albania, this approach has been rooted in military history and doctrine since the Cold War period, when the country was part of the communist camp and focused mainly on defense against perceived external enemies (Duka, 2012). However, recent developments in the global security environment and Albania’s membership in NATO have prompted the need to review this traditional approach and adopt more advanced concepts such as “Smart Defense”. The importance of this topic for our country lies in its context as a small country with limited resources, but with significant responsibilities for collective security within the NATO framework. The Smart Defense approach, which aims to maximize the use of resources through international cooperation and advanced technologies, is an opportunity for Albania and other similar countries to improve defense capabilities without the need for massive investments in traditional weapons and military equipment (Fischer, 2009). This topic is of particular importance for national security and for Albania’s role in the global security architecture.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the evolution of the concept of defense in Albania, focusing on the transition from the traditional approach to Smart Defense. This analysis includes examining the challenges the country faces in this process and the opportunities that Smart Defense offers to face modern threats. The paper also aims to answer the main question: What are the main challenges for the implementation of Smart Defense in Albania, and how can they be overcome? To achieve these goals, the paper will use a qualitative methodology, which includes a review of the scientific literature on defense and security in Albania and in the international context. Also, a comparative analysis will be made between the country’s traditional defense policies and its efforts to adopt Smart Defense, especially after NATO membership. One of the main sources that will be used for this analysis are NATO strategic reports and defense policy documents published by the Albanian government. This approach allows for an in-depth examination

of defense policies and the challenges facing Albania in the era of Smart Defense (Orford, 2016).

Albania's use of the Smart Defense approach is an important step in modernizing its defense capabilities and adapting to new global security challenges. Smart Defense aims to maximize the use of national resources through close cooperation with NATO allies and the more effective use of new technologies (Weiss, 2018). Albania, as a country with limited resources, has benefited from this concept, contributing to NATO joint operations and strengthening its role in regional and international security. However, the full implementation of Smart Defense requires significant challenges, including the modernization of military infrastructure and the integration of new technologies.

One of the main challenges for Albania is its limited financial and technological capacity, which may hinder the successful implementation of Smart Defense. However, through assistance from international partners and its engagement in NATO collective defense projects, Albania can compensate for these limitations and benefit from a more coordinated and advanced defense approach (Kaplan, 2015). The use of new technology, such as drones and advanced air defense systems, can help Albania improve its defense capabilities without major investments in traditional forces. In conclusion, Albania's transition from a traditional defense approach to Smart Defense represents an important step towards adapting to the modern security environment. This process is important not only for Albania's national security, but also for its role within the NATO framework and in the global security architecture. Despite the major challenges, Smart Defense offers a unique opportunity for Albania to modernize its defense and contribute to regional and international security. "Future wars will require a blend of traditional military power and technological capability, and Smart Defense is the path to that blend." Thompson, L. (2013).

The traditional concept of defense in Albania: history, sovereignty and the role of the armed Forces

National defense has always been an essential aspect of state policies, especially for countries that have experienced constant threats to their sovereignty. In Albania, the concept of defense has undergone profound transformations due to the historical and geopolitical contexts of the country. The traditional defense approach, based mainly on national sovereignty and territorial defense, has evolved in line with international and regional changes. This article will examine the history and development of the concept of national defense in Albania, with a particular focus on sovereign defense and the role of the armed forces. It will also address the main defense doctrines and lessons learned from historical examples.

“International cooperation and resource sharing are essential in a world where no state can guarantee security alone.” Bjola, C., & Kornprobst, M. (2013).

The concept of national defense in Albania has been shaped by the country’s geopolitical position and the historical challenges it has experienced. Since the establishment of the Albanian state in 1912, defense has been a priority for Albanian governments, due to constant threats from neighbors and foreign invasions (Duka, 2012). The Balkan Wars and World War I were difficult periods for Albania, showing the weakness of the new state institutions and the lack of a well-organized army to protect territorial integrity. After World War II, Albania became a communist state under the leadership of Enver Hoxha. During this period, the concept of national defense took a new direction, focusing mainly on defense against Western and Eastern powers. National defense turned into a sovereign ideology, where the small and isolated state had to be protected from any external threat. Albania began a strong policy of militarization and the construction of bunkers throughout the territory, following the doctrine of “defense with its own forces” (Fischer, 2009). This period represents one of the most extreme phases of sovereignty and territorial defense in the modern history of the country.

Sovereign Defense and the Role of the Armed Forces. In the traditional approach to national defense, sovereignty has played a key role, making the defense of borders and territorial integrity an absolute priority. In Albania, this concept was particularly emphasized during the communist period, when the country was in international isolation and faced real and perceived threats from neighbors and great powers. National sovereignty became a key element of security policies, influencing the country’s military doctrines and defense strategies. And this at a time when “Modern technology has fundamentally changed the nature of war, fostering the need for cooperation and innovation in defense.” Boot, M. (2006).

The Albanian armed forces have played a central role in maintaining sovereignty and protecting territorial integrity. During the communist period, the Albanian army was one of the most important sectors of the state, with a large number of conscripts and a large organization of reserves (Duka, 2012). This military structure, based mainly on territorial defense and popular resistance strategies, was in line with the national defense doctrine that focused on a decentralized defense, where every citizen would participate in the defense of the country. According to this doctrine, the defense of the country did not depend only on the professional army, but on the involvement of the entire people in a general resistance war. This idea coincided with developments during the communist era in other Eastern European countries, but in Albania it was particularly strong due to its isolation and lack of external allies. This doctrine also included the construction of bunkers and defense structures that enabled a long resistance to a possible invasion (Fischer, 2009).

Main doctrines and lessons from the past

Albanian military doctrines have been influenced by a number of factors, including historical circumstances, geopolitics, and the political ideology of different regimes. During the communist period, the main defense doctrine was “defense with one’s own forces”, which aimed to minimize the country’s dependence on international allies and guarantee its defense through domestic forces. This doctrine had a strong ideological basis, as the Hoxha regime promoted autarky and reliance on national forces as a key element for the survival of the socialist state (Kaplan, 2015). A historical example that reflects the power and limitations of this doctrine is the period of Albania’s isolation after the breakdown of relations with the Soviet Union and China. Albania was one of the few countries in the world that pursued a foreign policy of complete isolation, relying on the doctrine of national defense to guarantee the survival of the regime (Fischer, 2009). However, while this doctrine could provide some internal stability in the short term, it was unsustainable in the long term, due to the country’s economic and technological limitations.

After the fall of the communist regime in the early 1990s, Albania changed its approach to defense and security. Membership in international organizations such as NATO and cooperation with other countries to ensure national security represented a major departure from the traditional doctrine of sovereign defense (Duka, 2012). Albania began to adopt new doctrines that emphasized international cooperation and integration into collective security structures.

Thus, the traditional concept of defense in Albania has evolved from a sovereign and isolationist approach towards a more open and integrated model of collective defense. The history of Albania’s national defense shows the importance of sovereignty and territorial defense in different periods of the country’s history, especially during the communist period. However, lessons learned from historical examples show that the traditional defense approach may be limited in addressing new security challenges. As Albania moves towards integration into the international security architecture, it is clear that new doctrines and collaborative approaches are essential for the country’s defense in today’s global environment.

Changes in the international security environment and their impact on Albania

The international security environment has experienced profound changes in recent decades due to geopolitical and technological developments. Albania, as a small country in the Balkan region and a NATO member since 2009, has been

significantly affected by these transformations, which have changed the way it approaches national and regional security. Changes in the security environment include not only technological advancement and the emergence of new threats, such as cyberattacks and global terrorism, but also asymmetric threats, which have changed the defense strategies of states. Albania, as a country in transition towards modernization and Euro-Atlantic integration, has been challenged to adopt new approaches to confront new threats in the era of globalization. “Intelligent defense requires an integrated approach that combines traditional defense with new elements such as cyber and peacekeeping operations.” Collins, A. (2016).

Geopolitical and Technological Changes. Geopolitical changes have had a profound impact on the international security structure and on the strategies of small countries like Albania. After the end of the Cold War, the security worldview has changed from a bipolar one, where superpowers dominated certain regions, towards a multipolar system, where regional and non-state actors play an important role (Kaplan, 2015). The Balkan region, which has traditionally been a center of tension for great powers, has been increasingly integrated into Western security structures, including the membership of countries like Albania in NATO and efforts to join the European Union. This geopolitical transformation has offered new opportunities for stabilizing the region, but has also brought new challenges to security, especially in relation to the interventions of external actors like Russia and China, which have increased their influence in the region (Duka, 2012).

Technological changes have been another key factor influencing the security environment. Cyber technology, developments in artificial intelligence and increased global surveillance capacities have transformed the way states manage and respond to threats. In this context, Albania has begun to strengthen its capacities in cyber defense and improve its technological infrastructure to face new challenges. The cyber interventions that Albania has experienced in recent years have highlighted the need for investment in this area, especially after the major cyber attack that hit state institutions in 2022 (Fischer, 2009).

Evolution of Threats: Cyber, Terrorism, Asymmetric Threats. The evolution of security threats has significantly influenced Albania’s defense policy. In the past, threats were mainly territorial in nature and focused on protecting borders from potential military attacks. However, in the modern era, cyber threats have emerged as one of the greatest challenges to national security. Cyber attacks, which can be carried out by both state and non-state actors, have the ability to paralyze a country’s critical infrastructure, including financial, energy, and communication systems (Weiss, 2018). The cyber attack on Albania in 2022, which is believed to have been carried out by an external actor, highlighted weaknesses in the country’s cyber defenses and underscored the need for modernization and greater international cooperation in this area.

Another significant threat to Albania and the region is international terrorism. Although Albania has not faced major terrorist attacks, the Balkan region has been a source of recruitment for international terrorist groups such as ISIS, raising concerns about domestic stability and the involvement of Albanian citizens in terrorist activities abroad (Orford, 2016). To address these challenges, Albania has worked closely with NATO and other international partners to strengthen security and combat terrorist financing and recruitment. Asymmetric threats, which involve tactics that challenge traditional military powers, have also become more frequent. “Hybrid threats require a flexible and intelligent approach to defense, where countries share resources and experiences to address common challenges” (Hoffman, 2007). Such threats include organized crime activities, drug and arms smuggling, and illegal migration, which directly affect Albania due to its strategic position on the Balkan routes. To address these threats, Albania has strengthened regional cooperation and built greater capacities for border monitoring and combating organized crime (Duka, 2012).

The Defense Approach in the Age of Globalization. “The high costs of modern armaments mean that only through resource sharing and cooperation can effective defense be achieved.” Cordesman, A. H. (2014). In the era of globalization, the concept of security and defense has changed profoundly. Defense is no longer seen as an exclusive matter of national territory, but as an integrated component of international and regional security. Albania, as a member of NATO, is included in a collective defense system that aims to guarantee the security of the entire alliance in the face of global threats (Weiss, 2018). The new defense approach includes a combination of traditional military forces and advanced technologies, including cyber capabilities, air and maritime defense, and cooperation in the fields of intelligence and security. Globalization has also brought the need for a review of defense strategies, placing emphasis on international cooperation and resource sharing. Smart Defense, a concept promoted by NATO, aims to maximize the use of limited resources through close cooperation and coordination among allies (Kaplan, 2015). Albania has begun to adopt this approach, integrating its armed forces into joint NATO operations and contributing to international peacekeeping missions.

Thus, the international security environment has changed significantly due to geopolitical and technological developments, and these changes have had a major impact on Albania’s security policies. Kaldor, M. (2013). “New wars require new strategies, and Smart Defense is a response to challenges that cannot be met with traditional military forces alone.” The evolution of cyber threats, terrorism, and asymmetric threats have challenged traditional defense strategies and forced Albania to adopt more sophisticated and collaborative approaches. In the era of globalization, defense can no longer be limited to national borders, but requires deeper integration into international security structures, which Albania has begun to successfully adopt.

Smart Defense in the Albanian context: its concept and development

In today's world, where security threats are increasingly complex and interconnected, traditional national defense strategies are no longer sufficient to guarantee the security of small countries like Albania. Modern threats, such as cyberattacks, international terrorism, and asymmetric actions, require more coordinated and effective approaches to manage limited resources. In this context, the concept of Smart Defense has taken on special importance, especially for countries that are part of international alliances such as NATO. This article examines the origins of the Smart Defense concept, its main elements, and how this concept is being implemented in Albania within the framework of the alliance's defense strategies.

Origins of the Smart Defense Concept. The Smart Defense concept was first promoted by NATO in 2012, in response to the need for a more effective approach to collective defense. Following the global financial crisis of 2008, many NATO allies began to experience severe budgetary pressures that limited their defense investments. To address these challenges, Smart Defense aimed to maximize the efficiency of defense resources through cooperation among allies and the more effective use of new technologies (Kaplan, 2015). Instead of each country investing separately in expensive defense capabilities, the Smart Defense concept provided a platform for sharing responsibilities and resources through joint NATO projects, thereby increasing collective defense capacity.

In the Albanian context, Smart Defense is particularly relevant, as the country faces major challenges due to its limited military budget and the need to modernize its armed forces. Albania's membership in NATO has enabled the country to benefit from the advantages of this approach, contributing to collective projects and improving defense capabilities through cooperation with allied partners (Duka, 2012). Smart Defense has enabled Albania to play a greater role in regional and international security, without the need for large expenditures on expensive armaments. "Soft power and technological capabilities are two elements that must be combined in a smart way for a more effective and affordable defense." Nye, J. S. (2011).

Key Elements of Smart Defense. Smart Defense is based on three key elements: collective defense, coordination among allies, and efficient use of resources. All three of these elements are essential to ensure that NATO member states can address global security challenges in a coordinated and successful manner.

- **Collective Defense:** At the core of Smart Defense is the principle of collective defense, which means that an attack against one NATO member state is considered an attack against the entire alliance. This principle is essential

for the security of small countries like Albania, which do not have sufficient capabilities to defend themselves against major threats. Through Smart Defense, Albania can rely on its allies to guarantee national security, while contributing to collective defense operations (Fischer, 2009).

- **Coordination among allies:** One of the main challenges facing allied countries is the lack of coordination in military investments. Smart Defense seeks to address this problem by encouraging allied countries to coordinate their defense efforts and share resources. For example, instead of each country building up full military capabilities in different areas, allied countries could specialize in specific areas and rely on each other for the capabilities they lack (Kaplan, 2015). In this way, Albania can focus its resources on areas where it has advantages, while benefiting from the capabilities of other allied countries.
- **Efficient use of resources:** Smart Defense aims to maximize the use of limited resources through the optimization of technology and the sharing of responsibilities. Technology plays an important role in this regard, enabling countries to use more advanced equipment and systems to cope with modern threats. Albania, as a country with limited resources, has benefited from this approach by improving its technological capacities and using its resources more effectively through participation in joint NATO projects (Duka, 2012).

Smart Defense and Albania: Challenges and Prospects for the Future

For Albania, Smart Defense represents a great opportunity to improve its defense capabilities and contribute to regional and international security. As the country continues to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures, Smart Defense provides a platform for close cooperation with allies and for sharing responsibilities in collective defense. However, for the successful implementation of Smart Defense in Albania, there are several challenges that need to be addressed. One of the main challenges for Albania is the limitation of financial and technological resources. While Smart Defense aims to optimize the use of resources through cooperation, Albania needs further investments to improve its technological capabilities, especially in the areas of cyber defense and surveillance technologies (Fischer, 2009). Increasing the defense budget and cooperating with international partners will be crucial for improving the country's defense capacity.

Another challenge is to increase the capacities of military personnel. To implement Smart Defense strategies, Albania needs to invest in training and upgrading its military personnel, especially in the field of technology and cyber defense. Through NATO training programs and bilateral cooperation with other

member states, Albania can increase its capacities in these areas and improve its readiness to face new threats. The prospects for the future are positive, however. Through the implementation of the Smart Defense approach, Albania has begun to integrate more closely into NATO's collective defense architecture and benefit from sharing resources and experiences with its allies. The country has great potential to play a greater role in regional security and to contribute to joint NATO operations, based on the principle of burden-sharing and mutual assistance. "Traditional military force has limitations in an interconnected world, and only through an intelligent and collaborative approach can sustainable security be achieved" Smith, R. (2007).

Smart Defense therefore represents a new and necessary approach for countries like Albania, which face resource constraints and new threats to national security. Through the principles of collective defense, coordination among allies, and more efficient use of resources, Albania has managed to increase its defense capabilities and contribute to regional security. Although the challenges are great, especially in terms of financing and technological capabilities, Albania has shown a strong commitment to fulfilling its obligations to NATO and improving national security. In the future, the further development of Smart Defense in Albania will require sustainable investments, close cooperation with international partners, and a commitment to meeting the challenges related to technology and personnel. Only through such an approach can Albania ensure that it is ready to face new threats and defend its sovereignty in an increasingly interconnected world.

Comparison between the traditional concept and Smart Defense in the conditions of Albania

National security has always been an essential aspect for any state, especially for small countries like Albania. Traditionally, the concept of defense was focused on preserving sovereignty and territorial integrity through armed forces. This concept, called traditional defense, was formed during the Cold War period, when threats to national security were mainly of a military and territorial nature. However, with global developments and changes in the nature of threats, the concept of Smart Defense was introduced, especially within the framework of NATO. This essay will examine the advantages and disadvantages of these two concepts in Albania, the evolution of national and international strategies, and examples of the implementation of Smart Defense in different countries.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Traditional and Smart Defense Concepts. Traditional defense is mainly focused on maintaining territorial integrity through military forces and internal mobilization of the state. The main advantage of this approach is the clarity and direct control that a state has over its defense.

Albania, especially during the communist period, relied on this approach, where every citizen was involved in the defense of the country through a strategy of popular resistance (Duka, 2012). This approach emphasized the importance of a decentralized defense, ensuring that internal forces can react to any military threat.

However, the main disadvantage of traditional defense is its dependence on domestic resources, which in certain cases, such as the case of Albania, may be limited. Albania has faced great difficulties in modernizing its military forces and in securing sufficient resources for an effective defense during the post-communist transition (Fischer, 2009). This model is also limited in facing new threats that are not only military, but also include cyberattacks, terrorism and asymmetric threats.

On the other hand, Smart Defense is an approach that promotes international cooperation and more efficient use of resources through collective projects. This concept was introduced by NATO in 2012 to improve the way allied countries manage their defense, especially in the context of budgetary pressures and new threats (Kaplan, 2015). The main advantage of Smart Defense is that it allows countries with limited resources, such as Albania, to benefit from the technologies and capabilities of its allies. Through this concept, Albania can contribute to collective defense projects without having to build all the capabilities itself. "NATO represents an example of Smart Defense, where member countries can share responsibilities to achieve a more coordinated and robust defense." Sloan, S. (2016). However, the main disadvantage of Smart Defense is the increased dependence on allies. While Smart Defense implies burden-sharing among member states, this approach may create a sense of insecurity for states that feel more exposed to regional or global threats. Albania, as a small country in the Balkans, may feel external pressures from powerful actors such as Russia or China, which have strategic interests in the region (Orford, 2016).

The Evolution of national and international strategies towards Intelligent Defense

Over time, security and defense strategies have undergone profound changes to address new global challenges. Traditional defense, focused on securing borders and protecting against military threats, has evolved to include a more holistic approach, which includes non-conventional threats. Threats such as terrorism, organized crime, and cyberattacks have driven the need for intelligent defense and a more collaborative approach to security.

In Albania, this evolution has been evident since the country's NATO membership. Membership has forced Albania to modernize and improve its defense capabilities to comply with alliance standards. Albania's National Defense

Strategy now focuses on strengthening collective defense, modernizing the armed forces, and strengthening cyber capabilities to address modern threats (Duka, 2012).

In the international context, Smart Defense has been an important tool to manage the limited resources of member countries and to ensure a more efficient and coordinated defense. NATO has encouraged its member countries to invest in technologies and joint projects that help improve the overall capabilities of the alliance without the need for large individual expenditures (Weiss, 2018). This shift in international strategies has enabled a more affordable and sophisticated approach to defense.

Practical Examples of Smart Defense Implementation in Different Countries. Smart Defense has shown success in several countries that have benefited from international cooperation and resource sharing. One of the most well-known examples is the NATO Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) program, where several allied countries share aerial surveillance aircraft. This program has allowed small countries like Albania to benefit from NATO air capabilities without having to invest in expensive aircraft of their own (Kaplan, 2015). This model is a clear example of the success of Smart Defense, as it helps to fill gaps in national defense through cooperation with allies.

Another successful example of Smart Defense is the use of new technologies to improve the cyber capabilities of member countries. Albania has begun to build stronger cyber defense capabilities, especially after the cyber attacks that hit its institutions in 2022. Through the assistance of NATO and its international partners, Albania has begun to strengthen its cyber infrastructure to face new threats (Fischer, 2009).

Smart Defense has also helped countries with limited resources to invest in joint maritime defense projects. For example, several allied countries have built a joint fleet for maritime defense in the Mediterranean, sharing their resources and improving the overall security of the region (Orford, 2016). These practices have shown that Smart Defense is a sustainable and effective solution to face common defense challenges, especially for countries with limited resources like Albania. This cooperation between NATO member countries allows defense capabilities to be maximized through the sharing of resources and technologies, creating a stronger and more responsive system to regional and global threats.

Albania has begun to benefit from the concept of Smart Defense through participation in joint NATO operations and missions and regional cooperation with Balkan countries. Participation in joint peacekeeping operations and airspace protection within NATO has significantly strengthened Albania's role in the regional security architecture (Weiss, 2018). This is a clear example of how Smart Defense has allowed Albania to increase its defense capabilities without requiring large domestic financial resources. In conclusion, Smart Defense

offers a modern and more efficient approach to security challenges for countries with limited resources like Albania. While traditional defense offered certain advantages in preserving sovereignty and direct control over defense forces, it has become insufficient to cope with the new threats of the modern era, such as cyberattacks and international terrorism. Smart Defense, on the other hand, promotes international cooperation and resource sharing, allowing Albania to increase its capabilities through integration with NATO allies.

Although it has some disadvantages, such as increased dependence on allies, Smart Defense offers a more sustainable solution to security challenges in the era of globalization. Through further investment in technology and involvement in joint projects, Albania has the potential to improve its defense and contribute to regional and international security. The evolution of defense strategies from a traditional approach to an intelligent model is an important step for Albania and other small countries, which seek to ensure their sovereignty and stability in an increasingly interconnected world.

Challenges and perspectives for the future in the conditions of Albania

In the context of Albania, the concept of Smart Defense represents an important step towards the modernization of national defense and the country's inclusion in international security systems, especially in the framework of NATO. However, there are several important challenges that need to be overcome to ensure the full and effective implementation of this approach. Difficulties include the lack of financial resources, advanced technology, and the lack of proper coordination between national and international actors. Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities for further improvement and development of Smart Defense in Albania, especially through regional cooperation and the improvement of technological and human capacities. "The wars of the future will require a mix of traditional military power and technological capacity, and Smart Defense is the path to this mix." Thompson, L. (2013).

Another challenge is the lack of coordination between national institutions and international partners. To implement Smart Defense effectively, there needs to be close coordination between Albanian institutions and NATO allies. For example, while Albania has progressed in its involvement in joint NATO operations, there remains a need for better cooperation in intelligence sharing and integration of common technologies (Weiss, 2018). The lack of this coordination leads to fragmentation and difficulties in achieving effective results.

Opportunities for Further Improvement and Development

However, despite the challenges, Albania has some important opportunities to improve and further develop its capacities within the framework of Smart Defense. One of the greatest opportunities is regional cooperation. The Balkans is a region that faces common security challenges, such as organized crime, cyber threats and terrorism. Through joint efforts with other Balkan countries and regional partners, Albania can improve its defense and share resources with other countries in the region (Duka, 2012). The creation of a common platform for cyber defense and air surveillance could be an important step in this direction.

Another opportunity for development is the modernization of Albania's technological capacities. While technology plays a crucial role in the concept of Smart Defense, Albania needs to invest more in advanced technologies and its cyber infrastructure. In this regard, NATO and other international partners can play an important role in supporting Albania to strengthen technological capabilities and develop the infrastructure needed to confront modern threats (Fischer, 2009).

Thus, while Albania faces major challenges in implementing Smart Defense, including financial constraints and lack of coordination, there are great opportunities for further improvement and development of this approach. Through regional cooperation and improved technological capabilities, Albania can fully benefit from the advantages that Smart Defense offers and strengthen its national defense in an increasingly interconnected world challenged by modern threats.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In today's world, where threats to national and global security are increasingly complex and diverse, Albania is facing new challenges that require a new and more sophisticated approach to defense. In this context, the Smart Defense concept, promoted by NATO, offers an extraordinary opportunity to improve the defense capacities of countries with limited resources, such as Albania. However, to achieve these goals, it is necessary for Albania to solve several key challenges, including better coordination among international partners and securing the necessary financial and technological resources.

In this analysis, we have examined both the traditional concept of defense, which focuses on the protection of national borders through armed forces and the mobilization of internal resources, and the more advanced concept of Smart

Defense, which emphasizes international cooperation and the more efficient use of limited resources through sharing and coordination among NATO member states. Traditional defense has been essential for Albania in the past, especially during the communist period, when every citizen and part of the territory was part of the defense strategy. However, this approach is limited to confronting modern threats such as cyberattacks and international terrorism.

On the other hand, Smart Defense offers a more sustainable solution for Albania in the context of new global threats. By sharing responsibilities and resources, Albania can benefit from the technologies and capabilities of other NATO allies, improving its defense at a lower and more affordable cost. However, this approach also brings increased dependence on allies and requires deeper and more organized cooperation within the framework of defense strategies.

Recommendations for Defense Policies and International Cooperation

- Increase investment in advanced technologies: Technology is essential for Smart Defense, especially for countries like Albania that have limited financial resources. Investment in cyber defense systems, artificial intelligence, and sophisticated defense equipment can significantly improve the country's defense capabilities. The Albanian government should make technology a high priority in the defense budget, while also seeking financial and technical support from NATO and international partners.
- Improve international coordination: Cooperation with NATO allies is essential for the successful implementation of Smart Defense. Albania should intensify efforts to cooperate with other NATO member states in the areas of intelligence sharing, joint training, and peacekeeping operations. Closer coordination will help Albania improve its capabilities and benefit more from the experiences and resources of its international partners.
- Human capacity development: One of the most important aspects for the successful implementation of Smart Defense is the training and qualification of military personnel. Albania should invest more in the education and specialization of its armed forces in modern technologies and tactics. Training provided by NATO and international defense programs is essential for increasing the capacities of Albanian military personnel.
- Regional cooperation: Albania should strengthen cooperation with other Balkan countries to address common security threats. The Balkans face challenges such as organized crime, cyber threats, and illegal migration. By creating regional alliances and partnerships, Albania can help share resources and improve the common defense of the region. This would reduce the pressure on Albania's domestic resources and ensure a more coordinated defense against regional threats.

- Policies to increase the defense budget: To meet NATO standards and successfully implement Smart Defense, Albania needs to increase its defense budget. Even though the country faces economic constraints, a higher percentage of the state budget should be devoted to strengthening defense capabilities. Such a policy will help Albania strengthen its defense independence, while benefiting from international cooperation.

Conclusion

In a rapidly changing security environment, Albania must be ready to face current threats ranging from cyberattacks to regional geopolitical challenges. Smart Defense offers a more contemporary and affordable approach for small countries but requires a major commitment from Albania to increase investments in technology and strengthen cooperation with its international allies. With proper planning and political commitment, Albania can strengthen its defense and contribute to regional and international security.

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