

A HUNDRED YEARS AFTER THE BALKAN WARS:
LESSONS AND MESSAGES
СТО ГОДИНИ ПОСЛЕ БАЛКАНСКИТЕ ВОЈНИ:
ЛЕКЦИИ И ПОРАКИ

Prof. Sinisha Daskalovski, Ph.D. Faculty of Philosophy
Institute for security, defence and peace
sinisa@zfz.ukim.edu.mk

Abstract: This paper tries to ascertain the position and the role of the Balkan wars in the typology of 21st century conflicts, based on an analysis of both historical and contemporary research material on greater armed conflicts. In an effort to do so, it starts by the notion that war, as a socio-historical category, has characteristics that can be considered as general for identification with other wars, and distinctive characteristics that can be used to make distinction between wars. In the category of distinctive characteristics, we can also include the Macedonian people and territory, where the Balkan wars were mostly fought, and which mostly sparks the interest of the neighbouring countries and the great powers alike. It has been conjectured that the lessons and messages of these wars may serve a useful purpose to the Macedonian people and the Macedonian country, in the sense of overcoming the problems created by armed conflicts in all situations of life and in the development of the country.

Key words: war, armed conflicts, lessons, messages, experiences, people, territory, country.

Апстракт: Трудот се обидува да го утврди местото и улогата на Балканските војни во типологијата на конфликтите од 21 век, базирани на научни анализи на историските и современите материјали за големите вооружени конфликти. За да одговори на поставените прашања, трудот почнува од идејата за војната како социо-историска категорија која има карактеристики кои можат, генерално, да се идентификуваат и споредат со други војни, како и карактеристики кои можат да се искористат за да се направи разлика помеѓу војните. Во категоријата на посебни карактеристики, можеме да ги вклучиме македонскиот народ и територија, каде што најмногу се одвивале Балканските војни, и каде што најмногу се

судирале интересите на соседните држави и големите сили. Настаните од тој период се перцепираат како претпоставки кои можат да понудат корисни предлози на македонскиот народ и македонската држава, во смисла на надминување на проблемите создадени од страна на вооружени конфликти во било која ситуација од функционирањето и развојот на државата.

Клучни зборови: војна, вооружен конфликт, лекции, пораки, искуства, народ, територија, држава.

INTRODUCTION

War, as a socio-historical category, in its evolutionary development originates in the most elementary forms of destruction, and it will reach the most complex ones, having a destructive power that can cause unfathomable consequences with global proportions. In terms of destructiveness, the Balkan wars, and the First and Second World War, represent a step forward in relation to wars led in the 19th century, and a significant signal that the industrial approach to application of force opens wide possibilities for increased destructiveness. It is certain that this relates mainly to countries as lead roles in international relations, and to war as a regular threat. In such conditions, armed forces as separate state institutions are the most significant instruments for realisation of goals of the political strategy practiced by war. On the other hand, peoples that had no country and no armed forces of their own faced every danger that war and expansionist policies of the neighbouring countries and the great powers imposed at the given period. In that sense, and as a historical experience, this will be subject of interest and analysis in the first part of this paper.

In the second part of the paper, attention will be paid and analysis will be performed on the current aspect of larger armed conflicts, which represent the contemporary reality of armed conflicts, and which have undertaken the primary importance of classical warfare as a significant trait of 20th century wars, including the Balkan wars.

At the end of the paper, at the place of conclusions and deductions, lessons and messages, significant to the Macedonian people and country will be incorporated.

HISTORICAL EXPERIENCES OF THE BALKAN WARS SIGNIFICANT TO THE MACEDONIAN PEOPLE

The attempt for a deeper immersion into the Balkan wars phenomenon opens an entire range of issues that impose the need for analysis from several aspects. Thus, the issue

of the historical experience of the Macedonian people can be analysed by at least two aspects, as a general historical experience, and as a national historical experience.

From the aspect of a general historical experience: how to efficiently form a condition and processes that converge more with the needs and interests of peoples who have already constituted their countries, especially those peoples whose countries have already been established as great powers, mostly due to the fact that at the beginning of the 20th century, most significant actors in the international relations were great powers, such as imperial Russia, France, Austria-Hungary, Germany, Turkey and others. Smaller countries, each by its own and allied with other countries have tried to impose their influence and fulfil their interests, above all in their immediate proximity, in the meanwhile striving to incorporate their interests into those of the larger countries. Almost without exceptions, they would adjoin to some of them and would seek support and assistance in realising strategic interests and goals which were expansionist. In the case and period relative to the Balkan wars, it regards to the neighbours of the Macedonian people, who had already formed their own independent countries, such as Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria. Thus, for instance, the mentor of Bulgaria and Serbia is imperial Russia, which is evident in the friendship and alliance agreement, made immediately prior to the start of the First Balkan war. Namely, it is evident in the secret annex – a secret part of the agreement where it is stated that the possible misunderstandings surrounding the division of the territory are to be solved and decided upon by imperial Russia (Потемкин, Б.П., 1949:193). The Balkan Peninsula is of the utmost importance to Russia due to its access to the 'warm seas'. At first, Russia wanted to actualise this intention through Serbia, so when this failed, Russia attempted to do this through Bulgaria. For this purpose, the Russian diplomat, the duke Ignatiev, will create the concept of a Greater Bulgaria (a San Stefano Bulgaria), through which Russia will have access to the sea. In this process, no heed has been paid to other territories and peoples, especially to the Macedonian people and the territory they lived on, which was under the influence of Turkey. Unlike the Macedonian people, the new concept was found not only very suitable by ruling circles in Bulgaria, but it will become their main preoccupation, ambition and a guide in the actualisation of expansionist interests. The access to the 'warm seas' was the desire and interest of the Serbian bourgeoisie as well, members of which also held positions in imperial Russia. Differences arose regarding the use of Serbian territory for the needs of imperial Russia. However, the sole attempt at realisation of this concept, speaks volumes about the estimates of the Russian diplomacy that it is viable, and it is founded in the already established relations. The issue of interests is another

matter, since interests can either converge or disjoin.

The issue of the countries' interests can also be raised to the level of establishing of new relations, different of the already mentioned, as alliances between the smaller countries that will venture to disobey the recommendations of the great powers. For instance, despite the recommendation of the great powers not to wage war against Turkey, the Balkan countries will embark upon the First Balkan war. In fact, in a time when Turkey is facing a general system crisis and an uncertain future, the gates will be widely open for the visibility of the expansionist policy of the great powers, especially of the countries already constituted on the Balkans. The Balkan countries, Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece, feeling the auspiciousness of the moment for realisation of their expansionist interests, will organise and prepare both separately, and as an alliance, to reach their goals. Indirectly, this will signify the ignoring of the great powers' interests or a perfect timing needed to favour their own interests which would potentially be endangered by the great powers. However, in both cases the subject of interest is the European part of the territory then still ruled by Turkey, especially the territory on the Balkan Peninsula. Thus, the main instruments for realisation of the expansionist interests were their armies. The army is a special state institution that held the role of 'warlord'. In that sense, the army was paid a great deal of attention and was greatly supported by the countries, aiming to improve it in quality and quantity. Quantity is expressed through the formation of a several thousand soldier army, equipped and trained for military actions and activities. In fact, it regards a clash of a million soldiers war, the largest part of which – around three hundred thousand soldiers each belong to Serbia, Bulgaria and Turkey, while Greece had an army of about one hundred thousand soldiers, and Montenegro had little above thirty thousand soldiers (Vojna enciklopedija – 1, 1970). In order to avoid confusion, there are other data (Тодоров, 1938), different from the above mentioned, but essentially, as already mentioned, it regards a clash of armies of the type of mass armies, with more than one million troops.

With regards to quality, relative to the needs and strategic interests of the countries, the army follows the trend of development of industrial technologies, and in accordance to the needs it applies these in the direction of increasing fire power. This is especially evident in artillery tools through the introduction of groove artillery, increase of the quality of gunpowder, and the introduction of wide-range and automatic weapons. Ultimately, this will find a most unfavourable reflection on the troops, whose loss will increase several times. For instance, the number of casualties in the World War II only will be 168,900, 93,000 of which

are Bulgarians, 44,500 are Serbian, 20,000 Greek, 6,000 Romanian, 4,000 Turkish, and 1,400 Montenegrin (Скоко, 1975).

This will favour the need for great armies that are capable, like in the case of the Balkan wars, to commence a second war after the first, despite the great loss of manpower. To meet those needs, they are certainly going to use their capacities and forces, but they will not let go of the capacities and forces of peoples who live on the territory they were fighting for, which was under Turkish rule. This is mainly with regards to the Macedonian territory and the Macedonian people, which brings us closer to the second aspect of the Balkan wars analysis.

NATIONAL HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE AND MEMORY

The closest experience of the Macedonian people, in the battle for freedom and a country of their own before the eruption of the Balkan wars, was the Ilinden uprising. The attempt to create a Republic will work, but will be short-lived. In a period when the revolutionary forces and the Turkish army will clash on Mechkin Kamen, the qualitative and quantitative advantage of the Turkish army will be obvious, ultimately resulting in harsh consequences for the Macedonian people, and especially the revolutionary organisation, which was the foundation, the pillar, and the moving force of the resistance, and of the fight for freedom and creation of a country. It became obvious that the Republic cannot persist without a constant organised armed force to guard it from every danger. This will prove to be very significant in a period when Turkey faces a ruling crisis over the Balkan territories. The crisis will be a meaningful signal for the revolutionary organisation to return to their old fight for freedom and autonomy. This time, unlike past chances, the organisation will face new enemies, unfortunately expecting them to afford assistance. Namely, the Macedonian people believed that its neighbours would offer aid in the fight for freedom, through participation and contribution in the war the Balkan countries Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro were preparing against Turkey. The enthusiasm and the expectations were so great that the Macedonian people, and especially its Revolutionary Organisation were prepared as volunteers to participate in the war for realisation of century-long fight for their freedom and their own country. The Revolutionary Organisation, especially in the district of Ser, had well-organised bands, capable of performing military activities.

More widely, on the territory of Macedonia, there were thirty-four bands. Forty-four bands were formed in Bulgaria, amounting to seventy-eight along with the ones formed in Macedonia. The Bulgarian Supreme Command formed special headquarters for organisation

of the Macedonian bands, which will later be entitled 'Headquarters of the Macedonian Regiment (Opolchenie) – volunteers'. Greater tactical units – brigades were also formed, ten of which were purely Macedonian.

Macedonian volunteers were also present in the Serbian army, organised in volunteer bands, while later there was a volunteer regiment of 2,400 Macedonians, Albanians and Turks under the command of the Greek army in the so-called 'Holy Band' comprised of andartes – volunteers chetniks from Aegean Macedonia (Историја на македонскиот народ, 1969:364-365).

Macedonian volunteers acted either as a vanguard or along with the regular units of the Bulgarian, the Serbian or the Greek army, mostly in the first battle lines. They were given the most difficult army tasks, and when major tactical units were formed, such as the brigades in Bulgaria, they were sent to the front in Thrace. Although these forces are insignificant compared to the dimensions of the Bulgarian army, this move made it obvious that they were striving towards elimination of any chance that may incur any risk that might trigger unfavourable connotations for the Bulgarian expansionist policy, centring on the territory of Macedonia.

On the other hand, Macedonian volunteers acted both in cooperation with regular units of the Allies, and independently. In many places, they activated and organised the Macedonian population as village militia. In that sense, the role of the independent squad of Jane Sandanski amounting to 500 chetniks was especially significant, especially from the aspect of the experience and memory of the Macedonian people, as to the opportunity to expose their wish for freedom even in times of war, when lacking an army of their own.

CURRENT ASPECTS OF THE BALKAN WARS

One hundred years after the end of the Balkan wars, in the prestigious London Strategic Research Institute 'The Military Balance', war is defined as 'an international conflict that implicates the beleaguered parties – governments into an armed conflict over sovereignty or territory' (The Military Balance, 2008).

War and conflict act as the general and the distinctive, whereby the general represents conflict, and the distinctive represents war. Each war in turn represents an armed conflict. However, not every conflict is necessarily a war. According to the UN and in the prestigious Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI Yearbook, 2006), any larger armed conflict between the armed forces of two parties, at least one of which being the government

of a country, resulting in at least 1,000 victims on the battlefield in a given calendar year, can be called a war. In the case of the Balkan wars, it is evident that these can also be placed under the term of international armed conflict which implicates the governments of the Allies: Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, and Greece, against Turkey in the First Balkan War; and the governments, i.e. the armed forces of Serbia, Greece, Montenegro, and Turkey against Bulgaria in the Second Balkan War. The First Balkan war will be led by the Allies against Turkey over a territory that was still under Turkish rule, mostly regarding Macedonia. In the Second Balkan war, the centre of attention is still the Balkan territory, but this time the issue is its division. Namely, Bulgaria deemed that the previous division, effectuated after the First Balkan war, was against its interests, hopes, and aspirations for a Greater Bulgaria, therefore igniting a new war. Bulgaria will be defeated, and not only will it fail to acquire the desired part of the territory on the Balkans, but it will also be denied what was previously awarded by the First Balkan war. However, of the territory won by Turkey, Bulgaria will be awarded 21,000 km², Greece will be awarded 55,000 km², Serbia 39,000 km², Montenegro 11,000 km², and Romania 800 km² (Coko, 1975), which clearly shows that the conflict has been led for acquiring territory. In other words, and in relation to the style of warfare, it is evident that it regards a territorially focused approach.

Regarding victims, for instance, in the Second Balkan war, starting on 30 June 1913, and ending on 30 July 1913, during a month of conflict, the number of victims will reach an astonishing 168,900 victims, most of which are Bulgarian: 93,000. Therefore, it can be concluded that this was a style of warfare that is focused on incapacitation and infliction of as great as possible damage in manpower on the opponent. Certainly, a great deal of the fault for this lies in the warfare means, which due to the application of the advantages of the industrial revolution, will have much greater impact and fire power, than other previous wars. This trend, unfortunately, shows signs of increasing from that period on.

On the other hand, this leaves no room for comparison with the definition of a conflict which has 1,000 casualties within one year to be transformed and to grow into a war. However, this opens up opportunities for further analysis, especially significant for the new millennium, in which a multi-polar conflict environment fraught with irregular and diffuse threats is formed, which is not the case with the Balkan wars.

In essence, when it comes to analysis of the Balkan wars from a contemporary aspect, when we are already well into the 21st century, we can say that it regards a bi-polar conflict environment filled with regular threats and regular forces. More exactly, the armies

of the beleaguered parties represent regular forces, and the war is a regular threat, all else ignored. We will also ignore the participation and the contribution of the Macedonian people, who instead of being liberated, will fall under another rule, and its territory will be divided among the Balkan countries.

With regards to the status of the Balkan wars, in comparison to contemporary conflicts' status, without exceptions they cover the area relative to active conflicts, ceasefire/ amnesty, and peace treaty (The Military Balance, 2008). Ceasefire is an agreement between the beleaguered parties, whereby all military actions are regulated and ceased. It does not stand as an official conflict resolution, and it suggests that all conflicts have been disrupted. The case with the Balkan wars, especially the First Balkan war, confirms that, and especially that despite the truce, warfare activities will indeed continue. A peace treaty, on the other hand, represents an official conflict resolution by authorised parties, and it can regulate the manner of realisation of the post-conflict commitments. This is especially with regards to the commitments of the party that lost the conflict. However, as was the case of the London treaty of 30 May 1913, it may happen that one of the victorious parties – in the given case Bulgaria, is not satisfied with the division of the territory ruled by Turkey on the Balkans, and that it starts a new war within a month – in this case the Second Balkan war. The Second Balkan war will last for a month, during which there will be a truce, and a further continuation of warfare, ultimately ending with the Bucharest Peace Treaty of 10 August 1913. This treaty only effectuates the division of the territories that have already been divided.

This was the actual state of matters at the time of the Balkan wars, when the greatest influence in international relations was in the hands of countries, mainly through the armed forces as their main instruments, put in the function of expansionist policy and interests. Today, this seems to be a good foundation for estimation and expression of strategic interests and goals of the Macedonian people, in a time when we live in a kind of a storm. Acting otherwise means facing the consequences we have already seen, stated and felt during a significant period of time. This is one of the lessons and messages, alongside with the lesson that the number of casualties in the Balkan wars is really big, and refers mostly to military persons, rather than civilians. Armies can be said to have been mass, and practiced the territorially-focused approach, and the approach that enable them to inflict the greatest possible damage to the opponent. The conflict environment was bi-polar, and filled with regular forces and regular threats, which were in the function of realising expansionist policies and interests of the countries as lead roles in international relations.

The Macedonian people were abused, manipulated, and indoctrinated, which along with the lack of a unique military organisation and a country of their own, will be most unfavourably reflected in the fight for freedom and a country at the time and under the given circumstances.

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