



Strategic Planning in the Albanian Armed Forces

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On July 9 2008 the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies signed Accession Protocols with Albania and Croatia. This action opened the way for the full NATO membership of these two countries, and marked a major milestone in the continuing post-Cold War realignment of Europe. The event was especially significant for Albania, a country essentially isolated from its neighbors and the rest of Europe from 1948 to 1991. While there is still work to be done, most indications are that Albania will formally join the 26-nation pact in April 2009, coinciding with the 60th anniversary of the founding of NATO.

In 1993 the Albanian Army consisted of approximately 40,000 poorly trained personnel operating obsolete World War II and Korean War vintage equipment. The first step towards modernization was the establishment of a defense agreement with the United States. This agreement opened the American armed forces professional military education and training systems to Albanian students, and laid the groundwork for United States European Command (USEUCOM) supervised military to military exchanges.¹ These U.S. programs combined with similar efforts by other NATO members support the Albanian Armed Forces (AAF) ongoing transformation to a smaller, more effective, well-trained, joint force capable of contributing to NATO operations.

A major step in the AAF's transformation was the publication of *The Military Strategy of the Republic of Albania* in 2008. In his introduction to this national military strategy, Lieutenant General Luan Hoxha, Chief of the General Staff of the AAF, stated that "The main goal of this Strategy is the fulfillment of the standards and requirements, as well as the related responsibilities for integration in the Euro Atlantic structures." This document represents a necessary first step in achieving the AAF's transformation goals by 2010.



Dr. R. Craig Nation, USAWC, highlights the finer points of strategic planning.

BUILDING PARTNER CAPACITY

Developed by the General Staff with the assistance of NATO members, *The Military Strategy of the Republic of Albania* is a keystone strategic planning document. However, in order to create and maintain a credible military, nations must institutionalize the strategic planning process and translate that planning into resource allocation that effectively builds and maintains their armed forces. Although the AAF General Staff has made tremendous progress

1. David Binder, "U.S. and Albania Sign a Military Agreement," *New York Times*, 21 October 1993.

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in working with their Ministry of Defense to refine their national military strategy and subsequently to align resources that best positions their military to achieve their vision, the understanding of the strategic planning process needs to be instilled in tomorrow's leaders as well.

In support of the effort, and under the auspices of the USEUCOM Joint Contact Team Program, the US Army War College (USAWC) sent a three person team to Tirana, Albania, to facilitate a strategic planning seminar for the Albanian Armed Forces from December 14-18, 2008. The USAWC Team members included Professor Bernard F. Griffard and Colonel Daniel G. Grey from the USAWC Center for Strategic Leadership (CSL), and Professor R. Craig Nation, Ph.D., USAWC Department of National Security and Strategy (DNSS). Fifteen senior leaders of the AAF, to include the Director of the General Staff and all Directorate Heads of the General Staff, actively participated in the entire seminar. Additionally, key leaders from the Albanian Joint Forces Command and the Albanian Training and Doctrine Command provided invaluable insights throughout the seminar.



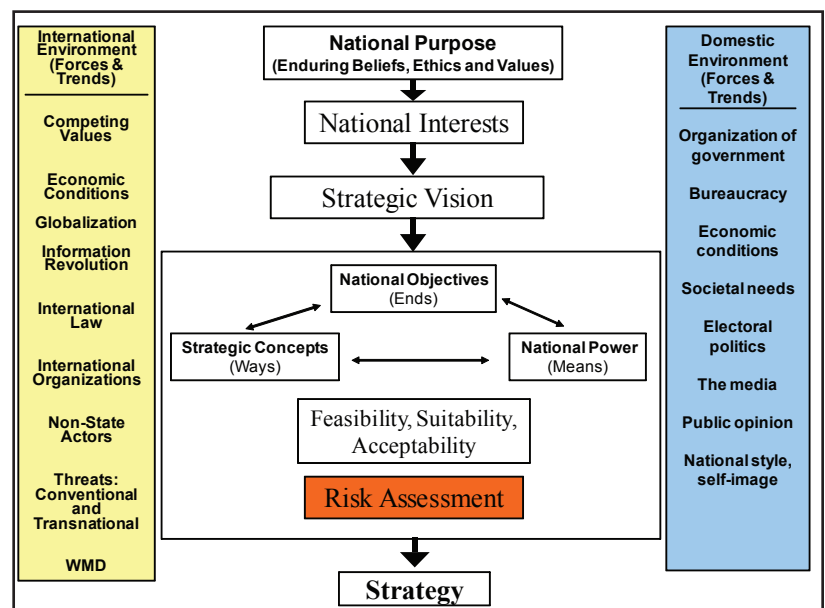
Major Aurel Mehmeti, AAF TRADOC, Lieutenant Colonel Shkelqim Kalemi, JFC, and Colonel Perikli Kolici, C/S JFC, discuss force design issues.

STRATEGIC PLANNING – A WAY OF THINKING

Strategic planning is conducted at the highest level and looks at broad ranges of outcomes and options. Since it is non-linear, and has no set, fixed, or obvious answers it may be considered more art than science. It requires practitioners to discipline their thought processes to accept greater levels of uncertainty and risk. To assist in this process the seminar focused on the USAWC strategic planning model as a guide for discussion.

Conducted at the Albanian Military Cultural Center in Tirana, the seminar employed the USAWC learning model which ensured the active exchange of ideas among all participants. This was made possible by the remarkably good English language skills of the participants, who required interpretation assistance only when discussing technical terms. Another plus was the participation of Colonel Roland Bërzani, AAF Military Intelligence Director, and a member of Dr. Nation's Seminar while an International Fellow in the USAWC Class of 2008.

With the strategic planning model as a guide, the USAWC team-led discussions progressed through the United States' process for development of a national security strategy and a national military strategy and juxtaposed that with the Albanian process. It was immediately apparent that the Albanian senior leaders not only understood the American process, but also had excellent insights on why their process should be different in some ways in order to reflect specific national circumstances and challenges. Additionally, they fully understood the content and intent of their national military strategy and had a comprehensive understanding of the long term vision of their nation and military. These conditions position the AAF to continue the difficult process of prioritizing requirements and aligning those requirements with available resources. These topics occupied the second and third day and led to extensive discussions on the impacts of the domestic and international environments on the AAF's long-term strategy. At the conclusion of the seminar it



USAWC Strategic Planning Model.

was evident that the strategic planning concept and its role in competing for available resources were well instilled in the senior AAF leadership. What was now necessary was to develop the processes that will institutionalize strategic planning throughout the AAFs evolving professional military education system.

TRANSFORMING THE AAF

The Albanian Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the General Staff (GS) are looking at a number of ways to make their Armed Forces more effective and more efficient. Resourcing the AAF is a major priority. Since 1999, Albania has spent approximately 1.35% of its GDP on defense, and that has served to make substantial improvements to their Armed Forces. Additionally, they have increased that amount to slightly over 2% of GDP for 2008, and their parliament agrees that defense spending at the 2% of GDP rate should continue in the near term.² Each of the General Staff Directors has a good understanding of where to direct resources in order to improve the overall military, and each had a good feel for unfinanced requirements and the need to identify their importance. Technology modernization in all fields, along with improved pay, housing, education, logistics and overall infrastructure top the list of those requirements. Clearly, the AAF leadership has not solved all of its shortfalls, but they understand them along with the process required to make significant improvements.

Structurally, the AAF faces the same challenges as many small militaries, how to adequately staff, plan, and execute without exhausting the limited manpower and talent pools. An ongoing initiative developed with the assistance of the U.S. Defense Modernization Team-Albania is an attempt to combine the MOD and GS into a single entity to decrease the duplication of effort and increase the understanding of military and civilian aspects of the strategic planning and resourcing process. From a mission capabilities standpoint the AAF has a modular structure roadmap that postures them to be both a viable force for homeland defense, while at the same time possessing the ability to provide value-added to a larger NATO operation. Moreover, in addition to a conventional defensive and stability operations capability, the military will have the resources for natural disaster response, a capacity that is particularly important in the seismic Balkan region in which Albania is located.



Albanian Armed Forces Strategic Planning Seminar attendees.

Demonstrably, the AAF is pro-active in sending their most promising officers to critical American and other NATO member schools. A large percentage of Albania's key military leaders have studied their craft in the United States or at the George Marshall Center in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. In addition to Colonel Bërzani, a distinguished graduate of the USAWC, we also met with Navy Captain Kristaq Gerveni, the Commander of Albania's Naval Brigade and a 2001 graduate of the National War College. Though faced with some significant challenges, the seminar participants exhibited a single-mindedness of purpose. Simply stated, they all want their country to be democratic, prosperous and stable, and they all see their opportunity to do their part in making a difference to bring the vision to fruition. Two key elements toward supporting democracy, prosperity and stability are to become full members of NATO and the European Union (EU). The Albanians generally believe that the soon-to-be-achieved full NATO membership will give a boost to efforts to join the EU.

THE STRATEGY OF ACTIVE SECURITY

The Joint Contact Team Program is a key tool in the Security Cooperation activities portion of USEUCOM's Strategy of Active Security. Executed as part of the coordinated Country Security Engagement Plan for Albania,

2. Data drawn from various U.S. Government sources.

this seminar was the second contribution by a USAWC team in 2008. Professor Griffard previously led a three-man USAWC team to Tirana in February 2008 to conduct a Joint Operations Planning, Roles and Functions Seminar for more junior members of the Albanian Armed Forces. Despite a number of distracters such as the significant downturn in the Global and European economies over the past ten months, the AAF has remained on track for full NATO membership. Without question they could not have maintained this steady course without the benefits of USEUCOM's capacity-building assistance. Continued support of the USEUCOM engagement initiatives by the USAWC not only allows the College to meet its mission requirement to support the regional Combatant Commanders, it provides unrivalled opportunities for the faculty to remain current through first hand experiences in the theater.



Dr. Nation, Colonel Grey, Captain Gerverni, Professor Griffard, and Colonel Bërzani.

COMMENT

When former Albanian President, Alfred Misliu heard that Albania was invited to join NATO this past April, he was full of praise and stated, this “is an event not only for the good of Albania, but also important for the whole region.”³ Albanians are clearly supportive of the United States and Europe, and they are progressing in a manner that will no doubt benefit the entire NATO alliance. With the significant strain on US and NATO forces in general, it is particularly helpful for a Muslim-majority country to have many of the same ideals as America and its best allies as we transition to the future. As a NATO member Albania may prove to have a stabilizing effect on the entire region.

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3. “Albania Praises NATO Invitation” *BalkanInsight.com*, 3 April 2008, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/9124/>.

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