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**ALBANIAN-NATO RELATIONS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST
INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM**

by

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December 2012

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**ALBANIAN-NATO RELATIONS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST INTERNATIONAL
TERRORISM**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

After the September 11 attacks on the United States, Albania, a majority-Muslim country in a region vulnerable to 21st-century threats—and at the time, a candidate NATO member—aligned immediately and publically with the North Atlantic Alliance to fight international terrorism. This decision reflected a process of political and institutional transformation in Albania that has important implications for both Albania, as a new NATO member, and the alliance, as it faces the counterterrorism challenges of the coming years.

This thesis examines the effects of NATO policy and practice, throughout the accession process in the years 1994 until 2009 and later, in shaping and guiding Albanian counterterrorism efforts. The present project argues that this relationship has positive implications for Albania in the dimensions of international security, defense and military affairs, as well as domestic security. It suggests that in the future, Albania will continue to be a committed member of the Alliance, ready to play its role in fostering and extending cooperation with partner countries in the fight against international terrorism. The thesis concludes that the Albanian-NATO partnership in the fight against international terrorism also underscores for NATO the importance of developing partnerships to tackle international terrorism.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A-3	US-Adriatic Charter-3
A-5	US-Adriatic Charter-5
AAF	Albanian Armed Forces
ACT	Allied Command of Transformation
AII	Adriatic-Ionian Initiative
AIS	Automatic Identification System
AIWG	Accession and Integration Working Group
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Annual National Plan
BSEC	Black Sea Economic Cooperation
CBSC	Counter-Proliferation Border Security Counter Terrorism
CC MAR	Maritime Component Command
CEI	Central European Initiative
CI	Communication and Information
CIMIC	Civil Military Cooperation
CODEXTER	Committee of Experts on Terrorism
COMMZ (W)	Communication Zone West
CRO	Crises Response Operations
CRS	Congressional Research Service
DOD	Department of Defense
EAPC	Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council
EOD	Explosive Ordinance Disposal
EU	European Union
FOC	Full Operational Capacity
FG	Force Goals
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HQs	Head Quarters
HUMINT	Human Intelligence
ICCIT	International Center for Combatting Illegal Trafficking
IDM	Institute for Democracy and Mediation
IEJ	Islamic Egyptian Jihad
IFOR	Implementation Force
IIRO	Humanitarian Islamic Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPP	Individual Partnership Programs
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JFC	Joint Force Command
KFOR	Kosovo Force
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
MAP	Membership Action Plan

MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoD	Ministry of Defense
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MTT	Mobile Training Teams
NAC	North Atlantic Council
NACC	North Atlantic Cooperation Council
NAMSA	NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NHQ	NATO Head Quarters
NLA	National Liberation Army
NSS	National Security Strategy
OAE	Operation Active Endeavour
OAF	Operation Allied Force
OIC	Organization of Islamic Conference
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PAP-T	Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism
PARP	Planning and Review Process
PARP	Planning and Reviewing Process
PCC	Prague Capabilities Commitment
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PG	Partnership Goal
POMLT	Police Operational Mentoring Liaison Team
PSO	Peace Support Operations
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RRB	Rapid Reaction Brigade
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapon
SDR	Strategic Defense Review
SEEBRIG	Southeast Europe Brigade
SEECF	Southeast Europe Cooperation Process
SEEDM	Southeastern Europe Defense Ministerial
SG	Secretary General
SHAPE	Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe
SNMG2	Standing NATO Maritime Group 2
U.S.	United States
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WAMY	World Assembly of Muslim Youth
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

The September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States affirmed the emergence of international terrorism as a serious threat to global security in the 21st century. Such blows clearly demonstrated the risk that large-scale terrorist attacks pose to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its members. NATO's invocation of Article V, for the first time in its history, and its subsequent counterterrorism efforts prove that fighting terrorism is an important issue on the alliance's agenda.¹

Albania, a majority-Muslim country in a region "exposed to globalization threats,"² and at the time a candidate NATO member, aligned immediately with the United States and the North Atlantic Alliance to fight international terrorism. This decision reflected a process of political and institutional transformation in Albania that continues to this day—and that has important implications for both Albania, as a new NATO member, and the alliance as it faces the counterterrorism challenges of the coming years.

This thesis intends to explore the effects of NATO policy and practice, throughout the accession process in the years 1994 until 2009 and later, in shaping and guiding Albanian counterterrorism efforts. The present project attempts to shed light on such questions as: What are the implications of NATO's response to terrorism for Albania in the dimensions of international security, defense and military affairs, as well as domestic security? What are the implications for the armed forces? How might the future of Albania's counterterrorism partnership with and in NATO unfold? What lessons can NATO draw from NATO-Albanian relations to improve partnership with other countries in the fight against terrorism? All of these questions derive from or at least relate to the main topic under consideration here, namely: how NATO, as an institution, as a process

¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO's Military Concept for Defense Against Terrorism," (n.d.), <http://www.nato.int/ims/docu/terrorism.htm>.

² Teodora Popescu, "Tackling Terrorism in the Balkans," (n.d.), <http://dc97.4shared.com/doc/3mtD7ccU/preview.html>.

of policy and strategy, and an ideal in political culture, influences the Albanian counterterrorism response and, by further implication, Albanian strategic culture in the midst of change.

B. IMPORTANCE

The transnational nature of international terrorism, the extremist religious context, the ability of terrorist organizations to continuously adapt and develop,³ and the potential for great harm necessitates a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy, especially for smaller states close to the cultural and geographic boundaries that may become flashpoints of terroristic activity (either attacks or support for distant groupings). In order to be successful, national counterterrorist efforts require intensive international cooperation with a variety of security organizations. Albania, especially as the country endeavors to embed itself in Western norms and institutions, is committed to be an active player in the regional and international cooperation against terrorism. As Richard Nelson argues: “NATO, [particularly], as a regional security organization [that] fits in between the broadest-scope efforts orchestrated by the UN and more specific national efforts to confront terrorism”⁴ and has a special place in facilitating counterterrorism efforts. Furthermore, NATO “through political consultation and a range of practical measures,”⁵ provides a promising framework of cooperation for Albania in the fight against terrorism.

Studying the influence that NATO has had in defining Albania’s counterterrorism efforts is very instructive, because the NATO-Albania relationship has undergone different stages of development since 1992, when Albania joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) as the first step in Euro-Atlantic integration. Albania entered Partnership for Peace (PfP) in 1994 and embarked on a course of increased cooperation and contact with NATO norms and practices that culminated in NATO

³ Bruce Hoffman, “Terrorism Trends and Prospects,” in *Countering the New Terrorism*, ed. Ian O. Lesser et al. (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1999), 7–37.

⁴ C. Richard Nelson, “NATO’s Role in Confronting International Terrorism,” *Atlantic Council of United States Policy Paper* (June 2004), <http://www.goodharbor.net/media/images/books/pdf-NATO-role-confronting-terrorism.pdf>.

⁵ NATO, “The Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism,” (n.d.) http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-AE854E09-A88AFF64/natolive/topics_50084.htm.

membership for Albania in 2009. During this period of time, Albania experienced its own close calls with transnational terrorism, particularly as a locus for money laundering and other organizational support for Islamic terrorism; it underwent profound democratic reforms and sweeping changes to its defense institutions and the armed forces in order to prepare the country to face the new emerging threats.

Ultimately, in support of NATO and especially the alliance's increasing counterterrorism goals, Albania took active part in international efforts against terrorism, including the deployment of troops in Afghanistan within the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) campaign. Significantly, throughout these developments, popular support for NATO membership has remained high in Albania, hovering at more than 95 percent even today.⁶ This number demonstrates a unity of opinion in Albania that is unusual among new or even established alliance members. This support, in turn, suggests that Albanians at both the elite and popular levels of society believe that NATO's response to terrorism is very important to regional and global security in the wake of newly emerging threats.⁷ That is, Albanians, by and large, conceive of their national security, particularly counterterrorism measures, in connection with NATO—either directly, as an organization in which Albania participates, or indirectly, as a matter of implementing NATO's procedures and values.

This research question is important because it analyzes NATO's role in the counterterrorism efforts of a partner and a member country, a key strategic consideration today, as well as a good indicator of the state of integration and cooperation within the alliance, especially its newer members. The impact that NATO's counterterrorism

⁶ NATO, "NATO Relations with Albania," (n.d.)
http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_48891.htm.

⁷ To be sure, Albania also participates in the Central European Initiative (CEI), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII), the Southeast Europe Cooperation Process (SEECP) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), all regional-cooperation organizations that focus, at least in part, on transnational crime in and through the Balkans. Albania also aspires to membership in the European Union (EU), which entails its own security and counterterrorism measures. Acknowledging that all the above organizations play complementary roles and help improve the security of Albania, this thesis focuses on NATO because it is the major security organization. NATO-Albania relations in the fight against terrorism involved both political and military implications for Albania. NATO membership, being the major foreign policy objective for Albania since early 1990, became the primary force driving Albania's efforts to improve the domestic and regional security and to increase regional cooperation.

strategy has had on the transformation of the Albanian armed forces also provides an interesting case study of this process of transforming a nation's strategic culture through consequent and consistent institutional association.

A closer look at the bases of the widespread elite and popular support for NATO in Albania also reveals some insights and implications for future counterterrorism efforts. The Euro-Atlantic identity that Albanians embraced after the Cold War makes it difficult for Islamic extremism to spread and gain popular support in the country, which further contributes to the region's security. Furthermore, Albania, with a Muslim majority and taking active part in the global fight against terrorism, emphasizes the justice of the cause and shows that, for example, NATO's operations in Afghanistan do not amount to a war on a major world religion but rather a war on terrorism in a small band of mass murderers and criminals. This stance may encourage other Muslim countries to reject extremism and trust NATO—and the West. Of course, an increase of casualties among Albanian troops participating in counterterrorism operations and the collateral damage that may happen in areas of operation with Muslim populations may influence Albanian popular support for such measures and have a backlash effect on the alliance. While clearly not exhausting the topic, this thesis will touch on several factors that may enhance or limit the role of Albania—a majority-Muslim country with a firm Western orientation—in NATO counterterrorism measures. At the heart of these issues is Albanian strategic culture and its transformation in the course of its association with NATO, especially as regards the current and urgent concerns of counterterrorism.

C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES

This thesis is guided by the hypotheses that NATO's response to terrorism has had an important impact for Albania in three ways. First, NATO's operations and presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Macedonia was received in Albania as helping Muslim populations and thus increased even more the strong identification of the people with liberal-democratic values that the alliance represents. This embrace of NATO's values, as noted, has made it difficult for religious extremists to spread their ideology and conduct terrorist activities in Albania.

Second, the continuous political and public support for NATO membership induced policymakers to show solidarity with the alliance and participate in NATO operations abroad,⁸ while at the same time taking strict domestic measures. As noted above, Albania contributed troops to support Allied forces in the ISAF in Afghanistan—currently, Albanian troops serve in two ISAF companies in Herat, a platoon in Kabul for security operations and escorts, and a special company in combat operation in Kandahar.⁹ Since 2008, the Albanian Navy has participated in Operation Active Endeavour, NATO’s ongoing presence in the Mediterranean.¹⁰ In addition, aspiring membership in NATO and EU, Albania has achieved significant progress in implementing reforms in the political, economic, military, and juridical realms, as well as in combating corruption, organized crime, trafficking, and terrorism.¹¹ In addition, Albania undertook strict measures to tackle terrorist financing and support activities inside the country by adopting counterterrorism legislation and developing interagency action plans.

Finally, a NATO report indicates that “during the period leading up to accession, NATO had been involving Albania in Alliance activities to the greatest extent possible and continued to provide support and assistance, including through the Membership Action Plan.”¹² Albania participated in the Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism, “sharing intelligence and analysis with NATO, enhancing national counter-terrorist capabilities and improving border security.”¹³ Furthermore the Albanian Armed Forces were reformed following NATO’s recommendations through the Planning and Reviewing Process in order to achieve interoperability with NATO forces and to face

⁸ NATO, “NATO Relations with Albania,” (n.d.) http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_48891.htm.

⁹ Ministry of Defense of Albania, “The Contingent “EAGLE 2” Departs in Mission to Kandahar, Afghanistan, (n.d.) http://www.mod.gov.al/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=948:niset-per-mision-ne-kandahar-afghanistan-konigjenti-eagle-2&catid=42:lajme&Itemid=52&lang=en.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania, “Albania and Map,” (n.d) http://www.mfa.gov.al/index.php?option=com_multicategories&view=article&id=5735%3Ashqiperia-dhe-map&Itemid=65&lang=en (accessed May 7, 2011).

¹² NATO, “NATO-Albania Relationship,” (n.d.) http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_48891.htm (accessed May 10, 2011).

¹³ Ibid.

more effectively the new threats. These reforms have reverberated through Albania's defense institutions, magnifying the effects and entrenching them in the very fabric of the nation's strategic culture.

In sum, NATO-Albanian relations in the counterterrorism realm suggest NATO's ability to promote constructive cooperation and to wage "the war of ideas," which are two important fronts in the war on terror.¹⁴ Thus, NATO membership has effected meaningful changes in Albania's national counterterrorism policy and practices which this study hopes to interpret in detail.

D. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature addresses NATO-Albanian relations in the fight against terrorism as part of the broader assessment of NATO enlargement, strategic gains and NATO membership efforts of Albania. The literature, while noting the Albanian support to NATO's fight against terrorism, the contribution of Albania in NATO operations, and Albanian efforts to tackle domestic terrorism, does not provide in depth analysis of the evolution of this relation. There is a gap in the literature in addressing in detail the dynamics of NATO-Albania relations in the fight against terrorism. I will fill this gap by looking at NATO-Albanian relations, focusing on the fight against terrorism.

The literature reviewed also reveals the need for a comprehensive approach to international terrorism. While there is agreement about the need to improve international cooperation to address twenty-first century security threats, especially the threat of terrorism, there are different views on what NATO can really do in the fight against terrorism. However, the literature shows that NATO partnership programs and initiatives may play an important role in fostering cooperation and improving security. Studies of some partner countries and new members show NATO's role in reforming the Albanian military has been effective and positive, but there is a need to address specifically the role of NATO in shaping their counterterrorist efforts. As the U.S. Congressional Research Service noted in 2005:

¹⁴ Daniel Byman, *The Five Front War* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 173-190.

In the longer term, efforts to stabilize the region and thereby perhaps reduce its attractiveness to terrorists are also dependent upon integrating it into Euro-Atlantic institutions. Euro-Atlantic integration for the region may encourage these countries to take steps that will enable them to more effectively fight terrorism.¹⁵

Hendrickson et al., assessed Albania's efforts—while “campaigning aggressively” for NATO membership, in terms of “modernization of the armed forces, the status of its military capabilities, and its steps to combat global terrorism”—and found that NATO has been “an important catalyst” for achieving progress in these fields.¹⁶ Hans van den Berg explains, “On the road towards NATO membership, Albania has made significant and tangible steps in implementing reforms in the political, economic, military and juridical areas, as well as in combating corruption, organized crime, illegal trafficking and terrorism.”¹⁷ Indeed, Albania took strict measures against terrorism because while aspiring for NATO membership “it [could] not afford to be accused of being a safe haven for terrorists or of not doing enough to prevent terrorism.”¹⁸ A later study, conducted when Albania became a member, suggests that Albania has made considerable efforts to “transform itself in a security producer” by making “measurable military advancements” and bringing “meaningful geo-strategic advantages to the Alliance.”¹⁹ Asymmetric threats, like terrorism, with which NATO deals today, require changes in the strategies and capabilities of NATO members. Albania changed its military strategy to reflect the new threats and plans to develop “niche capabilities” accordingly in the modernization plan of 2007–2012.²⁰ The Committee of Experts on Terrorism (CODEXTER) 2010

¹⁵ U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Intelligence Issues for Congress*, by Richard A. Best Jr., CRS Report RL33539 (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, June 1, 2010).

¹⁶ Ryan C. Hendrickson et al., “Albania and NATO’s ‘Open Door’ Policy: Alliance Enlargement and Military Transformation,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 19:2 (2006): 243.

¹⁷ Hans A. van den Berg, “Albania into NATO: Once Building Bunkers, Now Building Bridges,” *Atlantisch Perspectief*, no. 3 (2009) <http://www.atlcom.nl/site/Publicaties/wp-content/AP%202009%20nr.%203.pdf>.

¹⁸ Damian Gjiknuri, “Albania’s Counter Terrorism-Terrorism Policy Options: Finding a Strategy of Common Sense” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2004), 1.

¹⁹ Hendrickson et.al. “Albania and NATO’s ‘Open Door’ Policy” 243.

²⁰ Mariola Qesaraku, ed., “Costs and Benefits of NATO Membership: Albanian and Regional Challenges after the Bucharest Summit,” *Institute for Democracy and Mediation*, <http://idmalbania.org/publications/en/NATO-IDM-anglisht.pdf>.

report on Albanian counter-terrorist capacity notes that Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism launched by NATO and partners in 2002 “improved intelligence-sharing and cooperation in areas such as border security, terrorism-related training and exercises, and the development of capabilities for defense against terrorist attack or for dealing with the consequences of such an attack.”²¹ In sum, the literature shows that NATO brought about or encouraged positive changes in Albanian political-military institutions.

The end of the Cold War was accompanied by fundamental changes in the global security environment. As Alexandra Gheciu observes, “While conventional dangers were declining there was a corresponding increase in the probability of a different, multifaceted and hard to contain type of risk.”²² In its 1999 Strategic Concept, NATO had already identified terrorism as a threat to the alliance, but after the September 11 attacks, the fight against terrorism became, in the words of Lord Robertson, NATO’s secretary general at the time, “front and center—a main focus of our activities.”²³ As NATO’s missions expanded to include counterterrorist tasks, the extent, the effectiveness, and even the efficacy of NATO’s contribution to the war on terror has become the center of ongoing debates. The literature about the role that NATO may play in combating international terrorism reflects this controversy.

Some scholars doubt whether NATO is an appropriate institution for counterterrorism efforts. For example, trying to define the fronts of war on terrorism, counterterrorism expert Byman suggests that alliances might be unsuccessful in the war against terrorism. He advances the idea that counterterrorism efforts are more productive when accomplished in “bilateral settings,” rather than on a multilateral footing.²⁴ He also doubts the effectiveness of intelligence sharing on multilateral basis.

²¹ European Council Committee of Experts on Terrorism, “Profiles on Counter Terrorist Capacity: Albania,” July 2010, http://www.coe.int/t/dlapil/codexter/4_theme_files/country_profiles/CODEXTER%20Profiles%20_2010_%20Albania%20updated.pdf.

²² Alexandra Gheciu, *NATO in the “New Europe”* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 60.

²³ Lord Robertson, “Tackling Terror: NATO’S New Mission” (speech by NATO Secretary General at the American Enterprise Institute’s New Atlantic Initiative in Washington, DC, June 20, 2002) <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s020620a.htm>.

²⁴ Byman, *The Five Front War*, 205.

Similarly, Foster and Wallace argue that “the formulation of a broad response to the challenges posed by transnational terrorism is beyond NATO’s capabilities or its appropriate functions.”²⁵ In their opinion, because the European Union (EU) and the G-8 group of leading economies are in a better position to develop networks of interagency cooperation, which are essential in dealing with transnational terrorism, there is no need to transform NATO into an “anti-terrorist alliance.”

De Nevers notes that NATO’s missions have increased “dramatically since the end of the Cold War.”²⁶ Nonetheless, she concludes that NATO has merely a supporting role in fighting international terrorism. She points out that “many of the essential activities of the fight against terrorism occur outside NATO, through bilateral cooperation or loose coalitions of the willing.”²⁷ Bebler arrives at the same conclusion about the supportive role of NATO in fighting terrorism. He analyzes such constraints on the alliance as, legal frameworks, the decision-making process, and military capabilities and concludes that “NATO is not well-suited to effectively counter the threat of transnational terrorism.”

On the other hand, many studies on the topic have put forward a more positive assessment of the role of NATO in fighting terrorism. Ellis, after making an analytical survey of the literature on counterterrorism strategies, suggests that NATO can play an important role on “four main realms being, diplomacy, military operations, intelligence-sharing, and defence cooperation.”²⁸ In the same vein, the U.S. Atlantic Council’s 2005 Policy Paper on NATO’s role in confronting terrorism provides a comprehensive framework of the functions for which the alliance is suitable. The tasks include “generating political will, providing intelligence, managing coordination and integration efforts, interdicting terrorist recruitment, financing, supply and operations, preventing

²⁵ Anthony Foster and William Wallace, “What is NATO for?” *Survival* 43:4 (2001):107.

²⁶ Anton Bebler, “NATO and Transnational Terrorism,” *Perceptions* 9:4 (Winter 2004 – 2005):159.

²⁷ Renee de Nevers, “NATO’s International Security Role in the Terrorist Era,” *International Security*, 31:4 (2007): 34.

²⁸ Brent Ellis, “If It’s Not Terrorism, It’s Not Relevant: Evaluating NATO’s Potential to Contribute to the Campaign against Terrorism,” NPSIA Occasional Paper no. 41, (2003), 9, http://www.carleton.ca/csds/docs/occasional_papers/npsia-41.pdf.

terrorist operations, managing the consequences of terrorist attacks and arranging security assistance.”²⁹ The paper puts forward that NATO has a comparative advantage in these tasks over such other international organizations as the UN and the EU. Specifically, the paper finds that NATO can offer more than an only-military response to terrorism.

Many scholars think that global terrorism should be addressed within the realm of international cooperation, which forms one of NATO’s stronger suits. As Miguel Angel Ballesteros argues: “NATO, due to its infrastructure, experience, and the characteristics of its members, seems to be the best equipped international organization to do this.”³⁰ Lord Robertson emphasizes the need for international cooperation in the fight against terrorism and argues that “a permanent coalition is better than a temporary one. An interoperable coalition is better than an incapable one. A value-sharing coalition is better than a coalition of convenience. And a NATO coalition is better than anything else.”³¹ Gheciu reinforces this idea, arguing that based on the alliance’s long tradition of building trust among the members, NATO is able “to build the kind of network of domestic and international agencies across the Euro-Atlantic area that is needed in the comprehensive struggle against the new enemies to Western values and way of life.”³² Moreover, Nelson writes that “NATO has the potential, as it did during the Cold War, to offer an attractive, positive vision of diversity, tolerance and progress beneath its security umbrella that could make a valuable contribution to the overall confrontation with international terrorists.”³³

At issue, in part, is NATO’s own transformation amid the changed circumstance of the post–Cold War era. For example, Asmus, too, recognizes the importance of the

²⁹ C. Richard Nelson, “NATO’s Role in Confronting International Terrorism,” Atlantic Council of United States Policy Paper (June 2004): 14, <http://www.goodharbor.net/media/images/books/pdf-NATO-role-confronting-terrorism.pdf> .

³⁰ Miguel Angel Ballesteros, “Nato’s Role in the Fight against International Terrorism” (translated from Spanish), <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/wcm/connect/e9bf71004f018677baa8fe3170baead1/Ballesteros853.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=e9bf71004f018677baa8fe3170baead1> (accessed May 10, 2011).

³¹ Speech by NATO Secretary General, Lord Robertson, “Tackling Terror: NATO’S New Mission” <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s020620a.htm> .

³² Gheciu, *NATO in the “New Europe,”* 249.

³³ Nelson, “NATO’s Role in Confronting International Terrorism,” 11.

alliance in the war on terrorism, but at the same time, he emphasizes that NATO should continue to transform “so that it could be as effective in meeting the threats of the future as it had been in helping win the Cold War.”³⁴ He suggests that NATO enlargement plays a positive role in achieving peace and security.

NATO enlargement, it is argued, contributes to the twenty-first century struggle against instability and terrorism.³⁵ Such institutions as the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), PfP, the NATO-Russia Council, and the Mediterranean Dialogue, which NATO developed since the early 1990s to facilitate enlargement process and increase cooperation with partner countries, provide a good framework of “cooperative security,” which contributes significantly to combating terrorism.³⁶ For example, immediately after the September 11 attacks, “EAPC defense ministers affirmed their determination to utilize the partnership to increase cooperation and capabilities against terrorism.”³⁷ The EAPC adopted the Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism, which asks partners to improve counterterrorism efforts at home and increase cooperation by sharing information and experience.³⁸ In addition, partner countries, including Albania, made substantial contributions to ISAF in Afghanistan.³⁹ Certainly, NATO’s engagement of and in counterterrorism has moved its member states, including Albania, toward a consensus on the appropriate policies and measures for counterterrorism. The Atlantic Council Policy Paper suggests that NATO’s response to terrorism “is partly responsible for the fact that terrorism has now become a high priority consideration on the national security agendas of countries directly affiliated with NATO, including those taking part

³⁴ Ronald D. Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 305.

³⁵ Ryan C. Hendrickson et. al., “NATO Membership For Albania And Croatia: Military Modernization, Geo-Strategic Opportunities And Force Projection” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 22:4, (2009): 502.

³⁶ Ellis, “If It’s Not Terrorism, It’s Not Relevant,” 9.

³⁷ Jeffrey Simon, “Partnership for Peace: Charting a Course for a New Era,” *Strategic Forum*, no. 206 (March 2004), 2, <http://dodreports.com/pdf/ada422608.pdf>.

³⁸ Simon, “Partnership for Peace,” 2.

³⁹ According to NATO 11 PfP countries had almost 2,000 troops deployed in Afghanistan, as of August 2010. Source: United States Government Accountability Office, *DOD Needs to Assess U.S. Assistance in Response to Changes to the Partnership for Peace Program*, Report to the Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, September 2010, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d101015.pdf>.

in its Partnership for Peace and Mediterranean Dialogue.”⁴⁰ According to the same source, Partnership for Peace is a useful tool to improve partner countries’ capacities to address terrorism. NATO, based on the close relations developed through PfP, is able to cooperate with partner countries on security issues related to the fight against international terrorism.⁴¹ This cooperation covers a wide range of activities, including the Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism adopted by NATO in 2002.⁴²

E. METHODS AND SOURCES

I intend to use the detailed case study method as the basic analytic approach of contemporary history to the research question, with Albania providing the case by which to study the ways that NATO can help shape a new member’s strategic culture. While the specifics of Albania’s experience, at one level, reflect their time and place, the general trends and developments in Albania’s transformation, particularly in the fraught realm of counterterrorism, and offer important insights into the internal and external workings of the alliance. Albania was selected because NATO’s effects and effectiveness in different stages and aspects of NATO-Albanian relations could be analyzed.

I will analyze Albania’s counterterrorism efforts in light of NATO-Albanian relations. In so doing, I will focus my analysis on three elements: public attitudes, policy, and defense institutions. These three elements ably capture both the depth and the breadth of the transformation of Albanian strategic culture since 1990 in association with NATO. The narrower focus on counterterrorism allows for more detailed attention to the forces that shape these elements. The object of this analysis is less to document every policy statement or media utterance in some effort to quantify the process of “NATO-izing” Albanian national counterterrorism policy and practice. Instead, I propose a broader approach that emphasizes points of interconnection and change. In this analysis, a particular focus is placed on the ramifications of these links to the future of Albania and its role in the Alliance.

⁴⁰ Nelson, “NATO’s Role in Confronting International Terrorism,” 14.

⁴¹ Russell D. Howard, “Thinking Creatively In The War On Terrorism: Leveraging NATO and the Partnership For Peace Consortium,” *Connections* (Spring 2005): 2–5.

⁴² Ibid.

I make use of both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include NATO communiqués, NATO main documents such as strategic concepts, military concepts, partnership and accession documents, national strategies, action plans and official public statements. Secondary sources include analytical articles, media reports, and scholarly works related to the research question. A big portion of the material that I will use is from Albanian sources, which provide an Albanian point of view on the research question.

Overall, this thesis will proceed in a chronological manner guided by a contemporary history method of analysis. This approach will reveal most clearly the steps and stages of the transformation of Albania's national counterterrorism policy (and its strategic culture) as it developed; after all, the process forms a central part of this analysis. Additionally, a chronology will allow me to cover the wide range of topics that fill out the categories of popular support, policy, and defense institutions—and that connect them to one another—in the most straightforward manner, highlighting the major and minor turning points.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

The thesis is organized as a chronological examination of Albania's relations with NATO in the realm of counterterrorism since the collapse of Albania's Cold War communist government in 1990. Following the introductory chapter, which explains the thesis and its main research question, methodology, and relevant background literature, each subsequent chapter encapsulates a particular stage in the NATO-Albanian relationship, focusing on the counterterrorism context particular to each period. Chapter II covers Albania's "pre-NATO" years—from 1990, when the country first opened (or reopened) to the world after decades of a repressive communist regime, to the eve of Albania joining NATO's Membership Action Plan in 1999. In this period, Albania first withstood an exodus of people to other European countries amid doubts about the country's future prospects. However, anti-communists prevailed in the country's democratic elections in 1992, and the task of rebuilding and reorienting Albania began in earnest. Officially, Albania retained (and retains) its secular footing, but the communist-era ban on religious worship was overturned in these years. With a clear Muslim majority

(around 70 percent of the population), Albania attracted attention from Islamic states, as well as its European neighbors. In this early phase, most of these contacts were benevolent—Islamic NGOs took up charity work in the country, while young Albanians were sent to Islamic countries for religious education. However, some Islamic extremist organizations also began to establish themselves in Albania, using the country mostly to launder money or otherwise support their activities elsewhere. In other words, the threat of Islamic extremism in Albania became real at this time. Albania's Western orientation also came more clearly into relief, however. Albania was one of the first former communist countries to express interest in joining NATO, and in 1992, it joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC). Public support ran very high, as did political cohesion. Joining NATO became a major political goal in this period, and this ambition, with elite and popular support, shaped the succeeding stages of Albania's transformation.

In 1994 Albania joined PfP and NATO-Albanian relationship saw Albania's first official steps toward NATO as an institution and a community of values, despite the ongoing turmoil of domestic reform. With the country's membership in PfP, Albania initiated military and defense-sector reforms in accordance with the program. In 1997, however, this progress was nearly undone by a popular uprising that was caused by the collapse of some financial pyramid schemes that swept away the savings of Albanians. The Albanian state disintegrated amid the turmoil. Military depots were looted by the population and the weapons and explosives fell into civilian hands—some of them members of criminal bands. Lawlessness and gangsterism flourished. In April 1997, the UN mandated a multinational protection force led by Italy "to secure the delivery of humanitarian aid to Albania."⁴³ The newly elected government was quick to approach to NATO. The ministry of defense sent an official request for NATO support "in rebuilding the armed forces."⁴⁴ NATO, in the framework of PfP, approved an Individual Action

⁴³George Katsirdakis, "Albania: A Case Study in the Practical Implementation of Partnership for Peace," *NATO Review*, vol 46, no. 2, (Summer 1998): 23 <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/1998/9802-07.htm>.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 22.

Plan which envisaged both NATO and bilateral assistance from NATO allies.⁴⁵ By 1999, with the NATO operation in Kosovo, public support in Albania for the alliance reached another high point.

Chapter III explores the next stage in Albania's relationship with NATO, namely the momentous years from 1999, when Albania became a MAP country, through the signing of NATO's Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism (PAP-T) and the NATO military concept for defense against terrorism in 2002. It proceeds with the penultimate phase of NATO-Albanian relations, from 2003 to 2008, during which Albania's integration of and in NATO's counterterrorism framework moved from mostly planning to implementation, with major domestic and international operations and exercises.

This period is characterized by the deepening involvement of NATO in Albania—and vice-versa, even as the alliance instituted new measures specifically in the realm of counterterrorism as the Global War on Terror began to take shape. In 2001, NATO Headquarters Tirana was established to help Albania with military reforms and partnership goals. Then, came the September 11, 2001 terror attacks on the United States and NATO's subsequent invocation of Article 5. Albania aligned itself formally and publically with NATO and the United States. Terrorism—and, as a consequence, counterterrorism—assumes an increasingly prominent role in alliance planning and policy. In 2001 the Ministry of Defense of Albania issued the Membership Action Plan, which included many objectives to improve the internal and external security. One of them was to increase “compliance and participation in international efforts to fight terrorism and organized crime in relation to the participation of Albania in the antiterrorist coalition of states.”⁴⁶ One of the earliest indications of this shift came in 2002, when NATO inked the PAP-T. The agreement covered such areas as political consultation, partnership goals against terrorism, intelligence sharing, civil emergency planning, terrorism financing, border controls, and so on.⁴⁷ In other words, the PAP-T

⁴⁵Ibid., 22–26.

⁴⁶ Enika Abazi, “Defense Reform of the Albanian Armed Forces: Democratization and Transformation,” (n.d.), http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/co/co_sep04/co_sep04c.pdf.

⁴⁷ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “The Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism,” March 5, 2012, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50084.htm (accessed May 12, 2011).

specifically extended NATO methods to the realm of counterterrorism. NATO's Military Concept for Defense against Terrorism followed the same year. Albania responded with its own national counterterrorism action plan in 2002 and the adoption of various counterterrorism goals in line with the NATO documents. In 2003, the country adopted a law against terrorism and froze the assets of Islamist organizations linked to al Qaeda—where only a decade or so earlier, such entities operated more or less as they liked in Albania. This point suggests just how Albania's association with NATO had already helped reshape the country's views on and measures against terrorism.

In 2003, Albanian forces deploy in support of the NATO-led ISAF force in Afghanistan, arguably the largest show of allied counterterrorism measures. In 2004, the discovery of a cache of chemical weapons, which had been acquired by Albania's old communist regime during the 1970s, brought home (again) concerns about terrorism. "Undocumented or poorly secured weapons caches could be exploited by terrorists with deadly effect."⁴⁸ That same year, the Albanian government's National Security Strategy acknowledged terrorism as a major threat; subsequently, the 2005 National Military Strategy focused on Albania's fight against terrorism. Between 2005 and 2007, three major exercises—Cooperative Engagement (2005), Cooperative Longbow (2007), and Cooperative Lancer (2007)—were conducted in Albania. Among the objectives of these exercises was achieving interoperability in the fight against terrorism. In 2007, the Albanian Navy joined operation Active Endeavor, NATO's ongoing operation in the Mediterranean, sharing information about the maritime domain. Albania was invited to join NATO in 2008, capping this period of extensive cooperation, internally and international, in counterterrorism, as well as other alliance security concerns.

Chapter IV brings the story of Albania's transformation within NATO up to date, including Albania's formal accession to alliance membership in 2009. It analyzes the state of Albania's transformed armed forces—now a completely professional military—

⁴⁸ Joby Warrick, "Albania's Chemical Cache Raises Fears about Others," *Washington Post*, January 10, 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A61698-2005Jan9?language=printer>.

Albania destroyed its chemical weapons stock in 2007, becoming the first country in the world without chemical weapons. The program was financed by the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Fund.

as well as such indications of ongoing change as the pending changes to Albania's National Security Strategy, in light of NATO's 2010 strategic concept. Assessing the developments within Albania's national counterterrorism response, specifically as NATO has shaped them, this chapter concludes that, in the case of Albania, NATO was successful in fighting international terrorism through the partnership program, just as Albania succeeded in aligning its national counterterrorism response with NATO standards and requirements. These changes were sufficiently accepted sufficiently early that they even withstood the near collapse of the country amid popular uprising in 1997. (In this connection, Albania's incentives to cooperate may inform any revisions of NATO's Partnership Action Plan to promote effective cooperation.) Today, it seems that these NATO-informed counterterrorism measures are widely viewed in Albania as key to the country's ongoing stability and security. While such eventualities as major losses of Albanian lives in Afghanistan could diminish Albanians' general contentment with their country's involvement in NATO, the striking transformation of Albania's counterterrorism institutions speaks to a real and lasting shift in its strategic culture through the ongoing NATO-Albania engagement.

The final chapter draws conclusions, about the implications of NATO's response to terrorism for Albania in the dimensions of international security, defense and military affairs, as well as domestic security. It considers some implications for the armed forces and brings in some consideration on how the future of Albania's counterterrorism partnership with and in NATO might unfold. At the chapters offers some recommendation to improve NATO-s partnership with other countries in the fight against terrorism?

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II. THE BEGINNING OF ALBANIAN-NATO RELATIONS

This chapter explores Albanian-NATO relations starting from the end of the Cold War, which brought to the end the harsh communist regime and marked the beginning of the relations between Albania and NATO, until 1999, just before Albania became a Membership Action Plan country, institutionalizing further these relations. This period of time is very important in the development of NATO-Albania relations because of the events and the decisions that paved a positive direction for this relationship. The chapter begins with an analysis of the situation in Albania in the post–Cold-War environment and an examination of the challenges and the threats that emerged with the demise of communism and the transition to democracy. In these years of drastic change and reorientation, new threats emerged to national and regional security: Islamic terrorism, weak institutions, domestic political instability, irredentism, and regional instability. As this chapter shows, Albania’s increasingly close relationship with NATO provided not only the external requirements but the internal motivation for Tirana to undertake a democratically inflected, western-oriented, and stability-enhancing response to these threats.

As such, this chapter turns specifically to the role of Albanian-NATO relations, the platforms of cooperation (such as NACC and PfP), the assistance of NATO in overcoming the internal crisis of 1997, and the cooperation with NATO in the resolution of the most acute Kosovo crises, all of which helped build mutual trust and partnership. Albania’s ensuing aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration and cooperation, amid NATO’s active engagement in the region, played a major role in preventing international terrorism from gaining a foothold in Albania.

A. ALBANIA AT THE END OF THE COLD WAR

The end of the Cold War thrust Albania out of its self-imposed isolation—and into a rapidly unraveling Balkan region, while the multi-faith state grappled with democratization, economic restructuring, border disputes, mass migrations, and not-always-friendly interest from other states in and beyond the region. The West provided

one model of the future for Albanians but, at least in the first years after the fall of the communist regime, certainly not the only one.

1. The fall of the Communist Regime in Albania

During the communist regime, Albania was one of the most isolated countries in the world. After leaving the Warsaw Pact in 1968, and after breaking the relations with China in 1978 over disagreements about communist orthodoxy, Albania found itself in a “strategic vacuum.”⁴⁹ The old government militarized the country and lavished already scarce resources on territorial defense. The national defense strategy, such that it was, aimed to repel any aggression from neighboring countries, NATO, or the Warsaw Pact through extensive permanent fortifications and total mobilization of the population. These plans reflected the official paranoia that suffused the communist regime. Between 1976 and 1982, the government built 350,000 fortified concrete elements—bunkers—that were planted all over the country. (As a result, Albanians faced severe housing shortages for many years because the cost of constructing a single bunker was almost equal to the cost of an apartment house.)⁵⁰ The total defense envisaged massive armed forces numbering about 120,000 active duty personnel, while 500,000 reservists (in a country with a population at the time of perhaps 2.8 million) could be mobilized on short order. Fearing a military coup as much as an attack from outside, the regime also decentralized the military, dispersing it a large number of small installations all over the country. It also exercised fierce political control over the military elite.⁵¹

The strategy of isolation also spoke to the regime’s ambitions to create a new identity for Albanians based on “true” communist ideology. While all outside influences were suspect, the regime was especially keen to cut Albanians’ ties with the Western world, whose values were seen as anti-communist. However, forty-five years of reprisals

⁴⁹ Adem Copani, “Partnership for Peace and New Dimensions of Albania’s Security Posture,” *NATO Review*, no. 2, 1, 44 (March 1996), 24-28, <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/1996/9602-6.htm>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ The military elite were often put under accusation of betrayal of the political line of the Party and were punished by the communist regime. In 1974 the communist regime executed the ministry of defense, the chief of staff and other generals on the grounds of working for foreign powers and jeopardizing the development of the military. None of them accepted the accusation.

and propaganda were not enough to extinguish in Albanians the desire to be part of the Western community. For many years, most Albanians secretly watched Italian TV with homemade receivers. As one Albania scholar put it: “To many Albanians living under the country’s communist regime, Italy was a symbol of freedom and the West, and Italian radio and TV broadcasts were the most important way in which Albanians were exposed to the West.”⁵² Thus did Albanians keep alive their hopes for a regime change—and freedom?

In July 1990, some 5,000 people challenged the regime and entered the western embassies in Tirana, asking for political asylum. This event, in fact, came as a big blow to the legitimacy of the communist regime, which, with the “wind of democracy” in the Eastern Europe at its back, had promised liberalization and was trying to portray the situation in Albania as under control. In March of 1991, after a dubious but nonetheless multiparty election, the regime grudgingly began to honor this promise, implementing some democratic reforms—making Albania the last European state to do so. In June, the first opposition government took office, led by a former communist. Ten days later, James Baker paid an official visit to Tirana, the first visit of a U.S. Secretary of State to Albania. Baker was welcomed by crowds of thousands—the *New York Times* reported “a sea of Albanians”⁵³—who gathered in the main square of the capital to listen to his famous words, “Freedom works.”⁵⁴

Arguably, even these modest steps sufficed to whet—but not slake—Albanians’ desire for reform and westernization. In August 1991, around 300,000 Albanians fled dramatically to Italy across the Adriatic on improvised and overloaded boats. Before, Europe knew very little of its Albanian neighbors; suddenly, in their poverty and desperation, they appeared as a potential wave of refugees from a collapsing Balkan state. In December 1991, amid worsening economic straits and widespread social unrest, the

⁵² Kosta Barjaba, “Albania: Looking beyond Borders,” *Migration Information Source*, August 2004, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?ID=239>.

⁵³ “300,000 Albanians Pour into Streets to Welcome Baker,” *The New York Times*, June 23, 1991. <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/06/23/world/300000-albanians-pour-into-streets-to-welcome-baker.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

⁵⁴ Norman Kempster, “Albanians Mob Baker, Cheer U.S : Europe: ‘Freedom Works,’ He Exhorts a Rally of 200,000,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 23, 1991 http://articles.latimes.com/1991-06-23/news/mn-2067_1_albanian-economy.

coalition government that had greeted Secretary Baker collapsed. Elections were called for March of 1992; in the interim, the government was headed by a non-communist independent.⁵⁵

In these slightly delayed 1992 elections, the Democratic Party won a landslide victory finally ending the more than four decades of communist rule in Albania. The new government adopted an open policy toward the world, seeking enthusiastically to improve the international relations that almost had not existed since the end of World War II. Although there was an inclination to prioritize the relations with the West, Albania sought close relations with the Islamic countries as well.

Muslims make up the biggest religious community in Albania, composing around 70 percent of the population. During the communist regime, all practice of religion was banned, clerics were decapitated, and mosques, churches, and monasteries were destroyed to extirpate religion from Albanian lives. Religion was eventually legalized after 1991, but it faced major financial problems in rebuilding congregations—and the infrastructure of worship—as well as in educating new clerics. Despite burgeoning interest in religious practice among Albania’s young Muslims, the Albanian Muslim community suffered from all these legacy issues, as well.⁵⁶ In 1992 Albania joined the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). The OIC is “the collective voice of the Muslim world [which aims] to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world.”⁵⁷ Membership marked an avenue by which Albania hoped to address the needs of its Muslim majority. It also opened the road for many Islamic organizations to press into Albania.

⁵⁵ Parliamentary Chamber of Albania, “Elections held in 1992,” April, 1992, http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2001_92.htm.

⁵⁶ Artan Hoxha, “Milion Dollarë për të Marrë Komunitetin Mysliman,” *Gazeta Shqiptare*, January 16, 2008, <http://www.acnss.com/html/intervista/VEHABI-SELEFIZMI%20GODET%20DEMOKRACINE%20DHE%20IDENTITETIN%20TONE%20KOMBETA R..pdf>.

⁵⁷ Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, (n.d.), http://www.oic-oci.org/page_detail.asp?p_id=52.

2. The Security Challenges of Albania after the Cold War

The end of the cold war and the demise of the communist regime brought a completely new security situation for Albania. The new threats—more acute than the old government’s paranoid fantasies—included serious economic problems inherited from the failure of the centralized economy system and its primitive industry, a vacuum in the legal framework, and weak institutions. Such phenomena, unknown before, as organized crime, corruption⁵⁸, and illegal trafficking, began to bloom. “The creation of a new economic system and the process of rebuilding state institutions had to take place simultaneously.”⁵⁹

This process needed guidance, assistance, and support from beyond Albania’s borders. Western investors were reluctant to sink money or effort in Albania because of the uncertainties of its reforms and transition to democracy. This circumstance, in turn, also informed Albania’s joining the OIC, perhaps in the hope that membership would attract investment from oil-rich Islamic countries out of common religious ties. Indeed, after Albania joined the OIC, the government also suspended all visas requirements for Islamic countries. Islamic entrepreneurs came, but not all of them aiming to resuscitate Albania’s trade and infrastructure. A lot of Muslims from Arabic Countries came to Albania to revive Islam, some of whom were suspected by the Albanian intelligence service and Western Intelligence Agencies as Islamic terrorists.⁶⁰ Islamic NGOs financed hospitals, aqueducts, orphanages, and other amenities for the poor—as well as the construction of 400 new mosques and eight madrasahs. In addition, they provided scholarships and financial assistance to young Albanians to study theology at Arab

⁵⁸ Corrupt tendencies existed during the communist regime, too. In fact, their roots go back to the Ottoman rule in Albania. However, the transition period associated with weak democratic institutions and lawlessness opened unprecedented opportunities for the new ruling elites to get very rich very quickly, if not exactly fairly or legally.

⁵⁹ Albert Rakipi, *Weak States & Security: Rethinking the Balkan Post-Cold War Security Agenda* (Tirana: Albanian Institute for International Studies, 2008), 103.

⁶⁰ Artan Hoxha, “Si erdhën në Shqipëri Terroristët e Xhihadit,” *Gazeta Shqiptare*, January 16, 2008.

universities. These students came back to Albania with a more radicalized form of Islam, which was opposite of the liberal Islam traditionally practiced by Albanians.⁶¹

The new democratic state, facing widespread corruption and lax border control, lacked the will, structure, and experience to investigate the activities of charity organizations and extremist groups that poured into Albania. Some Islamic organizations took advantage of this situation to promote their extremist religious objectives under the guise of fostering the Albanian economy. Extremist Islamism could have posed a real threat not only to religious tolerance and the peaceful coexistence of the religious communities in Albania, but also to the aspirations of the country for Euro-Atlantic integration—to say nothing of the security and stability of Europe's Balkan flank.

Indeed, the Balkan connection made the issue of Islam in Albania even more urgent—for both Tirana and the West. In particular, the atrocities committed by Milosevic's regime against the Albanians of Kosovo brought to the forefront the Albanian national cause, which had been seriously subverted—but not diverted—during the communist regime. As Rakipi aptly puts it, “Kosovo, like other Albanian territories, was not a target of Albanian state policy.”⁶² Although, as history reveals, Albania never embraced irredentism as a state policy, post-Cold War events called for a regional role for Albania. Now, Albania is the mother state of a nation, of which fully half of the members (ethnic Albanians outside Albania) live in three other border countries—in a region infamous for its ethnic conflicts. On the one hand, then, Albania bears some responsibility for defending the rights of ethnic Albanians as a national obligation; on the other hand, the new democracy had a responsibility to itself and its neighbors to maintain peace and stability in the region.⁶³ Strikingly, Albania realized that unilateral action

⁶¹ There prevails a specific culture of religious harmony and co-existence in Albania, which owes to the purposeful policies of the founders of the modern Albanian state in the nineteenth century. Based on this cosmopolitanism, updated from the heyday of the Hellenistic world, the four main religious communities present in Albania have had good relations with each other. “Everywhere you go in Albania, people speak of the country's tradition of religious tolerance and that there is complete harmony between the different faiths.” Inter-faith marriages are very common, and Albanians like to celebrate religious days together. In the absence of formal Islamic education during the communist regime, Albanians inherited from their families the Islamic traditions intertwined with Albanian culture of religious tolerance. The extremist religious type of Islam that the Islamic organizations attempted to introduce to the country was very different from the Albanian religious culture.

⁶² Rakipi, *Weak States & Security: Rethinking the Balkan Post-Cold War Security Agenda*, 97.

⁶³ Ethnic Albanians live in Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

would achieve neither goal—nor would irredentist policies. The national cause could be better served in the context of international cooperation, in which Albania had to build a credible positive profile.

Last, but not least, the Albanian people needed confidence that the communist regime would not come back again. The best guarantee was to ensure the people that the future of the country would be within the community that defeated communism, the Euro-Atlantic community.

For all of these reasons—the specter of Islamist extremism, the fractious lure of irredentism, and the shadow of a communist resurgence—Euro-Atlantic integration became the major foreign policy objective of Albania. Presently, whole-hearted westernization achieved the absolute consensus of all political forces and support from almost the entire population.⁶⁴ In other words, Albanians believed that the benefits of NATO membership would outweigh its costs.

B. ALBANIAN-NATO RELATIONS AFTER THE COLD WAR

Being part of Euro-Atlantic alliance entails sharing the democratic values and principles with western countries. This stance promotes democratic reform and free economy, improves the image of the country in the world, and creates guarantees for foreign investors. Furthermore, instead of maintaining a massive army, which drained national resources in the name of exaggerated territorial defense, westernization means developing a modern, professional military to contribute to collective defense. Next, being part of such a prestigious security organization as NATO improves the reputation and the image of the country in its international relations, particularly in connection with the rights of ethnic Albanians beyond the national borders. At the same time, this approach makes national movements less feasible by channeling the nationalist energies and attentions of Albanians into successful, multilateral and international models, rather than revanchism or extremism. Because the western Balkans also aspired to join NATO,

⁶⁴ Despite the fact that Albanian public support to NATO was never measured in a referendum or a large scale poll there has been a unanimous acceptance that it goes well beyond 90% having the consensus of both major political parties.

cooperation and trust among neighbor countries increases, promoting peace and stability in the region. In the words of Albanian Prime Minister Fatos Nano:

Albania's governing policy, as well as our foreign policy, is to try to prevent a security vacuum from returning to our region, since that would mean a return to the ugly past of totalitarianism and national conflicts. To that end, we are ridding ourselves of the ghosts of the past and are working to build a society that responds to current development needs, and one that is prepared for future challenges and is compatible with Western societies.⁶⁵

1. Albania Joins the NACC

At the NATO summit in Rome, the alliance adopted a new strategic concept that established the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) as a mechanism for institutional cooperation with South Eastern European states.⁶⁶ Albania was admitted to the NACC in June 1992. Immediately thereafter, many Albanian parliamentarians, journalists, politicians, and military personnel visited NATO headquarters in Brussels and Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Mons, participating in seminars and conferences and meeting with alliance officials. This process of socialization aimed to increase Albanian public knowledge and to teach Albanian elites how the alliance worked.⁶⁷

Already in December 1992, President Sali Berisha became the first Albanian leader to visit the NATO HQ in Brussels. He met with Secretary-General Manfred Wörner and discussed the situation in the Balkans, raising concerns about the situation in Kosovo. Berisha clearly articulated Tirana's westernization calculus—that Albania is “for peace and stability in the region, not for the change of the borders,” and he described the cooperation with NATO as very important for the peace and stability of the Balkans. He officially submitted the application of Albania to join the alliance.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Fatos Nano, “Security in Southeastern Europe: An Albanian Perspective,” (Speech held at 15th International Workshop on Global Security, Vienna, Austria, June 19–23, 1998). <http://www.csd.org/98Book/nano.htm>

⁶⁶ Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, 17.

⁶⁷ Copani, “Partnership for Peace and New Dimensions of Albania's Security Posture,” 24–28.

⁶⁸ “President Berisha Visits NATO HQ: Albania Wishes to be Member of NATO,” *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, December 19, 1992, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.nps.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/>.

In March 1993, Manfred Wörner became the first NATO Secretary General to visit Albania. The visit was a strong sign of the alliance's willingness to "extend the hand of cooperation to Albania."⁶⁹ Wörner, in his speech before the Albanian Parliament, declared that Albania belonged to Europe. These solemn words went beyond merely recognizing the western identity of Albanians. NATO was aware of the difficult situation of Albania concerning the fate of ethnic Albanians living outside the country and it praised Tirana's foreign policy of restraint and its efforts to cooperate extensively with the international community for the security and stability of the region.⁷⁰ NATO saw Albania as a responsible and trusted partner that could play a constructive role in the peace and stability of the region.

2. Albania Joins Partnership for Peace (PfP)

On the other hand Albania saw cooperation with NATO as very important for its own security, for defending the democratic rights of ethnic Albanians and for promoting peace and stability in the region. Thus, in 1994, Albania joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. PfP, launched at the Brussels Summit, was and is basically a cooperation initiative between NATO and non-NATO members that aims "to protect and promote liberal freedom, justice, and peace through democracy."⁷¹ PfP includes a wide range of joint NATO-partner activities that serve to familiarize partner countries with the norms, practices, and procedures of NATO. PfP is a useful tool not only to prepare aspirant states to join the alliance but also to measure their commitment and capabilities.⁷²

The program provided Albania with a real opportunity to strengthen its relations with NATO. Although participation in PfP was not a guarantee of membership, it served as a stage of active integration into the alliance.⁷³ According to President Berisha, Partnership for Peace was not only or even primarily about the military aspects of the

⁶⁹ Manfred Wörner, (speech by secretary general held at the Albanian Parliament, Tirana, Albania, March 19, 1993), <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1993/s930319b.htm>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, 67.

⁷² Kristaq Gërveni, "The Role of Armed Forces in Integration of Albania in NATO and EU," (PhD diss., Defense Academy "Spiro Moisiu," 2011), 26.

⁷³ Copani, "Partnership for Peace and New Dimensions of Albania's Security Posture," 24-28

Alliance. He suggested that, more importantly, the political values that underlay PfP would serve to promote trust among neighboring and non-neighboring countries.⁷⁴ Still, President Berisha asserted that Albania should insist on full NATO membership as a both an engine and a confirmation of Albania's Euro-Atlantic integration.

NATO-Albania PfP cooperation was enriched by two key elements: Individual Partnership Programs (IPP) and the Planning and Reviewing Process (PARP). "IPP is designed to bring together all the various cooperation mechanisms through which a partner country interacts with the Alliance, sharpening the focus of activities to better support their domestic reform efforts."⁷⁵ "Under this framework, the program included a range of PfP activities specific to Albania and covered a wide range beginning from military reforms and democratic control of armed forces to civil emergency preparedness. The PfP activities included military exercises, Mobile Training Teams (MTT), conferences, workshops, seminars, courses at NATO Centers of Excellence. All these activities aimed to socialize Albania with NATO way of thinking and of doing business and to help Albania develop defense concepts and capabilities to be used in support or within NATO operations. These activities increased the awareness of Albania about new asymmetric threats and new type of operations such as Crises Response Operations (CRO)."⁷⁶ The international terrorism, transnational organized crime and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction emerged as major threats to the security instead of state aggression as it used to be in the past.

The Planning and Review Process (PARP) provides an organized instrument for identifying partner capabilities that could be offered to the Alliance for multinational training, exercises and operations. For partner countries participating in the PARP, it also works as the principal tool used to "guide and measure defense and military progress."⁷⁷ PARP was an essential part of PfP for reforming the Albanian military in order to

⁷⁴ "President Views Kosovo Issue, NATO membership," BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, July 8, 1996, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.nps.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/>.

⁷⁵ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "The Partnership for Peace Program," http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50349.htm.

⁷⁶ Copani, "Partnership for Peace and New Dimensions of Albania's Security Posture."

⁷⁷ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Partnership for Peace Planning and Review Process," November 3, 2012, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_68277.htm?selectedLocale=en.

increase the interoperable with the ally forces and to adapt her to face the asymmetrical threats.⁷⁸ NATO sent several working groups to Albania to assist with identifying the forces and capabilities that Albania wanted to make available for PfP activities and to improve its interoperability with allied forces in many PfP cooperation fields, beginning from peacekeeping and humanitarian operations to crises response operations. Additionally, PARP was designed as a mechanism for providing regular exchanges of information among allies and Albania in order to increase transparency on overall defense plans. It showed Albania's policies, plans, and its commitments toward NATO, thus providing a good tool for allies to consider and assess Albanian NATO membership.⁷⁹ Through PARP Albanian defense plans were oriented toward a collective defense approach to the security threats. For example, Albanian Army disbanded many army units such as army divisions containing tank battalions or air defense battalions, reducing substantially the number of active military personnel but on the other hand developed small elite military capabilities such as Rapid Reaction Brigade and Commando Regiment able to handle crises response operations, fight against terrorism or deploy in support of NATO operations.

Albania took the PfP initiative very seriously. In 1995, the Albanian armed forces participated in twelve exercises with NATO in the United States, Greece, and Italy—the first time Albanian troops took part in military exercises outside the country. These exercises served not only to increase the interoperability of the Albanian Armed Forces but also to familiarize them with NATO practices and process and to develop good personal relations with NATO forces.

In 1996, Albania took another step in its cooperation with NATO by deciding to send thirty-three troops in NATO-led multinational peace support operation, the Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. IFOR was mandated by a UN Security Council Resolution to implement the Peace Agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Albanian contingent, after training for peacekeeping operations in

⁷⁸ Enika Abazi, "Defense Reform of the Albanian Armed Forces: Democratization and Transformation," http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/co/co_sep04/co_sep04c.pdf.

⁷⁹ Copani, "Partnership for Peace and New Dimensions of Albania's Security Posture," 24-28.

Germany, served as an independent unit of the German unit in IFOR.⁸⁰ This active participation in IFOR built on an earlier decision, when Albania had allowed NATO to use its airfield and ports to plan operations in Bosnia. This modest contribution to the first NATO-led mission in Balkans, despite the economic difficulties and the security risks, was an indicator that Albania was emerging as a reliable partner who was ready to play an active role in the peace and stability of the region.⁸¹

3. 1997 Internal Crises, Extremist Islamism and NATO's Stabilizing Role

Despite the positive democratic developments in its early post-communism years, Albania remained a weak state making a difficult transition to democracy. Its democratic institutions were not consolidated and the legal framework was incomplete. At the end of 1996, the domestic political situation was unstable and the opposition parties boycotted the parliament after contesting the parliamentary elections.

The already unstable political situation worsened with the spectacular collapse of several pyramid schemes that swept away the life savings of tens of thousands of Albanian citizens. These financial schemes had offered very high returns for a short amount of time. Albanians, whose years of isolation and authoritarian communism left them somewhat unprepared for the vicissitudes of capitalism when it arrived, saw these ventures as an easy way to get rich in a country that didn't have much to offer. According to one source, by 1997, the sums invested in these Ponzi schemes reached a staggering US\$1.2 billion—more than 50 percent of the country's GDP.⁸² The International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United States, and the European Union all issued warnings about alleged money laundering; the Tirana government was reluctant to outlaw the highly popular, if highly questionable, schemes. As such, when the pyramids collapsed, the government appeared complicit in the widespread financial ruin that followed.

⁸⁰ Ministry of Defense of Albania, "Peacekeeping Operations: Bosnia and Herzegovina," http://www.mod.gov.al/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=901:bosnje-hercegovine&catid=103&Itemid=481 (accessed November 10, 2012)

⁸¹ Copani, "Partnership for Peace and New Dimensions of Albania's Security Posture," 24-28.

⁸² Rakipi, *Weak States & Security: Rethinking the Balkan Post-Cold War Security Agenda*, 105.

The weak state fell amid outrage and violence after large popular revolts demanded that the government take full responsibility and resign.⁸³ As the unrest accelerated, crowds attacked military depots and looted large amounts of weapons and ammunition.⁸⁴ The military disintegrated together with other state institutions. In the ensuing chaos, organized crime and armed criminal bands flourished, actually undertaking state functions in many regions of the country. Many Albanians fled to Italy or Greece in an attempt to escape from the dangerous situation at home, which threatened a demographic crisis for Albania and its neighbors alike. Worse, the large number of weapons in unchecked circulation in a very poor and desperate population posed an even bigger concern for the region and the EU.

The possibility that the weapons might have fallen into terrorists' hands was considered an additional—and very real—threat. “With its weak governance, porous borders, and criminal networks, Albania [had] all the characteristics of a fragile state that could become a haven for terrorists.”⁸⁵ For all such terrorist groups, “Albania was a major transit point for immigrants seeking to reach Europe from further east and south, such as Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan”⁸⁶ not only to infiltrate into Europe, under the guise of genuine immigrants, but also to generate funds by coordinating the activities with the organized crime networks.⁸⁷ Between 1994 and 1996, already the country began to be used as an interim point for Mujahedin from Afghanistan who were on their way to Bosnia to fight the Serbian army.⁸⁸ Among the Islamic organizations that operated in Albania there were several radical Islamic terrorist groups that tried to advance their

⁸³ Ibid., 107. Rakipi argues that the reasons for the 1997 failure lay on the weak institutions and their low level of legitimacy.

⁸⁴ 700,000 different kinds of weapons were looted during the 1997 riots.

⁸⁵ David L. Phillips, “Project on Preventing Failed States: Albania,” (The National Committee on American Foreign Policy, May 2005), <http://www.ncafp.org/articles/05%20Project%20on%20Preventing%20Failed%20States-%20Albania%205-05.pdf>.

⁸⁶ Derek Lutterbeck, “Policing Migration in the Mediterranean,” *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 11, no. 1, (March 2006), http://studium.unict.it/dokeos/2012/courses/1001283C1/document/Lutterbeck-Med_Politics-March06.pdf.

⁸⁷ Garry Mason, “Immigration Criminals May Aid Terrorists,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review Magazine*, (December 2002). http://www.ndu.edu/CTNSP/docUploaded/FINAL_DH_53.pdf

⁸⁸ Artan Hoxha, “Si erdhën në Shqipëri Terroristët e Xhihadit,” *Gazeta Shqiptare*, January 16, 2008, 12-14.

terrorist objectives. “Islamic Egyptian Jihad,” “Egyptian Islamic Group,” “Algerian Front of Islamic Salvation,” and the “Islamic Armed Group of Algeria” were present and operating in Albania.⁸⁹

Terrorist organizations’ activity in Albania was mainly focused on using the permissive environment of the country as a safe haven for generating funds, conducting illegal activities, coordinating operations in the region, providing “asylum” to terrorist fugitives and spreading extremist religious ideology throughout the country. They used the Islamic charitable NGOs for their activities. For example The International Humanitarian Islamic Organization (IIRO), the first Islamic NGO established in Albania, helped the mujahidin fighters in Bosnia with finances and logistical support.⁹⁰ An Albanian office of the IIRO also employed Muhammad al Zawahiri, the brother of Bin Laden’s deputy, to assist with al-Qaeda’s terrorism efforts in the Balkans. The IIRO was one of the main organizations that supported the spread of Wahhabism. Wahhabism is “a conservative and intolerant form of Islam that is practiced in Saudi Arabia.”⁹¹ The sect seeks to purify Islam practices deviate from the seventh-century teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.⁹² Osama bin Laden practiced Wahhabism. IIRO provided opportunities to Albanians to attend Wahhabism theology studies in Arab countries.

Another Wahhabi charity organization sponsored by Saudi Arabia, the Al Haramain Association, was penetrated between 1993 and 1998 by the Islamic Egyptian Jihad (IEJ) and members of al-Qaeda. They formed a terrorist cell within the Al Haramain Association, which aimed to “recruit young Albanians, train them to forge documents, and prepare them to perform terrorist activities and acts of violence in Kosovo to further destabilize the internal situation in Albania by fomenting conflict among the country’s various religious groups.” The IEJ cell excelled in forgery and provided terrorist fugitives and operators with the necessary documents to travel in other

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Definition by Wordnet, <http://princeton.edu/perl/webwn>.

⁹² U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya*, by Christopher M. Blanchard, CRS Report RS21695 (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, January 24, 2008).

countries. The trial in Cairo of the captured members of this cell, called “the returnees from Albania,” brought to light facts about funds being generated and other activities to support operations in Europe.⁹³

The World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) was another Islamic organization based in Albania that spread extremist religious propaganda in the country and sponsored Albanian youngsters to study Wahhabi theology in Arab countries. It was co-founded by Osama bin Laden’s nephew, Abdulla bin Laden and the organization was linked to September 11 attacks.

During late 1990s terrorist groups attempted several times to attack U.S. targets in Albania, showing that they were capable of planning and staging attacks as well. In 1997, the U.S. embassy in Tirana was even temporarily closed “when it was discovered that a faction of the Muslim Brotherhood was plotting an attack.”⁹⁴ One year later, “Albania and the United States foiled another planned attack on the U.S. embassy in Tirana.”⁹⁵

Amid the ongoing and worsening turmoil, the Albanian government asked NATO for an international force to restore the order in Albania. However, NATO was reluctant to commit to an intervention in Albania; then-Secretary General Javier Solana ruled out any NATO-led military intervention in support of the government of Albania.⁹⁶ Instead, Solana emphasized political and diplomatic engagement first. Pettifer and Vickers, two prominent scholars of Albanian history, suggested that a possible reason that NATO rejected military intervention in Albania was to avoid taking sides in the conflict. This

⁹³ Three of six members of an IEJ cell who were arrested in Albania during the summer of 1998 received a capital sentence; one was sentenced to life prison and the remaining two served 10 years in prison. Mohamed Hassan Tita, Ahmed Osman Saleh dhe Essam Abdel Tauab were tried before a military court in Cairo in the beginning of 1999 and were accused of several high crimes. This was one of the biggest trials conducted until then relating to Islamic terrorist in the Arabic world. On 14 February 2000, Ahmed Ibrahim Al Naggar and Ahmed Osman Saleh were hanged in a prison of Cairo. The chief of Tirana Cell Kreu, Shavki Salama Attiya (Magad Mustafa) received a lifelong prison sentence. Mohamed Hassan Tita and Essam Abdel Tawwab were sentenced 10 years in prison each. The sixth one, Salah El-Sayed, was killed during the capture operation by police special forces on 24 October 1998. Source: *Gazeta Shqiptare*, dated 29.01.2008.

⁹⁴ U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Islamic Terrorism and the Balkans*, by Steven Woehrel, CRS Report RL33012 (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, July 26, 2005).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ “Albania Sends Troops and Tanks to Crush Southern Revolt,” *Associated Press*, March 5, 1997, <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1997/Albania-sends-troops-and-tanks-to-crush-southern-revolt/id-e01281070e69d3753a9f1407781351f6>.

step would have divided the country even more and would have soured the people on NATO.⁹⁷ Taking into consideration that public support for NATO has always been higher than 90 percent, meaning that it was supported by followers of both political parties engaged in the political turmoil, NATO's engagement either in support of the government or against it would have created discontent and anger in a highly politicised and divided public.

Nor did the EU show much interest in mounting a peacekeeping operation in Albania, particularly with the wars in the former Yugoslavia only recently officially concluded. For example, Germany saw the Albanian crisis as an internal matter. Thus, before Tirana could hope for any international assistance, Albania's political elites were pushed to come to an agreement to resolve the political deadlock.

However, a UNSC resolution mandated a humanitarian intervention by a coalition composed of eleven European countries and led by Italy.⁹⁸ The coalition also was supported by OSCE. Operation ALBA was in effect for a period of six months. Its main tasks were to secure the distribution of humanitarian aid and to secure the polling stations so that everybody could vote in the parliamentary elections as agreed by the political elites.⁹⁹ There are different opinions about the success of this operation, and a thorough discussion is outside the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, it can be argued that Operation ALBA reinforced the public's trust in international organizations, and the presence of western military forces that composed the coalition was widely welcomed. This experience created a suitable environment for the future deployment of NATO troops in Albania during the Kosovo crisis. Despite the domestic turmoil, political instability, and the reluctance of NATO to engage in military intervention in Albania, Albanian foreign policy objectives remained unchanged. At the Madrid Summit in 1997, Bashkim Fino, the prime minister of the care-taker government, declared that "integration into the Alliance remains an absolute priority of our foreign policy since this is our indisputable

⁹⁷ James Pettifer and Miranda Vickers, *The Albanian Question: Reshaping the Balkans* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2009), 65–78.

⁹⁸ Riccardo Marchio, "Operation Alba: A European Approach to Peace Support Operations in the Balkans," U.S. Army War College, 2000, <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA378201&Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf>.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

aspiration and it is included in all programs of Albanian parties of the entire political spectrum.”¹⁰⁰ He officially invited NATO to guide the restructuring of Albanian military through material and technical assistance, expertize and training and to channel also bilateral military assistance toward creating a small, professional, military forces able to deploy in NATO missions to address the new threats emerged after the cold war such as terrorism, proliferation of WMD, etc.¹⁰¹

NATO accepted the request and decided to assist through the PfP framework. An Individual Partnership Plan (IPP) was tailored to meet the Albania’s specific needs. The IPP was signed in Brussels by the newly elected Prime Minister Nano. The IPP included NATO assistance in “reconstructing and restructuring the Albanian armed forces under civilian democratic control, as well as training activities to keep Albania engaged in PfP.”¹⁰²

The IPP was designed to coordinate not only the assistance that NATO as an organization would give but also the assistance of individual ally and partner countries. NATO sent twelve teams of experts to Albania in four months to assist in developing a conceptual framework, including a national security concept, military doctrine, civilian control, legal framework, and civil-military relations. These delegations also helped to reorganize and re-function the Ministry of Defense, the general staff, and the major commands of the armed forces. They also provided technical assistance in securing armament storage sites and in ordinance disposal. At the same time, successful bilateral assistance programs with NATO nations improved basic infrastructure and trained personnel to face the challenges that the Albanian armed forces were going through. The

¹⁰⁰ Bashkim Fino, “Statement by the Head of the Albanian Delegation,” (Speech held at Madrid NATO Summit, 9 July 1997) <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1997/s970709m.htm>.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² “Secretary General’s Remarks to the Press on the Occasion of the Visit by the Prime Minister of Albania, Fatos Nano, on 10 September 1997,” *NATO Review*, no. 5, Vol. 45 (October 1997) <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/1997/9705-b.htm>.

IPP program included military cooperation activities to help the Albanian armed forces to take full advantage of PfP exercises and trainings.¹⁰³

Because the results of the IPP program in 1997 proved to be satisfactory to all sides, NATO decided to extend the IPP during 1998 as well. The eruption of Kosovo crises on the Albanian border had increased the urgency of reorganizing the Albanian Army. It had also emphasized the necessity of assisting the “Albanian authorities in addressing the possible consequences of the crisis in Kosovo, including possible assistance in communications, border control and refugee matters.”¹⁰⁴ In order to coordinate and implement the IPP activities NATO opened a PfP Cell in Tirana on 1 June 1998. According to NATO

The opening of this office signal[ed] the Alliance's interest in developing closer relations with the Albanian authorities in the implementation of PfP activities. It [was] the first of its kind and represent[ed] NATO's commitment to carry out the special IPP within the unique circumstances found in Albania.¹⁰⁵

Katardikis argues that “the case of Albania has broken new ground in the evolution of PfP and has confirmed its position as a key element in the new European security structure.”¹⁰⁶

As NATO-Albania relations were growing closer and warmer, NATO-Albanian dialogue and consultations intensified. Between March 1998 and May 1999, the NATO Secretary General and Albanian Prime Ministers met five times—three times in Tirana and twice in Brussels—to discuss the situation in Kosovo. Albania was consistent in asking the alliance to intervene in Kosovo in order to stop the “ethnic cleansing” and restore peace and stability in the region. (Tirana was just as scrupulous in foreswearing any irredentist advantage-seeking in the conflict.) Prime Minister Fatos Nano, in different

¹⁰³ George Katsirdakis, “Albania: A case study in the practical implementation of Partnership for Peace,” *NATO Review*, no. 2, Vol. 46 (Summer 1998), 22–26 <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/1998/9802-07.htm>.

¹⁰⁴ NATO, “NATO Opens NATO/Partnership for Peace Cell in Albania,” *news release*, May 29, 1998, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1998/p98-069e.htm>.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Katsirdakis, “Albania: A Case Study in the Practical Implementation of Partnership for Peace,” 22–26.

speeches, emphasized that NATO was the only solution to Kosovo crises. He persistently asked NATO to deploy troops in Albania in order to prevent the conflict from spreading.¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, the Albanian government continued to support the diplomacy by offering to NATO full cooperation. Albania allowed NATO airplanes to fly over Albanian territory and, as it had for IFOR in the Bosnian action, placed its international airport and military airfields at NATO's disposal.¹⁰⁸

NATO deployed about 8,000 troops in Albania to assist the country to manage the humanitarian crises caused by more than 200,000 Kosovo Refugees who crossed the border to escape the Milosevic's regime's annihilatory oppression.¹⁰⁹ The operation provided security for the international agencies and organizations that were engaged with delivering aid for refugees, "provided assistance in logistics, transport, infrastructure and coordination, based on the demands of the Albanian government."¹¹⁰

4. Albanian–NATO Relations during Kosovo Crisis

After exhausting all diplomatic means, NATO commenced Operation Allied Force (OAF, March–June 1999), which successfully compelled Milosevic's regime to stop the ethnic cleansing, withdraw the troops from Kosovo, and allow for a peacekeeping force to be deployed in Kosovo to guarantee the return of refugees to their homes. After the 78-day air campaign, Kosovo Force (KFOR), with about 50,000 troops from NATO and partner countries, deployed to Kosovo on 12 June 1999. (KFOR was a peace enforcement operation based on a mandate from UNSCR 1244 dated 10 June 1999.) Today KFOR's 10,000-troop presence in Kosovo continues to serve as "deterrence" to Serbia.¹¹¹ "KFOR's presence has been crucial in maintaining safety and security for all individuals and communities in Kosovo. Today, KFOR continues to

¹⁰⁷ "Albania on Brink of War," *Hobart Mercury*, June 24, 1998.
<http://www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.nps.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/>.

¹⁰⁸ "Albania places Airfields at NATO's Disposal," *Albanian Telegraphic Agency*, June 13, 1998.

¹⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights Watch World Report 2000 - Albania*, 1 December 1999,
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6a8c820.html> (accessed 11 November 2012).

¹¹⁰ "Albanian Premier says NATO Troops to Help Deal with Refugees," *BBC Monitoring Europe*, April 4, 1999 <http://www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.nps.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/>.

¹¹¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO's Role in Kosovo," August 31, 2012,
http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_48818.htm.

contribute toward maintaining a safe and secure environment in Kosovo for the benefit of all citizens.”¹¹² The relative stability of Kosovo also benefits Albania in terms of both immigration and the situation of the ethnic Albanians there.

At the end of Operation Allied Force, in August 1999, NATO established Communication Zone West (COMMZ (W)), as its presence with a specific mission in Albania. The Headquarters was integrated into the structure of the KFOR and had a Multinational Military Force from the USA, Germany, France, Turkey and Greece. The COMMZ (W) was tasked with securing the lines of communications from Albania to Kosovo and south from Albania to Macedonia, the port of Durres and Rinas International Airport. However, one important mission of COMMZ (W) was “to maintain working links between NATO and Albania.”¹¹³

NATO assistance to Albania after the 1997 domestic crises, its undisputable role in resolving the crises in Kosovo, and its presence in Albania during refugee crises and thereafter increased the public support for Euro-Atlantic aspiration in unprecedented levels. One professor on the University of Tirana put it in this way: “There is a great openness toward NATO. People have been hopeless, and they are reading very positive signs into the buildup.”¹¹⁴ According to Preç Zogaj, a senior adviser to Rexhep Mejdani, the Albanian President of that time, the presence of the alliance in Albania “demanded responsibility from Albania's politicians, curtailing their penchant for instigating unrest and accelerating internal reforms that will improve policing and immigration controls.”¹¹⁵ Prime Minister Majko said solemnly:

The presence of NATO troops in Albania, their role in the resolution of the conflict in Kosova and the aid they have provided for the rehabilitation of the infrastructure Albania have brought back to the people the optimism that the country has now a future, it has partners and worthy allies...¹¹⁶

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Allied Command Operations, “NATO HQs Tirana,” <http://www.aco.nato.int/page13612628.aspx> (Accessed 11 November 2012)

¹¹⁴ “The Little Nation that wants to join NATO; Albania Sees Balkan Conflict as Means to a Brighter Future,” *The Washington Post*, May 6, 1999.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ “NATO Troops are restoring Hope – Premier,” *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, June 25, 1999. <http://www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.nps.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/>

NATO stood side-by-side my people and my people lined themselves totally by the side of NATO in the role of an equal partner in this in gigantic battle, one of the biggest in the history of mankind.¹¹⁷

In 2001 NATO played an important role in resolving the nine-month conflict that erupted in Macedonia between ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians in 2001. Although the EU was engaged actively in hammering out the Ohrid Framework Agreement that ended the conflict, NATO's intervention was essential to demilitarize the National Liberation Army (NLA) and to collect and destroy their weapons. Mainly because the alliance had gained legitimacy and trust with its consistent and clear engagements to provide peace and stability in Balkans, first with intervention in Bosnia and then in Kosovo, NATO could influence this delicate task and, once again, help restore stability to the region.

C. NATO'S ROLE IN PREVENTING THE EMERGENCE OF ISLAMIC TERRORISM IN ALBANIA

NATO's efforts in and around Albania also helped curtail the allure of Islamist extremism and other forms of terrorism in the fledgling Balkan democracy. The anti-west ideologies advanced by extremist religious groups were not successful because Albanians embraced liberal democratic values and imagined their future integrated in the Euro-Atlantic Community.¹¹⁸ Particularly the crucial role that NATO played in ending the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and in resolving ethnic strife in Macedonia fostered a resolutely pro-NATO (and, hence, pro-Western) public attitude in Albania. Both strong political and public orientation toward NATO, while easing the socialization and cooperation with the West, made it difficult for terrorist groups to rely on the Albanian Muslim population for their terrorist acts against American or Western targets.

¹¹⁷ "Albania feels like equal partner of NATO – Premier," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, June 14, 1999, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.nps.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/>

The NATO active engagement, in contrast with Bosnia, deterred the involvement of mujahidin fighters in Kosovo. This was crucial in keeping the conflict out of religious nuances and boosting the public support in the Muslim community.

¹¹⁸ It also can be argued that the specific religious culture of Albania, which relate to the nation's pro-Western sentiments, also contributed to the success of NATO's counter-terrorism aspect in Albania. Ultimately, the overwhelming majorities of Albanians retains their mutual religious tolerance and reject extremism in the guise of faith.

Furthermore, NATO engagement in Kosovo and Macedonia not only boosted public support for the Euro-Atlantic alliance but also thwarted the involvement of Mujahidin fighters in the conflict for two reasons. First, the engagement of the West to stop the oppression of Muslims prevented the interpretation of the conflicts as religious wars. The NATO operations in ex-Yugoslavia were exercised “in support building institutions of good governance in central and Eastern Europe.”¹¹⁹ The allies were united in acting in accordance with shared liberal democratic values in order to stop the massive humanitarian crisis in Balkans. Thus the armed struggle of both KLA and NLA maintained their secular setting and did not embark on a religious war. Second, the potential support of mujahidin could not be compared with the military capabilities that NATO engaged in Kosovo crises. Both KLA and NLA leaders made it clear that they fought for the rights of Albanians and not for a religious cause.¹²⁰ They distanced themselves from terrorist groups and were eager to deny any alleged connections with them. They fully cooperated with NATO and were grateful to NATO for helping their cause.

Next, Albania’s aspiration for Euro-Atlantic integration created an incentive for the Albanian government to give a free hand to United States to fight terrorism in Albania.¹²¹ In 1998–1999, the Albanian government, in close cooperation with the American CIA, cracked down on terrorist cells and groups operating in Albania with suspected links to terrorists. Albania also has been able to deport suspected Islamic extremists and terrorists. On 18 April 1999, in Egypt took part one of the biggest terrorist trials in history. “The trial involved 107 Islamic fundamentalists, 63 of whom were tried *in absentia*. Most of the accused belonged to the Egyptian al-Jihad group, while the most notorious had ties to Osama bin Ladin’s al-Qaidah organization.”¹²² The trial has been called the “trial of the returnees from Albanian,” because “twenty of the accused were

¹¹⁹ Gheciu, *NATO in the “New Europe,”* 239

¹²⁰ Popescu, “Tackling Terrorism in the Balkans.”

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Yoram Schweitzer, “Osama bin Ladin and the Egyptian Terrorist Groups,” June 25, 1999, <http://212.150.54.123/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=81>

extradited from Albania in July of '98.”¹²³ The trial revealed a lot of information about the organization, links and plans of the terrorist groups. At the same time the determination of Albania to capture and hand over the alleged terrorist was a clear sign to terrorist organizations that Albania could not consider a safe haven any longer.

Last, NATO's presence and active engagement in defense institution building helped Albania overcome the difficult security situation created by the internal crises of 1997. NATO assisted Albania to store properly the munitions and to dispose the excessive amount of munitions that threatened to create a breach in the security of the country. NATO's positive engagement increased the faith of the people in the democratic reforms and in the national institutions, boosting the hope of the people for a future in the Euro-Atlantic community and, as well, further distancing the Albanians from international terrorism.

¹²³ Ibid.

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III. THE ROADMAP TO NATO INTEGRATION

This chapter analyzes NATO-Albanian relation beginning from 1999, when Albania joined the (MAP), until 2008, when Albania was invited to join the Alliance at the Bucharest Summit. This period of time is characterized by an intensification of relations between NATO and Albania. The major foreign policy objective, NATO integration, became the word of the day, meaning that it influenced and guided government plans and programs. In this phase, Albania made painstaking efforts to leave behind its image as a security consumer and to emerge as a reliable partner contributing to the regional and broader security.

In the early 2000s, Albania developed the first National Security Strategy, which was followed by the Military Strategy. These two important documents emphasized collective defense and guided Albanian defense reforms toward a small, professional and deployable military force able to participate in or support NATO operations. The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the United States and the strong reaction of the Alliance to international terrorism represented a strategic chance for Albania to align itself with NATO. Albania committed itself to fight actively international terrorism both domestically and abroad. NATO-Albanian relations intensified, and cooperation against fighting terrorism became an important point. Albania's participation in ISAF increased until it became the biggest contributor compared to the population. In addition, Albania strongly supported the so-called "coalition of the willing" in Iraq and participated in Operation Active Endeavour.

In the domestic realm, Albania undertook such effective measures from the Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism as improving border control; destroying small weapons and excessive ammunition, which Albania had in over-abundance; improving the legal framework to prevent money laundering and to comply with international conventions against terrorism; and fighting organized crime and corruption.

This chapter explores the regional policy of Albania as a very important feature of the Euro-Atlantic integration. The chapter concludes with an assessment of NATO-

Albanian relations at the eve of Bucharest Summit, when Albania was invited officially to join the Alliance.

A. ALBANIA JOINS MAP

The Membership Action Plan was launched in April 1999 at the Washington Summit to assist democratizing states in Europe to meet NATO membership in criteria by providing advice, assistance, and practical support in all fields.¹²⁴ Although the invitation to join MAP does not necessarily guarantee NATO accession, the process helps aspiring countries to identify objectives and develop individual annual national programs tailored to their needs covering a wide range of areas—political, economic, defense, resource, security and legal.¹²⁵ The individual annual national program is reviewed and progress is assessed by the alliance, which, by the same mechanism, provides political and technical advice. Furthermore, MAP is a clearing house which helps coordinate assistance by NATO and member states to aspiring countries.¹²⁶

Albania was one of the first nine countries that were invited to join MAP in the Washington Summit in 1999. Albania took MAP very seriously and developed 10 cycles ANP that guided the reforms and the transformation of Albania until the invitation to start accession talks in Bucharest Summit in 2008.¹²⁷ The annual national plans reflected Albanian aspirations to build a solid democratic and constitutional state based on the rule of law and a free market economy. They aimed at conducting reforms to consolidate the democratic institutions while declaring open war on organized crime and corruption. Particular emphasis fell on continuing the defense sector reforms in order to establish democratic civilian control over the military and to prepare the Albanian Armed Forces to join the Alliance. The ANPs also stressed the importance of good relations with the neighbors, and the regional cooperation to foster peace and stability. The programs

¹²⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Membership Action Plan (MAP),” June 11, 2012, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_37356.htm.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ MAP is not a substitute for PfP and PARP mechanisms, which are crucial in assisting the partner countries to achieve interoperability with NATO forces and prepare their forces for possible future membership.

¹²⁷ Gërveni, “The Role of Armed Forces in Integration of Albania in NATO and EU.” 71.

emphasized that “the strategic goal of the country is its full integration into Euro-Atlantic structures¹²⁸ asserting Albania’s commitment to take active part in peace support operations and the fight against international terrorism.¹²⁹

Because the MAP process covered such a wide spectrum of reforms, it required the contribution and the coordination of efforts among several different institutions. The Ministry of Defense (MoD), the Ministry of Finance (MoF), the Ministry of Interior (MoI), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), were closely involved in the MAP process, coordinating regularly through an interagency working group. In 2000, a new directorate, responsible for developing Defense Policies for Euro-Atlantic Integration, was established at the Ministry of Defense. This directorate played a major role in setting integration objectives for the Armed Forces. An inter-ministerial committee on Euro-Atlantic integration, chaired by the prime minister, was established to oversee the MAP process.¹³⁰ MAP objectives were embedded in all governmental plans and programs. Parliament also was active in the process, which enabled the passing of a huge body of laws aimed at the harmonization of national legislation with NATO.

The MAP process helped Albania to identify the right integration objectives and improve plans based on the allies’ feedback and consultation. Kristaq Gerveni, the Director of Planning Directorate at the Albanian General Staff from 2003 to 2005, argues that Albania made very good use of the consultation mechanism with the alliance.¹³¹ Indeed, Albania was the first partner country to employ political consultation with NATO during Kosovo crises. This step accorded completely with the spirit of the alliance, which emphasized political consultation as one of the most important drivers of the alliance. Since then, Albania has used consultation extensively to fulfill integration objectives. For example the MAP 2000–2001 included consultation with NATO on political, military,

¹²⁸ Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Defense, *MAP: Annual National Programs of the Republic of Albania 1999–200: Annual National Program 2000–2001* (Tirana: Military Press and Publication Center, 2004).

¹²⁹ Abazi, “Defense Reform of the Albanian Armed Forces: Democratization and Transformation”

¹³⁰ Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Defense, *MAP: Annual National Programs of the Republic of Albania 1999–2005; MAP 1999–2000* (Tirana: Military Press and Publication Center, 2004).

¹³¹ Gerveni, “The Role of Armed Forces in Integration of Albania in NATO and EU,” 53–55.

resource and legal issues, including political consultation for the post-Kosovo conflict regional situation, political consultation on the Macedonian ethnic conflict with ethnic Albanians in 2001, continuing military consultation on the transformation of the Albanian Armed Forces, and the consultation on the harmonization of the national legal framework with NATO.¹³²

B. DEVELOPPING THE STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS

In 2000, Albania developed its first National Security Strategy (NSS). The document, in sharp contrast to the previous defense policies of the communist regime, was open and public. It also was oriented toward collective defense rather than focusing on individual national defense. The strategy identified the risks and threats to the national security in line with the threats perceived by NATO.¹³³ The strategy outlined, above all, extremist nationalism, political instability, organized crime, and WMD as the main threats to the national security. The same document stated that the rule of law, consolidation of democratic institutions, Euro-Atlantic and EU integration were crucial to national security.

The NSS stated that Albania did not have territorial disputes, had no enemies, and made no claims to redraw borders, but, instead, firmly believed that regional cooperation was needed to achieve peace and stability.¹³⁴ These arguments “determined Albania as a factor which ‘produces and exports security’ through the implementation of good neighborhood policy and regional dialogue.”¹³⁵ The 2000 NSS was developed in a difficult time—right after the curtailment of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, whose status remained still unresolved, and on the eve of the eruption of the ethnic conflict in Macedonia, which involved ethnic Albanians. However, the NSS, framed by NATO-

¹³² Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Defense, *MAP: Annual National Programs of the Republic of Albania 1999–2000: MAP 2001–2002* (Tirana: Military Press and Publication Center, 2004).

¹³³ Geron Kamberi, Elira Hroni and Besnik Baka, “A Road Map for a New National Security Strategy: Evaluation of risks threats and challenges,” *Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM): Centre for European and Security Affairs*, June 2011, 11.
http://idmalbania.org/sites/default/files/publications/national_security_document.pdf

¹³⁴ Law No. 8572, dated 27.1.2000 “For the Approval of the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Albania.”

¹³⁵ Kamberi. “A Road Map for a New National Security Strategy,” 11.

Albania political consultation, did not resort to individual measures to tackle the national security challenges. The NSS claimed no border disputes and advocated dialogue and regional cooperation as the only way to resolve disputes with neighbor countries.

Not surprisingly, the strategy identified terrorism as an important security threat not only to the international community but also to Albania itself, and it touted regional and international cooperation as the proper way to fight the organized crime, to achieve internal stability in order to deny terrorists the safe haven in Albania.¹³⁶ The strategy also acknowledged NATO's presence in the Balkans and southeastern Europe as very important for the peace and stability of the region. Ultimately, the 2000 NSS adopted NATO's security concept and signaled Albania's intent to reinvent itself as a "security provider" in the region and in the alliance.

In 2002 Albania adopted its first military strategy, completing the legal-documentary framework for the national defense. The military strategy was developed in line with NATO's country standards and in "full accordance" with the NATO's 1999 Strategic Concept.¹³⁷ The strategy articulated three main goals for the defense reform: first, to become a full professional army by year 2010; second, to create small but capable military force to defend the country and at the same time to be deployed in support of NATO operations; and third, to increase the defense budget every year by 0.1 percent of GDP in order to reach NATO requirement of 2 percent of GDP by 2010. The military strategy listed among the most important threats organized crime and terrorism, acknowledging the threat they pose to the state and its democratic institutions.¹³⁸ The military strategy 2002 denationalized defense by identifying and addressing the common threats, departing farther from the individual self-defense concept.

The NSS of 2004, called also "the strategy of integration," was focused thoroughly on the integration of Albania into the Euro-Atlantic structures as one of the

¹³⁶ Law No. 8572.

¹³⁷ *Membership Action Plan 2001- 2002*, 169.

¹³⁸ Law No.8930, dated 25.7.2002 "For the Approval of Military Strategy of the Republic of Albania," <http://www.ikub.al/LIGJE/207250010/Article-Per-miratimin-e-stradegjise-ushtarake-te-Republikes-se-Shqiperise-.aspx>

two pillars of Albania's diplomacy—the other being the EU integration. It lays out the transformation of Albania from security consumer to security provider. The strategy believes that “the level of the security of the country will be fostered by successfully accomplishing the programs and standards of PfP and Agreement of Stabilization and Association.”¹³⁹ The strategy states that the national issue will be achieved through Euro-Atlantic integration.¹⁴⁰

The NSS of 2004 has been criticized by security experts on the basis that it is a strategy of NATO integration rather than a pure national security strategy. The critiques go on to suggest that defense and security reform in Albania is driven by external actors mainly through the consultation mechanism, such as MAP, and prioritizes meeting NATO military standards rather than fulfilling Albania's security environment requirements or national interests.¹⁴¹ However, the critics proposed no other alternative. Indeed, Albania was not able to maintain a big army, able to defend its national interest in the region and assert itself as a regional power. On the other hand, Albania's vital national interests were being threatened by the regional instability. Albania could have been dragged in a regional war full of nationalist sentiments, similar to post 1990 ethnic wars in ex-Yugoslavia, which would have ruined the country and the region. Considering the weak position of Albania, the internal political instability, weak economy, limited military power and regional instability Albanian national interest were much better realized according to this strategy of integration.¹⁴² By replacing nationalism with integration, the hostility with cooperation, individual action with political consultation with NATO Albania showed maturity, reliability and emerged as a regional factor to the stability. By becoming part of the solution it had better chances to be heard in the international domain therefore to advocate its national interest.

¹³⁹ Ministry of Defense, *The National Strategy of the Republic of Albania* (Tirana: Military Press and Publication Center, 2005), 13.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 22.

¹⁴¹ Tobias Pietz, with Marc Remillard, “Brief 34: Defense Reform and Conversion in Albania, Macedonia and Croatia,” *Bonn International Center for Conversion*, 2006, 21.
http://www.bicc.de/uploads/tx_bicctools/brief34.pdf.

¹⁴² Pietz, “Brief 34: Defense Reform and Conversion in Albania, Macedonia and Croatia,” 21.

C. ALBANIA AND NATO AFTER SEPTEMBER 11 TERRORIST ATTACKS

The terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, were perceived as an assault on democratic values and principles the over world. In the 1999 Strategic Concept, NATO had already identified terrorism as a potential risk that could affect the security interests of the alliance.¹⁴³ However, the unimagined scale of the terrorist attacks, the superb international coordination, and the determination of terrorist organization to destroy democratic order put the fight against terrorism very high in NATO's agenda.

"On the evening of 12 September 2001, less than 24 hours after the attacks, and for the first time in NATO's history, the Allies invoked Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, the Alliance's collective defense clause."¹⁴⁴ On the same day, government leaders of NATO candidate states, the "Vilnius 10"¹⁴⁵ group, condemned the terrorist attacks against the U.S. and vowed to "undertake all efforts to combat the scourge of terrorism."¹⁴⁶ The document that was endorsed in the EAPC meeting "underscored that the terrorist attack was directed not only against one country but also against all nations supporting freedom, democracy and global security."¹⁴⁷

Albania, as part of the Vilnius Group, joined the EU countries in proclaiming September 14 a National Day of Mourning. On September 28, the Albanian Parliament adopted unanimously a resolution that firmly condemned the terrorist attacks in the U.S. soil. The resolution declared Albania's full support in the campaign against the terrorism and offered the use of Albania's entire airspace, ports and airport facilities to the anti-

¹⁴³ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "The Alliance's Strategic Concept 1999," April 24, 1999, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27433.htm.

¹⁴⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Countering Terrorism," May 23, 2012, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_77646.htm?

¹⁴⁵ Vilnius group "The Vilnius 10" group included Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, Macedonia and Croatia.

¹⁴⁶ "Vilnius 10 Group Condemns Terrorist Attacks on U.S.," *Baltic News Service*, September 12, 2001 <http://www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.nps.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/>.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

terrorism coalition.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, on 5 October at the Sofia Summit, the President of the Republic, Rexhep Meidani, declared that Albania was ready to cooperate with NATO, the United States, and the EU in the fight against terrorism; the country, acting as a “*defacto* member of the alliance, puts at the disposal of the anti-terrorism coalition its land, maritime and areal space.”¹⁴⁹ In addition, Albanian Prime Minister Ilir Meta declared:

[The] Albanian government fully supports the U.S. and British attacks against terrorist bases and infrastructure in Afghanistan as well as against the Taliban regime that supported terrorism. The Albanian government states once more that it has committed to the antiterrorist campaign all of its assets, but above all its political will and determination to stand firmly and permanently in support of Freedom and Democracy, civilization and progress.¹⁵⁰

At a meeting of the EAPC held on December 2001, Foreign Minister Arta Dade stated that Albania considered the attacks against the United States “as an attack against values Albania stands for.” Besides making the military infrastructure available for the anti-terrorist coalition, the foreign minister declared the availability of 500 special troops to be used eventually in counter terrorist operations—a significant promise made by a small country with very limited resources. However, the strategic importance of this promise far exceeded the military capabilities that it offered. It showed clearly a firm political consensus and will across the Albanian political forces and strong support by the public to contribute militarily to the collective defense of the values for which the alliance stands. This willingness is in fact what NATO was seeking from those countries seeking membership.

In the brief outline of the initial measures taken from the Republic of Albania in the framework of the action against terrorism, then Foreign Minister Dade noted that Albania will follow the fight against the international terrorism “in all its complexity,

¹⁴⁸ Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Defense, *MAP: Annual National Programs of the Republic of Albania 1999–2000: MAP 2001–2002* (Tirana: Military Press and Publication Center, 2004), 84.

¹⁴⁹ Arjan Konomi, “Shqipëria në Anën e Koalicionit Antiterrorist (Albania on the Side of the Coalition,” *AIM Tirana*, October 11, 2001.

¹⁵⁰ *MAP 2001–2002*, 85.

political, juridical, military and economic aspects.”¹⁵¹ She reassured the EAPC that the Albanian government was committed to “maximally increas[ing] its efforts to strengthen Albania's border control and to identify and prevent depositing, circulating, or transferring money by the foundations or individuals financing the terrorist actions exercise continuous control on bank assets.” She aptly pointed out the nexus that exists between organized crime and terrorism and stated that the fight against organized crime and illegal trafficking “assumes a special importance under the new circumstance.” She concluded that “fighting these threats is a must for the nations that aspire to freedom and democracy.”¹⁵²

Indeed, the Albanian government acted quickly to take steps to bolster anti-terrorist activities. For example, the Central Bank of Albania within one month from the terrorist attacks established a working group to investigate the possible presence of bank assets belonging to persons related to terrorist activities. In October 2001, five foreign citizens suspected of terrorist connections and several others were expelled from the Albanian territory.¹⁵³

In January 2002, the Albanian Parliament approved and enacted the National Plan against Terrorism to coordinate and bolter interagency efforts to fight terrorism in all realms. The plan was prepared by an inter-ministerial working group under the lead of the Ministry of Defense.

Many experts in the field aptly have criticized the engagement of the Ministry of Defense in leading positions, particularly in the planning aspect, while the Ministry of Interior is the ministry carrying out the most responsibilities.¹⁵⁴ However, it can be argued that the leading role of Ministry of Defense has two reasonable explanations. First, it has a symbolic value. By giving the leading role to the MoD, the government elevated the importance of the fight against terrorism to the level of the national defense.

¹⁵¹ Arta Dade, (Intervention by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania at the meeting of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, Brussels, December 07, 2001) http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-871BECC8-A8A70089/natolive/opinions_18930.htm.

¹⁵² Dade, Intervention at the meeting of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council.

¹⁵³ Woehrel, *Islamic Terrorism and the Balkans*, 7.

¹⁵⁴ Gjijnuri, *Albania's Counter Terrorism-Terrorism Policy Options*, 56.

Second, it was an organizational choice. The Ministry of Defense, thanks to NATO assistance, was by far more organized, reformed, and functional than the other ministries, especially the Ministry of Interior (called Ministry of Public Order), which at that time was struggling with reforms to fight corruption and to increase effectiveness.

The plan identified two main categories of terrorism: domestic and international. Domestic terrorism, which aims to destabilize the state and hamper the democratic transition, is further divided into two subcategories: terrorist acts executed in Albania by Albanian citizens supported by domestic forces and terrorist acts perpetrated by Albanian citizens supported by foreign forces. The plan divides international terrorism into two subcategories, too: terrorist acts perpetrated by foreigners in Albania and terrorist activities abroad perpetrated by Albanian citizens recruited by international terrorist organizations. Although the plan noted that no terrorist acts pertaining to the international terrorism category had been recorded yet, it drew attention to the potential threat of international terrorism based on the fact that from 1990 to 2000 the borders of Albania have been poorly controlled.

The plan aimed not only to bring counterterrorism measures to Western standards but also to improve the image of Albania in support of Euro-Atlantic integration. In the wake of the Prague Summit,¹⁵⁵ where NATO was expected to extend membership invitations to some of the candidate countries, Albania could not afford to be accused from some foreign media of being a safe haven for terrorist activities.

And these accusations were floated at the time, mostly by the Serbian and Macedonian intelligence services. The gist was that Tirana, in addition to being unable to control its borders and terrorist activities inside the country, was supporting Albanian terrorists operating outside Albania. Although such allegations were never proved, the Albanian government was concerned that they “appear to be accepted at face value in the West, where influential media echo[d] the allegations that Albania poses an Islamic threat to Europe.”¹⁵⁶ Albania feared that its religious composition, dominated by a Muslim

¹⁵⁵ NATO Summit held in Prague in November, 21–22, 2002.

¹⁵⁶ “Bin Laden and the Balkans: The Politics of Anti-Terrorism,” *ICG Balkans*, Report N° 1199 November 2001, 9.

majority, could be used not only by religious fundamentalists to extend their influence on the region but also by some neighbor countries that might want to portray Albania as a country that harbors, trains and supports terrorists.¹⁵⁷

As much as Albanian solidarity with its strategic ally,¹⁵⁸ this sensitivity to the reality and the perceptions of Albania's status as a Muslim-majority polity in Europe begins to explain the Albanian government's "overzealous efforts to eradicate all fundamentalist Islamic influences from the country" ensuring that no terrorist cell can operate from Albanian soil.¹⁵⁹ Yet, another reason is that Albania feared that any horrible terrorist acts would shift the attention of the West from the problems of small nations, such as Albania. Thus, in order to "prevent abandonment" from the West, national efforts were needed to improve the internal stability and security and embark on the same boat with the Allies in order to emerge as a reliable partner, which hopefully would accelerate the integration process.¹⁶⁰ NATO, through a statement regarding Balkans released at the Brussels Defense Ministers' NAC meeting, had made it clear that it "will ensure that NATO forces continue to pursue, within their current mandates and capabilities, actions against persons suspected to be terrorists, in coordination with appropriate civil authorities and other international organizations. The Alliance will remain engaged with local authorities to ensure that the region does not become a safe haven or way station for terrorist."¹⁶¹

At the same year, the KFOR COMMZ (W) was transformed into the NATO HQ Tirana, commanded by a Senior Military Representative who reported directly to the Commander Allied Joint Force Command Naples.¹⁶² NATO HQ Tirana's mission was to

¹⁵⁷ Council of Ministers Decision Nr.12 Dated 28.1.2002 "For the Approval of the National Action Plan against Terrorism."

¹⁵⁸ U.S. has been engaged actively in support of Albania's Euro-Atlantic integration.

¹⁵⁹ "Bin Laden and the Balkans: The Politics of Anti-Terrorism," 8.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹⁶¹ NAC Official Statement on the Balkans, issued at the Meeting of the NAC in Defense Ministers Session held in Brussels, June 6, 2002, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-56527528-A2CE70E9/natolive/official_texts_19563.htm.

¹⁶² Allied Command Operations, "NATO HQs Tirana," <http://www.aco.nato.int/page13612628.aspx> (Accessed 11 November 2012).

facilitate the coordination between the Albanian government and NATO and to assist Albania in the implementation of defense reforms geared toward future NATO membership. NATO HQ Tirana was deeply involved in many reforms and defense issues, providing advice, expertise, and assistance. Of particular note are their efforts to coordinate border control measures with the involvement of many agencies, their assistance and advice on Partnership Goals (PG), MAP, and ANPs, and on other defense- and integration-related issues. The cooperation between NHQ Tirana and the Ministry of Defense developed to a point that the NATO HQ representatives became permanent participants in MoD meetings.

This close coordination was doubly important. First, Albania was making excellent use of NATO's assistance and expertise by engaging its representatives in a wide variety of defense related issues. Second, NATO's involvement in depth with Albanian defense issues not only increased the transparency and the mutual trust between the MoD and the alliance but also provided the allies with a clear understanding of the problems and genuine efforts of Albanians in their path toward integration. Last, but not least NATO HQ Tirana had an outstanding Civil Military Cooperation CIMIC program, which included activities in support of the civilian population and which improved further the positive image of NATO in Albania.¹⁶³

Following the national policy for the maximal engagement and support to the Worldwide Anti-Terrorism coalition, in August 2002, Albania sent a Special Forces Platoon to Afghanistan. Participation of this contingent in the ISAF framework had full support from all political parties and the public opinion in Albania.¹⁶⁴ The personnel of this force were capable, trained, prepared, equipped and motivated to achieve the mission successfully. They served under the Turkish forces in Kabul, and their main missions were to provide base security and escorts.

¹⁶³ From 2002–2005 NATO HQ Tirana was involved in different activities in support of Civilian population in Albania such as providing air lift capabilities to transport food and medicines to the Northern Parts of Albania that were trapped by the bad weather, providing assistance to improve the local infrastructure and providing aid and donations to orphans, poor people, and schools.

¹⁶⁴ Ministry of Defense, *MAP: Annual National Programs of the Republic of Albania 1999–2005* (Tirana: Military Press and Publication Center, 2004), 69–136.

The decision of Albania to be part of ISAF without delay was consistent with Albanian foreign policy goals and the integration strategy. Certainly, the participation in ISAF was associated with many political risks and economic and social costs. First of all, there was the matter of Albania's Muslim majority. The ISAF operation was somehow different from the missions in Bosnia or Kosovo, where NATO was perceived as the protector of the rights of Muslim populations. ISAF was involved in fighting against the Muslim Taliban, which might have ramified within the Islamic community, especially if it were being radicalized. This is to say that at best, Albanian support for NATO integration could have decreased and at worst Albania could find itself a target of terrorism to be compelled to withdraw from the coalition. Moreover, ISAF involved greater risks in terms of casualties than the other Peace Support Operations PSOs in which Albania was participating.

Next, the participation in ISAF came at the moment when Albanian military was undergoing deep reforms with a very limited defense budget.¹⁶⁵ ISAF diverted valuable resources from modernization and reconstruction programs, not to mention the other pressing socioeconomic needs of the nation. Last but not least, the participation in ISAF could have resulted in total failure of the mission and national embarrassment, showing that Albania was not capable of providing military capabilities to the alliance. Taking into consideration the total disintegration of the army only five years ago, this concern too was entirely at that moment. However, Albanian government firmly decided to continue to pursue its major objective, Euro-Atlantic integration, aptly assessing that the benefits of participation in ISAF would outweigh the costs associated with it. Indeed, the cohesion of all political elites, the public attitude, NATO's assistance, and the outstanding efforts of the Albanian military would make ISAF participation in the coming years Albania's biggest PSO.

¹⁶⁵ In 2002 Albanian defense budget was 1.2% of GDP

1. The Prague Summit

Despite its enthusiastic and energetic approach to NATO integration, Albania was not invited to join the alliance at the Prague Summit 2002. As Albanian President Alfred Moisiu acknowledged later:

We are aware, however, that we will not be invited to join NATO simply because of the level of public support for Alliance membership or for our contribution to NATO-led peacekeeping operations. Rather, when we are invited to join the Alliance, it will be in recognition of much hard work and the successful conclusion of a long and comprehensive reform process to bring our standards in line with those of the Alliance.¹⁶⁶

According to Moisiu, “Albania's historical political and economic under-development, internal instability and wider conflict in Southeastern Europe undermined our membership aspirations at the Prague Summit.”¹⁶⁷

The Prague Summit did not discourage Albania, however. On the contrary, it bolstered Albanian efforts to meet political, economic and military membership criteria. By inviting seven other aspiring countries to assume full membership,¹⁶⁸ NATO showed Albania that its enlargement policy was not merely rhetoric but an achievable objective connected to fulfillment of membership criteria. Furthermore, at the Prague Summit, Albania was commended for “its significant reform progress, its constructive role in promoting regional stability, and strong support for the Alliance,” and was encouraged to “redouble their reform efforts” because together with Croatia and Macedonia it “remained under consideration for future membership.”¹⁶⁹

Secretary General Lord Robertson reinforced this message during his visit to Tirana just after the Prague Summit in November 2002. He stressed that the “latest wave

¹⁶⁶ Alfred Moisiu, “Albania’s Relationship with NATO and its Aspirations for Eventual Alliance Membership,” *NATO Review*, (Spring 2004), <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2004/issue1/english/special.html>

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia were asked to begin accession talks to join NATO in Prague Summit 2002.

¹⁶⁹ Prague Summit Declaration, (Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Prague on 21 November, 2002), <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2002/p02-127e.htm>

of expansion would not be the last,” and Albania “must do more to improve border security and stop the free movement of criminals and traffickers.”¹⁷⁰ With such encouraging words, NATO provided further incentive for Albania to continue vigorously pursuing its reforms. Prime Minister Fatos Nano said that the Albanian government understood that “in order to fully meet NATO's membership criteria it should continue doing its "homework" and he hoped to achieve this "over the next three years.”¹⁷¹

In addition to the successful round of enlargement, the Prague Summit was also important for the documents that were adopted related to the new security environment: the Prague Capabilities Commitment,¹⁷² a Military Concept for the Defense against Terrorism and the Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism.

The Military Concept emphasizes the real threat that the allies face from terrorism and draws attention to the point that any response would be time critical. Thus it suggests member nations have “the primary responsibility for defense of their populations and infrastructures, so the Alliance should be prepared to augment nations' efforts.”¹⁷³ The concept identifies four roles for NATO's military operations against terrorism: anti-terrorism, which includes basically defensive measures from terrorist acts; consequence management; counterterrorism, which includes primarily offensive measures; and military cooperation. The military concept urges NATO to “be ready to conduct military operations to engage terrorist groups and their capabilities, as and where required, as decided by the North Atlantic Council.”¹⁷⁴ It showed that the fight against terrorism would be one of NATO's top priorities for the coming years.

In addition, the alliance bolstered its cooperation with partners in the fight against terrorism by launching the Partner Action Plan against Terrorism (PAP-T). The

¹⁷⁰ “Robertson Tells Albania, Macedonia NATO Door Remains Open,” *SETime*, November 2002, http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2002/12/021202-SVETLA-001.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Prague Capabilities Commitment (PCC),” January 14, 2011, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50087.htm.

¹⁷³ NATO, “NATO's Military Concept for Defense against Terrorism,” June 8, 2010, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_69482.htm.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism (PAP-T) is an important part of PfP framework that uses political consultation and a wide variety of activities.¹⁷⁵ The PAP-T accords with fundamental freedoms and human rights, as well as upholding the rule of law in combating terrorism.¹⁷⁶

2. The Istanbul Summit

The summit declaration welcomed the progress made by Albania implementing the MAP, especially its contribution to regional stability and cooperation. NATO reassured Albania that the door to membership would remain open and “encouraged it to continue pursuing the reforms necessary to progress towards NATO membership.

The Istanbul Summit 2004 stressed even more the resolve of the alliance to fight the international terrorism. At this summit, NATO adopted a package of measures, to include improving intelligence sharing; increasing counter-terrorism cooperation through NATO's partnerships; enhancing capabilities to defend against terrorism and robust engagement in Afghanistan. Moreover, the Alliance was committed to continue “the robust efforts in the Balkans to help create conditions in which terrorism cannot flourish until peace and security were firmly established and the progressive integration of all Balkan countries into Euro-Atlantic structures was achieved.”¹⁷⁷

D. IMPROVING INTERNAL SECURITY AS A PATH TO NATO

The PAP-T, in reality, was a simple plan that, among other measures, put focus on improving the internal security of partner countries as a measure to impede support for terrorist groups. While Albania has never been a source of terrorist activities abroad, or a target of them, the fragile internal security increased the concern of NATO that Albania

¹⁷⁵ NATO. “The Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism.”

¹⁷⁶ Signing the PAP-T the partners agree to ratify all international conventions against terrorism and take national, sub-regional and regional measures to suppress terrorist activities. “These include inter alia political consultations; operations; issues of military interoperability; defense and force planning and defense reform; consequence management, including civil emergency planning; air defense and airspace management; armaments co-operation; border control and security; suppression of financing of terrorism; prevention of arms and explosives smuggling; science; and arms control and non-proliferation.”

¹⁷⁷ NATO, “NATO’s Policy Guidelines on Counter-Terrorism,” May 21, 2012, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87905.htm?selectedLocale=en.

might become a safe haven for terrorism. The geographic position of Albania, at the crossroads of West and East, coupled with weak borders control, weak state institutions, and consolidated organized crime, made it a favorable transitory place to all kinds of illegal traffics.

“Since 1992, ethnic Albanian organized crime groups have profited greatly from instability and war in the Balkans to become the fastest growing ethnic criminal presence in Europe. With operations reaching as far as Australia and the United States, Albanian groups are the direct distributors of an estimated 40 percent of heroin in West European markets and may have an indirect role in as much more.”¹⁷⁸ Other criminal undertakings included illegal immigration from Albania, Eastern Europe and Asia, human trafficking and illegal arms trade. “The illegal arms trade has been fed by an estimated 550,000 military weapons, nearly 1 billion rounds of ammunition, and 16 million explosive devices that were removed from military stockpiles during the rioting of 1997.”¹⁷⁹

NATO noted with particular concern the nexus between organized crime and extremism in the region. The alliance believed that fighting organized crime and providing effective border control and surveillance was the key of the door to Euro-Atlantic integration and to the development of prosperous and democratic stability.¹⁸⁰ NATO throughout its partnership mechanisms such as MAP, PfP, IPP assisted in identifying, planning and addressing these challenges accordingly respecting the rule of law.

1. Small Arms and Light Weapons Destruction

Albania and NATO began to cooperate closely on the destruction of the small arms, light weapons, and stockpiles of ammunition. Albania had inherited from the period of communist regime 194,000 tons ammunition, distributed in 182 regions and stored in 955 depots all around the country. The military reforms in post-communist

¹⁷⁸ U.S. Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, *Nations Hospitable to Organized Crime and Terrorism*, by LaVerle Berry, et al., (Washington, DC: October, 2003), 33.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 36.

¹⁸⁰ NAC Official Statement on the Balkans. 06 Jun. 2002.

Albania decreased the numbers of military units, ammunition depots, and personnel so the ammunition stockpile was stored in fewer depots, sometimes exceeding their storage capacities and breaching the standards of safety. Meanwhile, fewer guards stood duty amid the draw-downs. At the same time, the ammunition was fast approaching the end of its shelf life, making it increasingly unstable and dangerous to military personnel and the surrounding communities.¹⁸¹ Inventory of the stockpiles had become difficult, leading to unaccounted fire arms and ammunition that might end up in the hands of organized criminals or terrorists.

The looting of a large amount of fire arms and ammunition during the civil unrest in 1997 complicated the situation even more. “Around 550,000 military weapons, nearly 1 billion rounds of ammunition, and 16 million explosive devices were removed from military stockpiles during the rioting of 1997 which potentially might have fed the illegal traffic of arms”¹⁸² In the end, the Albanian government managed to reclaim a considerable amount of the errant weapons and ammunition, which still had to be accounted for.

In 2000, NATO established the PfP Trust Fund to assist PfP countries with the safe destruction of stocks of anti-personnel landmines.¹⁸³ Albania was the first country to take advantage of this initiative. In 2001, under a tailored PfP Trust Fund project, NATO provided the financial resources and technological training necessary to help Albania destroy its anti-personnel mine stockpile. The project was directed and managed by NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency (NAMSA) and included the cleanup of territories bordering Kosovo that had been littered with anti-personnel land mines during the Kosovo conflict and the destruction of stockpiled land mines. The project was a real success, destroying 1.6 million anti-personnel land mines.

¹⁸¹ Gërveni, “The Role of Armed Forces in Integration of Albania in NATO and EU.” 98.

¹⁸² U.S. Library of Congress, *Nations Hospitable to Organized Crime and Terrorism*, 33.

¹⁸³ The NATO PfP Trust Fund was established under 1997 Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines. Albania is signatory and ratified the convention in 2000.

Stemming from this success, the scope of the NATO/PfP Trust Fund Policy was expanded to include the destruction of small arms, light weapons, and surplus munitions.¹⁸⁴ Under NAMSA's management and with the financial assistance of allied countries, the period 2004–2007 saw the destruction of 11,500 tons of SALWs.¹⁸⁵ These projects helped Albania “achieve a high-degree of self-sufficiency in explosive ordnance disposal and ammunition management.”¹⁸⁶ This experience also made Albania one of the leading nations in the process of demilitarization with extensive expertise to offer to other countries. In fact, the demilitarization plan foresees that in 2013, Albania will have destroyed its entire excess munitions stockpile.

2. The First Country in the World without Chemical Weapons

In December 2002, some 16 tons of chemical agents that had belonged to the military during the communist regime came to light. The existence of these dangerous chemical agents has been unknown to the post-communist military leadership until their discovery. Albania quickly revealed the presence of these chemical agents in its territory, and took strict measures to store and guard the material. It also sought international assistance to destroy them.

The United States was prompt to offer cooperation and assistance for the disposal of the dangerous materials. In 2004, under the Nunn Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, the United States assisted Albania to realize the safe disposal of the entire amount of chemical agents turning Albania to be the first country in the world without chemical weapons.

3. Border Security and Illegal Trafficking

Because of its maritime proximity to Italy, Albania became “the starting-point for one of the world's busiest illegal-immigration routes.” The smugglers used fast boats to traffic human beings, illegal immigration, weapons, drugs, contraband goods, etc. into

¹⁸⁴ NATO Support Agency, “NATO Trust Fund Projects,” (n.d.), <http://www.nspa.nato.int/en/organization/logistics/LogServ/ntfp.htm>.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ NATO, “The Disposal of Albania's Anti-personnel Mine Stockpiles,” 2003.

Italy and the EU. Illegal immigration was such a normal activity in the early 2000s that the soon-to-be illegal immigrants boarded the fast boats near city centers as if they were merely going aboard a water taxi or a tour boat.¹⁸⁷ On the other hand, these activities generated incomes in a very poor country with a high unemployment rate.

Achieving the border security was important to improve the image of the country and convince NATO that Albania could contribute in the regional security. The campaign against international terrorism gave a certain impetus to improving border security. In November 2001, the council of ministers approved a National Strategy against the illegal trafficking of human beings. It identified the ways and means to prevent the illegal traffic. Albania sought closer cooperation among the countries of the region, believing that illegal trafficking represents a regional concern that demands a regional approach. At the end of 2001, in Vlora, the epicenter of illegal traffic in Albania, the International Center for Combatting Illegal Trafficking (ICCIT) was established with the participation of Germany, Italy, and Greece.¹⁸⁸

NATO's strict position on Border Security urged reforms, institutional transformation and interagency cooperation to ensure the border security. The transformation of the NAVY is a case in point. In 2002, the Albanian Navy assumed the mission of a coast guard. The Navy developed a web of memoranda of understanding with all the institutions that have interests at sea, establishing for the first time a coordinated plan to enforce the law at sea. It is important to note that the Navy was the first armed service to adapt to the new security challenges. In 2004, the Navy together with the other state agencies conducted its most successful operation to date, called "PUNA." During this operation, more than a dozen fast boats were intercepted or destroyed and some key criminals were arrested. Although it is unrealistic to claim that the illegal traffic was completely stopped, the operation was important not only for doing considerable damage to the international network but also for increasing the confidence

¹⁸⁷ "Adriatic Crossing, Unstoppable People- and Drug-Trafficking in the Balkans," *The Economist*, March 11, 2004, <http://www.economist.com/node/2504420>.

¹⁸⁸ Membership Action Plan, 2001–2002, 156.

of the state agencies and proving that interagency cooperation was key to law enforcement at sea.

Border security was further enhanced by the acceptance of the counterterrorism-related Partnership Goals (PG)s that were included in the PG package Albania accepted in 2004. PGs are interoperability objectives accepted by the partner country in order to develop capabilities that can be used to support or to be integrated with NATO forces.¹⁸⁹ Although the objectives are voluntary, they are important because first of all they test the commitment of the partner country to provide contribution in the alliance. PGs are included in the PARP process, which is similar to the NATO planning process, and the implementation progress is monitored closely. The PGs required that by 2006, all border patrol and coast guard vessels surveillance equipment be modernized, the personnel be trained to conduct boarding operations properly and a Communication & Information (CI) System be in place and able to share information with national and international security agencies.¹⁹⁰ In 2007, all these objectives were declared implemented.

The Navy embarked on a transformation plan that aimed to adapt to the concept “One Navy, two missions.”¹⁹¹ Accordingly, the Navy’s tasks increased, including among them the fight against terrorism, the fight against illegal trafficking, illegal immigration, search and rescue, etc. The plan foresaw the replacement of heavy gunned naval ships with new, fast, multipurpose ships able to be used in a wide range of operations. The modernization plan also included the procurement of a new and modern Integrated Sea Surveillance System to increase the Navy’s monitoring capabilities. Both projects were financed by the defense budget and cost around \$50 million.

¹⁸⁹ Astrit Gjunkshi, *NATO Integration and National Interest* (Tirana: Military Press and Publication Center, 2006), 17.

¹⁹⁰ Ministry of Defense, *Partnership Goals (PG)s* (Tirana: Military Press and Publication Center, 2006), 38–39.

¹⁹¹ The concept means that in addition to the traditional Navy mission to protect the sovereignty of the country the navy will also conduct law enforcement at sea.

4. Albanian Navy-CC MAR Naples Cooperation

The Navy emerged as the leading agency in the maritime security issues. It developed capabilities to ensure maritime situational awareness through promotion of regional cooperation, encouraging of interagency cooperation and modernization of assets. Due to these efforts it was able to exchange intelligence and reliable information with NATO. The Maritime Component Command (CC MAR) of Joint Force Command (JFC) Naples played a distinguished role in mentoring and supporting the Navy's transformation. CC MAR Naples through the Accession and Integration Working Group (AIWG) activities which include seminars, Mobile Training Teams (MTT), port visits etc advised and assisted Albanian Navy to transform according the NATO standards. CC MAR Naples introduced Albanian Navy with the Operation Active Endeavour (OAE), the ongoing counter terrorism maritime operation in Mediterranean. In 2007, the Albanian Navy and the CC MAR Naples signed an Operational Agreement for the participation of Albania in the OAE. According to the agreement Albania will share maritime information with CC MAR Naples.

CC MAR Naples assisted Albanian Navy to improve the Maritime Situational Awareness. In 2007 CC MAR Naples installed in Albania the first Automatic Identification System (AIS) transponder which transmitted via internet to the Operational Center in Naples real time data about the ship maritime traffic in Albania. At the same time a dedicated secure line was established to share sensitive information. The commitment to share maritime information with NATO gave a big impetus to the interagency cooperation. The navy led a dynamic campaign to promote interagency cooperation which was consolidated in the coming years.

5. Participating in Regional Initiatives in the Context of Euro-Atlantic Integration

Regional cooperation and initiatives were another way that NATO promoted the security of the region. Albania participated in a great number of bilateral and regional cooperation initiatives and agreements focused on enhancing security. Two regional initiatives were particularly important in fostering regional cooperation as part of the

process of Euro-Atlantic integration: US-Adriatic Charter-3 (A3) and South Eastern Defense Ministerial. Adriatic Charter-3 was signed in 2003 by Albania, Croatia, Macedonia and the United States. The charter, facilitated by the United States, aimed to increase the cooperation among the three NATO aspirant countries in order to coordinate their efforts toward Euro-Atlantic integration. The high level of cooperation achieved in this initiative is evidence of the progress these countries have made in adopting NATO methods and procedures of cooperation and political consultation.¹⁹²

One of the biggest achievements of the initiative was the contribution to the ISAF Operation in 2005 with a rotating joint medical team. Albania contributes to two doctors and two nurses to the team. This contribution has a symbolic value because first of all it shows the resolve of A3 countries to cooperate under the NATO-integration perspective. It also shows that the countries have reached the maturity to overcome regional issues and provide humanitarian assistance to distant countries. Finally the joint medical team showed that the countries, although their relatively small economies, *de facto* are able to raise capabilities to support NATO operations. The success of the initiative led to its enlargement in 2008 with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro.

6. Southeastern Europe Defense Ministerial (SEEDM).

SEEDM was established in 1996 when Defense Ministers of Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Macedonia, Turkey and the U.S. Defense Secretary met in Tirana to discuss and decide about effective ways for developing cooperation, common understanding and mutual confidence in the Southeastern Europe.¹⁹³ The initiative played a considerable role in promoting the Euro-Atlantic integration of NATO non-member countries which by cooperating with member countries in the framework of peace and security had another way to share experience, interact and show their determination to deserve the NATO membership. The initiative was able to develop several projects such

¹⁹² Gjunkshi, *NATO Integration and National Interest*, 20.

¹⁹³ Currently there are 14 full members and 2 observers.

as Military Support to WMD Counter-Proliferation, Border Security and Counter Terrorism (CBSC) Project.¹⁹⁴

However, the most representative feature of the initiative is the Multinational Peace Force Southeastern Europe commonly referring as (SEEBRIG). SEEBRIG's mission is to engage in conflict prevention operations or other operations in support of peace under an UN-mandated NATO-EU led missions. SEEBRIG is an infantry brigade composed by the forces from the SEDM countries. In 2004 the brigade was certified Full Operational Capacity (FOC) by a NATO assessment team and in 2006 was deployed in Peace Support Operation in Afghanistan as part of ISAF. The participation in Afghanistan is recognized as the greatest success of SEDM.

E. INCREASED EFFORTS IN THE PRE-INVITATION PERIOD

The change of the government after the 2005 elections did not change the strategic objectives of Albania's foreign policy. The new government program stated firmly: "[T]he integration in the Euro-Atlantic security structures is the primary strategic objective of the foreign policy of Albania. This priority is and will remain the priority of all governments."¹⁹⁵

In the Istanbul Summit NATO had welcomed the efforts made by Albania and encouraged Albania to do more to carry on reforms, to fight corruption and organized crime to provide border security and to respect the rule of law. The new government, which came to power with the slogan "Time to change,"¹⁹⁶ declared zero tolerance in the fight against corruption and organized crime. The Penal Code was amended and introduced tougher sanctions for crimes of corruption, organized crime and terrorism. Particularly special was the introducing of a three year moratorium which banned the use of fast boats in the coast of Albania in order to stop the illegal trafficking. Taking this extreme security measure, which obviously infringes the human rights and civil liberties, shows that border security was very high in the political agenda. The maritime

¹⁹⁴ SEDM, "SEDM Process in Brief," <http://www.seebrig.org/sedm/item/187-sedm-process.html>

¹⁹⁵ Gjunkshi, *NATO Integration and National Interest*, 15.

¹⁹⁶ "Time to change" meant fight against the organized crime and corruption to speed up integration process.

moratorium encountered some criticism by the opposition party and by representatives of the civil society but interestingly enough it was accepted largely by the population, which was willing to give up some freedom in order to achieve border security as a prerequisite to join the Euro-Atlantic alliance.

The government supported the Armed Forces Reforms and modernization plans keeping the promise to increase the defense budget annually until it reached the objective of 2 percent in 2008. The government financed major modernization project such as the Integrated Coastal Surveillance System, the four-large patrol boats project, C4I equipment, etc. The increasing of defense budget was another critical choice that the government had to make in order to prepare the Armed Forces to be interoperable with NATO.

The pre-invitation period was characterized by an intensification of NATO-Albania political and military relations. In 2006, Secretary General Scheffer visited Tirana. In his speech in the parliament he appreciated the reforms and stated that the allies saw the “seriousness and determination with which Albania is pursuing the necessary reforms in a very favorable light.”¹⁹⁷ He ensured the members of parliament that Albania’s integration was no longer a question of “if” but “when.”¹⁹⁸

In 2006, Prime Minister Sali Berisha visited Brussels to discuss Albania’s progress at the end of the eighth cycle of MAP. The Council of Ambassadors lauded Albania for its defense reforms and the strict measures against corruption, organized crime and illegal trafficking. Albania was also commended for its foreign policy, its role as a moderator in the security and stability of the region and its contribution in the fight against international terrorism. Prime Minister Berisha renewed the steadfast determination of the government to achieve NATO integration and told that an *ad hoc*

¹⁹⁷ Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, “Speech by NATO Secretary General,” (issued at the Albanian Parliament, July 6, 2006), <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2006/s060706a.htm>.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

NATO integration parliamentary committee was established in order to facilitate the process.¹⁹⁹

In 2007 Albania enhanced its contribution to ISAF with a company from the Rapid Reaction Brigade with 112 military personnel. At the end of 2007 Albanian Armed Forces engaged in international PSO in one single rotation reached 355 personnel or almost 6 percent of all operational land forces. This measure demonstrated that Albania was keeping its promise to become a security provider.

1. NATO-Albania Military Relations intensified

In the period 2005–2007, Albania hosted three major NATO-PfP exercises. In 2005, Albania hosted the Exercise “Cooperative Engagement,” the biggest ever conducted in the region, with the participation of 1500 military personnel, more than 20 ships and four helicopters from NATO and partner countries, which trained together in Crisis Response Operations.²⁰⁰ The exercise tested also Albania’s host nation capabilities and the public reaction to such a large NATO military presence in the country. The maritime exercise drew a lot of attention of the local population who visited the ships and participated in CIMIC activities. Amid this public enthusiasm the exercise seemed to be more than a simple political and military event.²⁰¹

In 2007, Albania hosted two exercises in the framework of the PfP called Cooperative Longbow 07 and Cooperative Lancer 07. Approximately 1,100 military personnel from seven NATO countries and 13 partner nations participated in the exercise. The objective of these exercises was to promote interoperability between NATO and Partner forces when conducting a complex and dynamic crises response operation.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Sali Berisha, Joint Press Point with NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, (issued on Brussels on January 30, 2007), <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2008/s080130a.html>.

²⁰⁰ NATO, “NATO Exercises with Partners in the Adriatic Sea,” September 12, 2005, <http://www.nato.int/ims/news/2005/n050912a.htm>.

²⁰¹ General Staff of Albania, “Cooperative Engagement’ 05’- not merely a Military Exercise,” <http://www.aaf.mil.al/mat.php?lang=AL&idm=109&idr=101>.

²⁰² NATO, “NATO Exercises with Partners in Albania: Initial Press Release Exercises Cooperative Longbow 07 and Cooperative Lancer 07,” <http://www.nato.int/fchd/fchdold/news/2007/n070918a.htm>.

In 2007, the Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2) conducted a port visit in Durres, Albania. Prime Minister Berisha noted the presence of the NATO ships in the port of Durres as another sign of excellent relations that Albania has established and is being consolidating more and more with NATO.²⁰³ The ships drew a lot of attention from the local people, who waited in long lines to visit the ships. The SNMG2 conducted many CIMIC activities including charity works and sport activities in order to establish close relations with the local community.

F. CONCLUSION

NATO-Albania relation intensified after Albania joined MAP. MAP proved to be a handy tool to guide and check Albania's plans and efforts in the integration process. The security documents that were adopted were developed under the supervision of NATO and were based completely on NATO's strategic concept. These documents made a realistic assessment of the security environment and chose the Euro-Atlantic integration and regional cooperation as the best way to achieve peace and stability in the region. The post-September 11 events marked a closer cooperation between NATO and Albania. Albania successfully adapted to the new security environment and to changes that NATO itself was undergoing. Albania did not hesitate to embark on the fight against international terrorism showing the alliance that it was ready to contribute to the collective security. Albania used political consultation with NATO and embarked on deep reforms in order to improve the internal security, fight organized crime, illegal trafficking. It made good use of NATO advice and assistance to dispose the large amount of ammunitions inherited from the old regime denying the criminals and the terrorist to get them. The military reforms transformed the military in a modern professional one focused on joint concept and interoperability with NATO. The military adapted successfully to the new missions and developed capabilities to conduct operations against terrorism and crises response operations.

²⁰³ "PM Berisha Meets the Commander of SNMG2, Rear Admiral Ertugrul," March 3, 2008, <http://lajme.shqiperia.com/lajme/artikull/iden/101575/titulli/Kryeministri-Berisha-takon-Komandantin-e-Grupit-te-dyt1105-te-anijeve-t1105-NATO-s-SNMG2-Kunderadmiralin-Sinan-Ertugrul>.

Regional Euro-Atlantic prospective provided the incentive to regional cooperation to foster mutual confidence and understanding. The biggest success of these initiatives was developing joint capabilities to deploy in NATO led crises response operations. The public and political support to the integration process has been unsheltered. This explains some extreme measures taken to improve border control in the face of human rights, such as the maritime moratorium. In the view of the fight against terrorism NATO-Albania relations helped improve the internal security through consultation, advice, technical assistance and planning. The soft power of the Alliance and the democratic values it represents influenced the public to identify terrorism as national threat and condemn it. It is interesting the fact that in a study conducted in 2008 terrorism was listed second major threat to the security in a country which never experienced serious terrorist acts.²⁰⁴ The emphasis that the government and the West put on the fight against international terrorism might be a reasonable explanation for this though. All these listed above denied terrorists to use Albania as a safe heaven. On the other hand, Albania was able to contribute to the alliance modest but symbolically important military contingents showing understanding of the alliance spirit and collective security concept.

²⁰⁴ “Albanian Perceptions on NATO Integration,” *Institute for Democracy and Mediation*, 2007, 35.

IV. ALBANIA IN NATO

Secretary General Scheffer, in his speech at the Albanian Parliament in 2006, stated that “NATO enlargement was a performance-based process.”²⁰⁵ But he also clarified that once Albania had done what was expected from it, NATO would keep its own part of the deal, opening its doors.²⁰⁶ Scheffer with these words actually gave a clear positive message for Albania that joining NATO for Albania “was no longer a question of ‘if’ but of ‘when.’”²⁰⁷

In the event, Albania received the invitation to join NATO at the Bucharest Summit in 2008, thereby realizing one of its two major foreign policy goals. (The other, as yet in progress, is joining the EU.) The accession protocol was signed in July 2008. After the ratification of the accession protocol by the parliaments of each member state, in 2009, Albania was warmly welcomed as member, together with Croatia, at the Kehl/Strasbourg NATO summit.²⁰⁸

The NATO invitation was a major historical event for Albania. The euphoric words of the Albanian PM Sali Berisha at the Bucharest summit—“This is a miracle of freedom” —indeed convey the enthusiasm of the people of a country that, less than two decades earlier under a ruthless communist regime, had used all of its resources to defend itself against NATO, at least as the old leadership had understood the organization. Certainly the Alliance put a lot of trust in inviting Albania to join the Alliance, which is in fact, one of the qualities of the Alliance. Berisha, remarked on this trust, and called it the “great responsibility of my nation toward your nations.” Berisha solemnly vowed “to carry out every reform, adopt and implement any decision and law to reach and

²⁰⁵ Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, “Speech by Secretary General,” (Speech held at the Albanian Parliament, Tirana, Albania, July 6, 2006), <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2006/s060706a.htm>.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Elmaz Leci, “Albania in NATO from strategy to reality,” <http://www.albatlanta.com/webpub/publications/viewpub.asp?ID=1436>.

consolidate the political, social, economic and military standards of NATO member states.”²⁰⁹ In reality that was what both NATO and the people of Albania wanted to hear.

Several studies agree that joining NATO provides incentive for some countries to speed up reforms and achieve integration objectives. However, there is a general belief that once the country enters the Alliance and the “carrot” disappears, the commitment to reform dwindles, as well. Albania showed a strong commitment to fulfill membership conditions. The path was difficult because Albania had to embark on significant reforms in several sectors to consolidate democracy and revamp the defense sector. An important achievement was the establishment of a positive image of Albania as a security factor in the troubled region of Balkans and in the fight against terrorism. More importantly, Albania retained its high level of motivation where NATO-related reform is concern, and the process of modernization, westernization, democratization, and integration continues apace. As Scheffer noted, although there was still a lot of work to do in many areas, Albania’s sustained and earnest determination to act in the spirit of Alliance was seen in a very favorable light by the allies.²¹⁰ This chapter explores this final stage of Albania’s journey to NATO—which also may be understood as the phase of complete Euro-Atlantic integration and democratic consolidation. It looks at the real costs and benefits of membership for Albania, as well as the trends and developments that may continue—and those that may change—in the years to come.

A. COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Interestingly, no comprehensive cost-benefit analysis was done until Albania received the NATO invitation. Even then, the analysis was kept at the academic and expert level and was not explained to the public. A survey carried out by an IDM team from March to May 2007 and sponsored by NATO identified a “NATO-friendly Albanian audience which [was] quite optimistic about the process of NATO integration in the country.” However, the survey suggested that the public was not well informed on NATO integration process:

²⁰⁹ Sali Berisha, “Address by Prime Minister Berisha at NATO Bucharest Summit,” Weekly News, no.44, April 2008, 3, <http://www.km.gov.al/skedaret/44.pdf>.

²¹⁰ Scheffer, “Speech by Secretary General,”

Yet, high levels of “DON’T KNOW” answers and other inconsistencies particularly with regard to factors influencing security matters or consequences deriving from the NATO integration process lead to the conclusion that respondents often offer their support to “what’s necessary” for membership without giving too much thought to technicalities of the process.²¹¹

The same issue was raised at the Regional Conference the Costs and Benefits of NATO Membership held in Tirana in May 2008. At the conference, it was pointed out that the expected NATO membership of Albania and other countries of the Adriatic Charter was taking place in a process not very well understood not only by the public but also by such important actors as the private sector, academia, and the media.

In Albania, the public discourse focused more on the positive sides of the membership. The politicians very seldom mentioned the costs of the membership, while the media focused on political issues and other concerns related to efforts in the framework of NATO integration. There might be two reasons for this tendentious coverage. First, there was massive public support and enthusiasm to join NATO—so much so that, in reality, there was little room for a detailed discussion of the costs and benefits of NATO membership. For the majority of the Albanian people NATO membership meant joining the West, and the obvious, if ill-defined, benefits clearly outran any costs. Second, because joining NATO was so popular, politicians did not want to risk losing favor by digging into the costs of it. Not surprisingly, the government’s slogan at that time was “membership at any cost.” The result was a curiously uninformed public discourse at all levels. For example, while the public fully supported Albania’s membership in NATO, a vocal segment of the population opposed the 2 percent of GDP level for the defense budget that NATO membership presupposed.²¹²

²¹¹ Gjergji Vurmo and Enis Sulstarova, “Albanian Perception on NATO Integration,” Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM): Centre for European and Security Affairs, June 2007, 15, <http://idmalbania.org/sites/default/files/publications/albperceptiononnatointegrations.pdf>.

²¹² Ibid., 31.

1. The Costs of NATO Membership

It is possible to identify two categories of costs associated with NATO membership: defense-related direct costs and indirect non-military costs.

Defense-related direct costs are those that are related directly with the accession of Albania to the Alliance, including the cost of defense reforms needed to provide the contribution of Albania in the collective defense and other NATO missions and operations.²¹³ These costs include:²¹⁴

- The membership cost. This is the country's financial contribution that goes to the common budget of the Alliance. For Albania, it is estimated to represent 0.05 percent to 0.1 percent of the NATO budget—about \$2.5 million.
- The cost of maintaining the defense budget: The member country is expected to maintain a defense budget equal to 2 percent of its GDP. This rate is needed to develop defense capabilities to defend the country and capabilities to contribute to NATO missions. The defense budget is important to sustain the modernization of the armed force according to the NATO standards.
- The cost of participating in NATO operations. This category includes the cost of equipping training, deploying, providing logistics, establishing command and control for the troops participating in NATO operations. Until present Albania covered only 20 percent of this cost while the remaining amount was covered by ally countries. Albania is expected to cover 100 percent of this cost as NATO member.
- The cost of the civilian and military representation in NATO HQs and other structures. There are around 40 positions for military and around the same number of positions to be filled by civilians. Their salaries and other expenses relating to their job are covered by the country.

²¹³ Shkëlqim Cani and Merita Shehu, "Albania's Cost of NATO Membership," in *Costs and Benefits of NATO Membership: The Challenges of Albania and the Region after the Bucharest Summit*, (Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation, 2008), 36.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 37-49.

- The cost of participating in NATO activities such as NATO exercises, seminars, workshops and trainings that are required to achieve the interoperability with the Allies. The cost of participation in these activities before the membership has been covered by the Alliance.
- The cost of development of infrastructure in order to fulfill the requirements of the host nation. The member state is required to offer its infrastructure to be used by NATO if needed. This infrastructure should meet the standards of the Alliance.

These direct military costs are a burden on the economy of the country. Let's not forget that although the economic development of the recent years Albania remains one of the poorest countries of Europe with the lowest GDP per capita. The money of the taxpayers that might be needed for building hospitals, schools, or improve the economy is going to defense. This is even harder to explain in the absence of an immediate external threat to the national security. About 90 percent of the participants in a survey think that the external threat to Albania is very low.²¹⁵ Some of them think that we don't need to spend much on defense because we are protected by NATO. This is the public should be informed on the requirements that should be met, the cost and the benefits of the NATO membership.

In addition to defense related costs that are easier to calculate there is another category of costs, namely indirect-nonmilitary costs. These costs are hard to evaluate because they implicate political and social aspects.

- The NATO membership limits the sovereignty of the member country and making it subject of collective defense decisions is a political cost.
- Another political cost might be the loss of public support due to participation of troops in NATO PSO, or other operations. In case of casualties the public pressure on the government is expected to increase.
- A political cost might be also the likelihood of targeting Albania because of her support to NATO missions. For example, the support of Albania to the fight

²¹⁵ Vurmo and Sulstarova, "Albanian Perception on NATO Integration," 17.

against terrorism is well known internationally. This might turn it into a target for the terrorists trying to force the people to stop the public support to government's anti-terrorism policies.

- The NATO membership will require the implantation of many reforms and measures to ensure the implementation of law, tax collection, customs control, and border control. Tough measures are taken to fight corruption organized crime. All of these measures are associated with considerable costs.
- The abolition of the informal economy the short term will have social implications to the small businessmen who make their living based on the informal economy.
- The defense reforms aim to create small professional armed forces. This means that many military personnel have to leave the military. This fact has negative implications on social security schemes and on the integration of these middle aged ex-military personnel.

Many observers think that the cost of membership in terms of financial expenditures is not an extra cost to the budget of the country because that cost, or even greater, would have been spent anyway for the defense of the country.²¹⁶ Saying that, national security experts put forward that taking into consideration the poor economy, the limited resources of the country, the backward military technology, the regional instability and the nature of the 21st century threats it would have been very hard to protect the national interest.

2. The Benefits of NATO Membership

The benefits of NATO membership encompass a wide range of fields from defense and security sectors to economic factors. For one example, Albanian national interest is related to the protection of the rights of ethnic Albanians living in five different

²¹⁶ Sherefedin Shehu, "Albania's Cost of NATO Membership," (Speech by the Deputy Minister of Finance held at the regional conference Costs and Benefits of NATO Membership: The Challenges of Albania and the Region after the Bucharest Summit, Tirana, Albania, May 2008) in *Costs and Benefits of NATO Membership: The Challenges of Albania and the Region after the Bucharest Summit*, (Tirana:Institute for Democracy and Mediation, 2008), 14.

countries in Balkans: Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. The ethnic conflicts of Kosovo and Macedonia involving ethnic Albanians thus posed a substantial threat to the Albanian national interest. NATO's intervention in both cases kept Albania out of involving itself directly in a bloody, endless regional war, for which the Balkans had won a bad reputation. It is true that Albania, today, does not recognize an external threat to its national interest but this happy fact is partly thanks to the stability that Euro-Atlantic perspective has brought to the region. That is, NATO membership brings stability to the region and serves the national interest.

NATO has guided and continues to assist Albania throughout the reform of its security sector in order to achieve full integration. Through the strategic concept and other NATO strategic documents, Albania can identify such new threats to its security as terrorism, and fight against them collectively with the Allies. Civilian control of the military ensures the development of the fragile democracy, even in times of acute domestic unrest. The armed forces' transformation, modernization, and training with the Allies continue, making them able to face the threats and challenges of our time.

In addition, being part of the most powerful security organization based on democracy and the respect for human rights improves the image of the country. It guarantees to neighboring countries that Albania is a stable democracy able to cooperate to improve the security in the region. In economic terms, it guarantees foreign investors can make safe investments in the economy of Albania.²¹⁷ It also attracts more tourists who are eager to visit a country that is rich in natural, historical, and archeological attractions but that is also safe.

The rosy glow of NATO membership radiates beyond Albania's border in terms of a positive image of the state and its government as an international partner. Albania, after membership, has a stronger voice in the realm of international relations. Albania has been invited to join countless regional and international security, economic, and cultural, initiatives and agreements, increasing its cooperation with the international community.

²¹⁷ Romania and Bulgaria reported increment of foreign investments right after joining NATO.

Gërveni, "The Role of Armed Forces in Integration of Albania in NATO and EU"

A good indicator of the improvement of the international positions of Albania is its successful lobbying for the international recognition of independence of Kosovo. At present Kosovo's independence is recognized by 94 states, of which 22 are EU members, while 24 are NATO countries.²¹⁸

Additionally NATO membership provides solid support to the relatively new democracy of Albania by urging it to complete the legal reforms to establish a full consolidated democracy. By submitting part of the national sovereignty to the Alliance of Democracies in fact Albanians receive some kind of warranty that the ruling political parties will take all measures needed for the process of democratization.²¹⁹ Furthermore, NATO membership is seen as an important and indispensable step before achieving the other major objective of the government: joining the EU. Most of the reforms required by NATO are also conditions set by the EU. With NATO membership, the chances of Albania to join the EU are doubled.

Finally there is a moral benefit for Albania as well. As, Deputy Minister of Defense, Arian Starova, put it:

...it is the special consideration all the Albanians have with regard to the NATO intervention in Kosovo in the year 1999 to give an end to the genocide atrocities of the Milosevic's regime against the Albanians there [and] being conscious of their historic sufferings Albanians in turn want to play their gratifying role for the freedom and security of the other peoples...²²⁰

This quote complements the explanation of wide support for Albanian contribution to NATO PSO—but makes the Albanian reluctance to publicize the points in cost-benefit terms even more mystifying. In the end, a cost-benefit analysis not only would have underscored even more the importance of the membership, but also would

²¹⁸ Greece, Spain, Romania and Slovakia are the only NATO countries which don't recognize Kosovo yet.

²¹⁹ After suffering 45 years in a totalitarian communist regime and almost 20 years in a difficult transition to democracy there is not too much faith in the political parties. Political parties often try to earn western support in order to make themselves reliable in the eyes of the public. In this case NATO plays an increased role in the internal stability of the country.

²²⁰ Arian Starova, "Albania – a Determined Member of NATO," *Common Defense Quarterly*, 2010, <http://www.commondefensequarterly.com/archives/CDQ9/albania.html>.

have helped Albanians understand the process better, laying the groundwork to achieve the standards more easily.

B. ALBANIA KEEPS ITS PROMISES TO NATO

One of the concerns of the Alliance about enlargement is that new members tend not to keep the same level of commitment and contribution after they “graduate” from candidacy to full membership. This was the case with the seven countries that joined NATO in 2005. In contrast, Albania pressed on with its NATO involvement, increased the range of engagements in NATO operations and increased the quantity and the quality of its contribution according to the Alliance principle of “burden-sharing.” This perseverance justified Albania’s listing among the five members that set an example in fulfilling their membership obligations.²²¹

1. Enhancing Contribution to ISAF

Almost one year into its NATO membership, Albania sent to Herat, under Italian command, another company composed of 110 personnel from its elite army Commando Regiment (RRB). With this enhancement, the number of Albanian military personnel engaged in mission in Herat in one single rotation reached 220 while the total number of servicemen engaged in Herat since 2007 over passes 1700.²²²

In August 2010, Albania contributed for the first time to ISAF with a contingent of 45 members of Special Forces Battalion of the Army. The contingent, named “Eagle,” served as part of the U.S. Army 525th Brigade and participated in direct combat operations in Kandahar. This mission was a considerable political risk taken by the Albanian government. The fact that, until then, there were no casualties for Albanian personnel participating in PSOs owed mostly to the nature of the missions, which were not very exposed to combat operations. Moreover, this engagement in direct combat missions in Afghanistan might have backfired on Albania in terms of hostility by Islamic

²²¹ Hysen Hoxhalli, “Albania’s NATO Membership: Approach and Reality,” *Mbrojtja*, No. 11, 2006, 20 – 25.

²²² Ministry of Defense of Albania, “Ongoing Peacekeeping Operations,” (n.d.), http://www.mod.gov.al/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=103&Itemid=667 (accessed November 10, 2012)

extremists to Albanian troops in Afghanistan or to Albania more generally. (Albanian soldiers had won a good reputation in Iraq and Afghanistan not only due to their common culture and religious values but also because of their nature of their non-combat-engagement there.) In this context, this decision of the Albanian government was a real courageous one.

“Eagle 1” was a real military and political success. Albanian personnel were praised by their allied counterparts for their professionalism and bravery.²²³ The Albanian Army showed that it was able to conduct substantially much more difficult missions reliably. At the same time, Albania demonstrated that it was able to take political risk and respect its collective security obligations. The “Eagle” missions continue in six-month rotations. More than 150 elite military personnel served in “Eagle” missions in Kandahar.

In August 2011, Albania increased its contribution to the ISAF mission; with 20 military personnel in the Operational Mentoring Liaison Team (OMLT) deployed to Kabul.²²⁴ The mission of this OMLT is to train, support, and develop a Support Combating Battalion of the Afghan National Army (ANA) capable of a wide spectrum of operations at the battalion level. To date, more than 50 Albanian military personnel are engaged in OMLT joined teams. In addition, Albania provided representatives in several missions related to ISAF, such as the NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan, the Provincial Reconstruction Team, ISAF HQs, A-5 POMLT under the A-5 Charter, and so on.

Albania is one of the largest troop contributors to ISAF as a percentage of population and GDP. Since July 2003, more than 2600 military personnel have been engaged in ISAF operation.²²⁵ This sum equals about 20 percent of the total number of the armed forces. In addition to its military contribution, Albania at the Bratislava NATO

²²³ “Gjenerali Petreus: Ushtarët Shqiptarë në Afganistan, Trima,” *National News Agencies*, January 18, 2011,

²²⁴ Joint team with the National Guard of the State of New Jersey.

²²⁵ Ministry of Defense of Albania, “Minister of Defense’s Visit in Afghanistan,” January 18, 2011, http://www.mod.gov.al/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=104:ministri-mbrojtjes-arben-imami-zhvillon-nje-vizite-ne-afganistan&catid=171&Itemid=544

Ministerial, held in October 2009, committed itself to provide non-military assistance to Afghanistan, as well. These measures included providing trainers to assist the development of the Afghan military and police force, sending a medical team to assist the civilian population, reconstructing or building eight schools in poor regions of Afghanistan, and providing 100 scholarships to Afghan students who would like to study at Albanian universities.²²⁶

This non-military assistance to Afghanistan drew international attention, particularly the measures to improve education in Afghanistan. The Deutsche Welle asked Minister of Defense, Arben Imami, to explain the decision to finance education in Afghanistan while it is well known that Albania needs to improve its own education infrastructure, too.²²⁷ Minister Imami explained that, first of all, Albania as a NATO member had some obligations to fulfill.²²⁸

2. Maintaining a Stable Defense Budget

Albania also kept its defense budget at a steady 1.5 percent of GDP. This commitment was a difficult one in light of the global economic crises. In 2011, only two NATO members passed the 2-percent NATO objective, while 17 countries were below 1.5 percent, showing a decreasing trend in the last years.²²⁹ The Albanian Armed Forces continued such modernization projects as building three additional “Iliria”-class patrol boats and the procurement of five multi-role “Cougar” helicopters from Eurocopter—both significant outlays in a time of financial pressure from all sides. Moreover, the project of building a self-sustainable battle-group battalion, able to participate in NATO mission by 2014, proceeds according to the plan.

²²⁶ Ministry of Defense of Albania, “Interview with Mr. Arben IMAMI, Minister of Defence of the Republic of Albania for the magazine ‘Coalition’ (published at the nr. 70 of the magazine ‘Coalition’), http://www.mod.gov.al/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=365:intervista-e-z-arben-imami-minister-i-mbrojtjes-i-republikes-se-shqiperise-dhene-revistes-coalition&catid=99&Itemid=475.

²²⁷ “Kontributi i Shqipërisë në Komplex në NATO,” *Deutsche Welle*, November 23, 2011, <http://www.dw.de/kontributi-i-shqiperise-n%C3%AB-shqiptare-m%C3%AB-kompleks-pas-an%C3%ABtar%C3%ABsimit-n%C3%AB-nato/a-4919856-1>.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Financial and Economic Data Relating to NATO Defense,” 2012, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_85966.htm?mode=pressrelease.

3. Passing the “Casualty” Test

“NATO commanders have found it increasingly difficult to persuade members to stay in Afghanistan in the face of mounting death tolls and domestic opposition.”²³⁰ For example, France ended its combat mission in Afghanistan earlier than planned after a series of killings of French soldiers.²³¹ Italy, Slovenia, and Poland also withdrew their troops amid domestic pressure after the death toll among their soldiers rose.

Albanian military personnel had suffered no casualties in 16 years²³² of engagement in PSOs. The limited exposure to combat operations partly accounts for that. This luck did not hold for Albania’s involvement in Afghanistan. In February 2012, Albanian Captain Feti Vogli was shot dead and Corporal Aleksander Peci was severely wounded after an Afghan policeman treacherously opened fire on them. They were part of the “Eagle 4” contingent and that day they were on a reconnaissance mission together with their American counterparts in Spin Boldak, Kandahar. Their mission was to provide protection to intelligence officers who talking with locals about how to open a school and a medical center in a village.²³³

The news of the death of the Special Forces captain shocked the whole county and received unprecedented media coverage. Captain Vogli was honored with the highest medal, the “Martyr of the Nation.” The whole population of Albania united to pay homage to him. The highest state representatives, the President of the Republic, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Parliament, Ministers, political party leaders, ambassadors,

²³⁰ “Italy to withdraw Troops from Afghanistan,” *The Telegraph*, October 12, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/italy/8059786/Italy-to-withdraw-troops-from-Afghanistan.html>.

²³¹ “France ends Afghan Combat Mission Early,” *BBC News*, November 20, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20417134> (accessed November 28, 2012)

²³² Albania’s first engagement in PSO was in SFOR Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1996.

²³³ “Letra nga Afganistani zbardh Sulmin kundër Voglit: U Vra Pabesisht nga Polici Afgan” *MAPO*, (January 2012), <http://www.mapo.al/2012/02/26/letra-nga-afganistani-zbardh-sulmin-kunder-voglit-u-vra-pabesisht-nga-polici-afgan/>.

representatives of religious communities thousands of military personnel and citizens paid tribute and bowed before of the lifeless body of Captain Vogli.²³⁴

Prime Minister Berisha declared solemnly that “his soul [would] rest on the altar of liberty of both the Albanian and Afghan nations for which he sacrificed his life.”²³⁵ Chief of General Staff Major General Xhemal Gjunkshi praised Vogli for serving with bravery and fortitude and honoring his flag and nation.²³⁶ The Minister of Defense, Arben Imami, said that “the heroic act of Captain Feti Vogli, makes the Armed Forces personnel feel proud before the people and Nation.”²³⁷ Opposition leader Edi Rama also expressed gratitude for his highest patriotic service.²³⁸ He saw the ultimate sacrifice of Captain Vogli as “an invaluable contribution of the small Albania for the big democratic world.”²³⁹

This positive—and unified—political and public reaction to the first loss of life of military personnel in a PSO operation is closely related to at least two factors. First, there is a strong belief that the participation of Albanian troops in ISAF serves the right cause of the free world in the fight against the terrorism. Second, thousands of years of Albanian history pay great tribute and honors to those who bravely fall in the line of duty, fighting for a just cause.

Prime Minister Berisha, in a phone call with General John Allen, Commander of ISAF, assured the American commander that the Albanian Armed Forces and the Albanian government continue to believe strongly that ISAF troop will fulfill

²³⁴ Ministry of Defense, “Captain Feti Vogli, ‘Martyr of the Nation’, Escorted to the Last Dwelling,” February 24, 2012, http://www.mod.gov.al/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1279:percillet-ne-banesen-e-fundit-deshmori-i-atdheut-kapiten-feti-vogli&catid=291&Itemid=628

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Chief of General Staff General Major Xhemal Gjunkshi, (Speech held at the homage ceremony of Captain Vogli), http://www.mod.gov.al/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1279:percillet-ne-banesen-e-fundit-deshmori-i-atdheut-kapiten-feti-vogli&catid=291&Itemid=628

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ “Sulmi në Afganistan, vdes 1 Komando Shqiptar, Tjetri në Koma,” *Balkanweb*, February 20, 2012 <http://www.balkanweb.com/shqiperi/2685/sulmi-ne-afganistan-vdes-1-komando-shqiptar-tjetri-ne-koma-82111.html>

²³⁹ Ibid.

successfully its historical mission; more importantly, he declared that Albania is dedicated to continue its contribution to this mission.²⁴⁰ In the same vein, General Xhemal Gjunkshi, in a phone call with General Martin Dempsey, U.S. Military Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated that “the heroic fall of Captain Vogli did not shake the determination of Albania to participate in PSO operations [alongside] the U.S. allies.”²⁴¹ At the NATO Chicago Summit, held in May 2012, Prime Minister Berisha repeated Albania’s commitment to keep its troops in Afghanistan as long as NATO was there—if necessary even beyond 2014.”

4. Consultation with NATO, Warranty for Democracy

The helpful and well-tried practice of consultation with NATO on sensitive issues continued even after Albania acceded to full membership. It is understandable that member countries should consult each other on daily basis on various issues. However, two issues—and the public attention that the Albanian- NATO consultations received—suggest that in this case, consultation has an added value.

In 2010, the Albanian government prepared a draft amendment for the Law on the Intelligence Service. Broadly stated, the general reason for the amendment was to increase the efficiency of the Intelligence Service by giving more control to the government. The draft amendment generated a heated political debate in Albania, which tends to take a dim view of the Intelligence Service, as is the case in all ex-communist countries. Giving more control over it to the Prime Minister was viewed very skeptically by a public wary of a political police force. Not only the opposition party, but also government coalition parties refused to vote on the law without first consulting with NATO on the draft amendment.²⁴² The draft amendment was suspended. Since then, NATO’s answer or comments to the draft have not been made public, but NATO

²⁴⁰ “Sulmi në Afganistan, vdes 1 Komando Shqiptar, Tjetri në Koma,” *Balkanweb*.

²⁴¹ “Gjunkshi siguron SHBA: Nuk lëkundemi nga Rënia e Kapiten Voglit, *Balkanweb*, February 27, 2012, http://www.balkanweb.com/bw_lajme2.php?IDNotizia=82689&IDCategoria=1.

²⁴² “Berisha tjetër Tentativë për të kontrolluar SHISH, rikthen Konfliktin me SHBA dhe OSBE,” *Sot*, July 20, 2010, http://www.sot.com.al/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2393:berisha-tjeter-tentative-per-te-kontrolluar-shish-rikthen-konfliktin-me-shba-dhe-osbe&catid=79:politike&Itemid=466.

Secretary General Rasmussen, during his visit to Albania in 2010, acknowledged that he had had a phone conversation with PM Berisha on this issue and that he was “very confident that the Albanian government will ensure that all Albanian laws will be conform NATO standards.”²⁴³ Ultimately, the government withdrew the draft law.

In 2012, the opposition party accused the Ministry of Defense of a lack of transparency on weapons trade and the management of military real estate inventory. A group of members of parliament from the opposition party requested parliamentary oversight on the Ministry of Defense. The parliamentary audit team, composed of opposition members of parliament, was not allowed to conduct the inspection of the Minister of Defense on grounds of illegality and political accusation. Then, a group of parliament members wrote a letter to SG Rasmussen notifying him about the situation and asking his mediation to unblock this institutional deadlock.²⁴⁴ SG Rasmussen replied with a letter to the Albanian parliamentarians stating that he appreciated the role of Albania in NATO and specifying that the parliamentary oversight is crucial for the country’s democracy. He wisely advised that it was in “the best of the country that national institutions cooperate closely and constructively.”²⁴⁵

On one hand these events illustrate the mutual distrust in the national institutions and in opposite political parties in a non-consolidated democracy. On the other hand, it shows that there is a strong confidence in NATO, which is seen as a guarantor of the democracy in Albania.

²⁴³ “Tirana, Rasmussen: The Policymakers should cooperate, ” *Balkanweb*, April 29, 2010, <http://www.balkanweb.com/m/homepage/tirane-rasmussen-br---politika-shqiptare-br---te-bashkepunoje-10892.html>.

²⁴⁴ “PS letër NATO-s për Mbrojtjen, Socialistët ankohen te Aleanca për Imamin,” *Infoarkiv*, October 14, 2012, <http://lajme.shqiperia.com/lajme/artikull/iden/1047296265/titulli/PS-leter-NATO-s-per-Mbrojtjen-socialistet-ankohen-te-Aleanca-per-Imamin>.

²⁴⁵ “Rasmusen i përgjigjet Lutajt: Punoni së Bashku për Kontrollin te Mbrojtja,” *Panorama*, October 30, 2012, <http://www.panorama.com.al/2012/10/30/rasmusen-i-pergjigjet-lutajt-punoni-se-bashku-per-kontrollin-te-mbrojtja/>.

C. THE WAY AHEAD

The aftermath of NATO membership will pose its own challenges for Albania. After membership in the Alliance comes the integration into the Alliance. This integration is a longer process related to “the development of political, economic, financial and military capabilities of the member to be able to exercise both the benefits and the contributions of collective security and defense.”²⁴⁶

1. The Integration Begins

In this context, the Albanian Armed Forces (AAF) began full military integration in NATO structure. Allied Command of Transformation (ACT) is guiding this very important process. In close cooperation with ACT, a midterm integration plan has been developed. The plan prioritizes the review of Strategic Documents and the Long Term Military Plan, the management of Human Resources, the Force Goals (FG), Logistics and Collective Defense. For each field working groups are established and cooperating closely with allied experts to develop plans.

A Strategic Defense Review (SDR) is currently in process. The recommendation of the SDR will be the base of the NSS and Military Strategy which are also under review.²⁴⁷ These strategic documents will reflect the new status of Albania, as a NATO member, depict the path to the full integration of AAF in NATO structures, and include NATO’s new Strategic Concept. “The new forms of terrorism, cybercrime, energy security, proliferation of WMD, ballistic missiles, piracy, failed states, natural disasters etc. are some of the actual threats and challenges which are pointed out in NATO’s Lisbon Strategic Concept.”²⁴⁸ These threats will be also part of the NSS of Albania.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Thimi Hudhra, “Beyond Strasbourg&Kehl: Military Challenges of NATO Membership,” *Revista Ushtarake*, (March 2011), 36.

²⁴⁷ Ministry of Defense, “Speech by the Albanian Minister of Defense, Arben Imami, held at the 5th Integration Conference, June 27, 2012, http://www.mod.gov.al/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1633:speech-of-the-albanian-minister-of-defence-mr-arben-imami-at-the-5th-integration-conference&catid=99&Itemid=475.

²⁴⁸ The NATO’s Lisbon Strategic Concept was adopted in Lisbon NATO Summit in 2010.

²⁴⁹ “Albania Reviews the National Security Strategy,” VOA, March 10, 2011, <http://www.zeriamerikes.com/content/shqiperia-rishikon-strategjine-e-sigurise-kombetare-117749723/457901.html>.

The SDR will support the concept of security sector reform, which defines the Armed Forces and the other security instruments of the security sector as public services in support of the community.²⁵⁰

In 2008 Albania accepted 49 Force Goals, which aim to increase the operational capabilities of the AAF until 2018. During this period, Albania will undertake seriously to build military and civilian capabilities capable to participate not only in NATO Article 5 operations, but also in other NATO operations, such as PSO. Different from the Partnership Goals, where implementation was voluntary and the partner country was evaluated based on its political ambition, the implementation of Force Goals is mandatory, and the NATO member is held accountable in front of other members for not fulfilling them. Thus, the planning and the implementation of this package of Force Goals will be the priority of MoD for the next years.²⁵¹

The Alliance's 2010 Strategic Concept establishes NATO's strategic priorities and its vision of Euro-Atlantic security for the next years. It provides an analysis of the strategic environment and identifies the kinds of operations NATO must be able to conduct.²⁵² In this context, the next missions of the AAF, as a NATO member, are expected to be more difficult, longer, more complex, multinational, and in distant locations. The AAF will have to be trained, well equipped and deployable able to participate in NATO missions wherever is required. The AAF's aim is to self-sustain its deployable forces for a long period. This effort will be not only costly but also will require a substantial change in the training and the doctrine of use of AAF. In this process the modernization of the AAF becomes indispensable.²⁵³

The development of these capabilities will be hard to fund in the defense budget. Even developed NATO members are facing difficulties in developing capabilities in order to keep pace with NATO's transformation. Albania, with the smallest GDP of all,

²⁵⁰ Hudhra, "Beyond Strasbourg & Kehl," 41.

²⁵¹ Gërveni, "The Role of Armed Forces in Integration of Albania in NATO and EU," 165.

²⁵² NATO, "Improving NATO's Capabilities," October 2, 2012, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49137.htm.

²⁵³ Gërveni, "The Role of Armed Forces in Integration of Albania in NATO and EU," 137.

has a more difficult job to do. It needs to reach the NATO standards while keeping the pace with its change. The government should keep the defense budget near 2 percent in order to continue the modernization projects. The modernization of the Albanian Armed Forces is expected to continue in order to ensure meeting the requirement of the integration and interoperability with the Alliance.

2. Developing Niche Capabilities, Single Set of Forces and Smart Defense

Albania is considering the development of “niche capabilities.” These are qualitative capabilities in a specific field. Albania is considering developing such capabilities at the company level s Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD), Military Police, HUMINT, CIMIC, Boarding Teams, etc. Taking into consideration that 70 percent of Albania’s terrain is mountainous, developing mountainous army units may be another option.²⁵⁴ On the one hand, such capabilities can be supported by the defense budget. On the other hand, these capabilities would be more helpful in support of NATO operations as they are specialized qualitative capabilities in special area.

Albania has showed a strong commitment to participate in NATO’s PSO operations. In addition, Albania participates with troops in several EU or UN PSO operations as well. Taking into consideration the aspiration of Albania to join the EU and the ambition to be a security provider in the region and in the world, this commitment of Albania to contribute in PSO is expected to continue in the future, too. Unfortunately, Albania cannot afford to have separate capabilities for national missions and for NATO, EU and UN missions. The current SDR is elaborating the concept of “single set of forces” in order to develop forces with military and civilian capabilities able to carry out national and international operations.²⁵⁵

The development of new capabilities requires a careful planning and spending. In difficult economic times it is very difficult to spend more for the defense, but at the same time it is crucial to maintain the capabilities in order to implement the strategic concept. “Smart defense” was one of the main issues on the agenda of the Alliance summit on 20–

²⁵⁴ Hudhra, “Beyond Strasbourg&Kehl,” 41.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

21 May 2012, in Chicago. The concept aims to improve allied defense capabilities through smarter spending, prioritization and improved cooperation.²⁵⁶

Albania fully supported the “Smart Defense” Concept. In this framework Albania promoted the regional cooperation through the regional initiatives such as A-5, SEEDM, etc. The Minister of Defense Arben Imami in his speech at the “Smart Defense Conference: Regional Cooperation among Southeastern Europe Country,” held in Tirana in 2012, said that it was crucial to establish a long term and consolidated among the regional armed forces aiming the direct contribution to NATO or EU operations.”²⁵⁷ The AAFs have selected 22 projects and they are ready to cooperate on common procurement with the other regional countries in the framework of A-5.

3. The Fight against Terrorism after NATO Membership

The fight against terrorism provides Albania with the opportunity to contribute to the protection of democratic values aligned with its Allies. Albania is expected to remain committed to the fight against international terrorism. This commitment means that with NATO integration, Albanian military units will engage in more and more in combat missions. This will have two main implications. First, the risk of these troops will increase, and second, these operations may outrage the Islamic extremists, who would not tolerate a majority Muslim country to fight against them allied with the West. To counter these eventualities, Albania should take every measure to ensure the security of its troops in the area of operations. It should be careful in choosing the nature of missions that it will carry out in accordance with the real capabilities and equipment at disposal. Measures should be taken also to develop civilian and critical infrastructure protection.

Albania has continued to improve the legal framework to discourage the terrorist activities in the country. In 2009 Albania adopted the “Law on Preventing the Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism,” which aims to restrict the use of money from unlawful activities and to stop the finance of terrorism. The law has been assessed to be

²⁵⁶ Imami’s speech held at the 5th Integration Conference.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

in conformity with international standards.²⁵⁸ “The law provides for the coordination among all state institutions, bank sector, insurance companies, gambling or games entities of casinos or private companies, etc. that deal with money transactions, the movable and immovable assets in the territory of Albania, carried to this territory or only in transit”²⁵⁹ In 2009, the government approved Normative Acts related to suppressing terrorist activities such as the Normative Act on the “Investigation of Financial Crime,” “the Action Plan to Cross-Cutting Strategy to Fight against Organized Crime, Trafficking, and Terrorism.” The same year the parliament approved the law on “Prevention and Suppression of Organized Crime, Trafficking through Preventive Measures against Property,” which aims “to suppress organized crime and trafficking through confiscation of property of persons who have unjustified economic level as a result of suspected criminal activities.”²⁶⁰

Despite this clear progress in the counter terrorism legal measures, a U.S. Department of State Report on Terrorism suggests that these efforts were “undermined by lack of a data-processing infrastructure and an inadequate capability to track and manage cases properly.”²⁶¹ In 2008 Albania froze the bank accounts related to money laundering and terrorist financing. In 2008 the Hamzeh Abu Rayyan, the administrator of the company “Loxhall”²⁶² was charged and tried for hiding funds used to finance terrorism.²⁶³ The company’s assets were confiscated. However, after several trials and appeals, he was found not guilty by the Court of Appeals in 2011.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁸ European Council Committee of Experts on Terrorism, “Profiles on Counter Terrorist Capacity,”

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, “Country Reports on Terrorism,” April, 2008, 53. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/105904.pdf>.

²⁶² The company’s owner is al-Kadi which has bought 19 buildings in Albania, including the twin towers in the center of Tirana. Al-Kadi was in the black list of UN for several years accused for having ties with Al Qaeda. Al Kadi was removed from the UN black list in October 2012.

²⁶³ Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, “Country Reports on Terrorism,” 53

²⁶⁴ “Lirohet Artan Kristo, Gjykata e Lartë rrëzon Prokurorinë,” *Balkanweb*, <http://www.balkanweb.com/kryesore/1/lirohet-artan-kristo-gjykata-e-larte-rrezon-prokurorine-76935.html>

In 2010, a local imam was arrested in Durrës, accused of “publicly inciting and propagating terrorist acts” by allegedly calling for jihad in an online forum.²⁶⁵ The Durrës court decided to detain the imam pending trial. The imam was found not guilty by the Supreme Court of Albania. In both cases Albania has been accused by human rights observers of not respecting the human rights. The Islamic Human Rights felt that at “least two articles in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights have been breached by the Albanian authorities.”²⁶⁶

Albania, as a member of the Alliance of democratic values, should be very careful about respecting the human rights and civil liberties of all citizens and fighting terrorism within the rule of law. This is crucial to maintain the religious harmony inside the country as well as the positive image of Albania in the international arena and the great public support and legitimacy that NATO enjoys in Albania. Thus it is very important for Albania to develop adequate capabilities to prosecute the future cases with professionalism and within the rule of law.

D. CONCLUSION

After securing NATO membership, Albania continued the commitment to the Alliance. The political and public support of NATO continues to be at the highest level although it has been noted that a major part of the people does not really understand what specific costs and benefits are associated with NATO membership. NATO continued to be a “mediator” in domestic disagreements on security issues setting democratic standards. It also motivates and shapes much of Albania’s interactions with its neighbors and international partners. This ongoing effect is expected to persist in the foreseeable future.

Both NATO and Albanian public opinion expects Albania to continue to be a committed member of the Alliance. The democratic reforms are also expected to continue due to also EU accession aspirations. Albania has improved its image in the international

²⁶⁵ Office of the Coordinator, “Country Reports,” 53.

²⁶⁶ Islamic Human Rights Commission, “Action Alert: Albania – Imam Imprisoned for not Complying with Secret Services,” June 25, 2010, <http://www.ihrc.org.uk/activities/alerts/9349-action-alert-albania--imam-imprisoned-for-not-complying-with-secret-services>.

domain and it is expected to give its contribution also in diplomacy according to NATO's new strategic concept. NATO's new strategic concept puts a lot of focus on partnerships. It calls for fostering and extending the fields of cooperation with partner countries. Albania, being a partner country for two decades, may share its experience and assist other partner countries on the integration process especially of the countries of the region. Under the "smart defense" concept, it can create regional capabilities for the management of the air traffic, strategic transportation or civilian emergencies. These capabilities are very useful in the facing the threats of our century including terrorism.

Albania might be helpful in assisting partner countries to demilitarize their excessive stockpiles of ammunitions, denying terrorist to possess them, making themselves and the region more secure. The Albanian Armed Forces gained invaluable experience after conducting a long and difficult process of demilitarization of the ammunition stockpile inherited from the Cold War.²⁶⁷

Furthermore, Albania might be of great help in fostering the partnership with the Islamic countries in the fight against international terrorism, for example, through the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative and the Mediterranean Dialogue. Being a multi-religious country with an Islamic majority and a long history of religious tolerance and a clear western orientation, Albania may act as a bridge between Islamic countries and NATO. Albanian troops may be engaged in CIMIC activities in the Islamic areas of NATO operations and may take advantage of the cultural similarities with locals to facilitate the civil-military relations.

Similarly, it will be of great interest the establishing of good relations with Russia. Russia is one of the strongest opponents of Kosovo's independence. Albania may improve the chances to approach to Kosovo issue toward constructive cooperation with Russia in the auspices of NATO-Russia relations. Generally speaking, NATO partnerships offer a great opportunity for the advancing of the national interests as well. The partnerships provide a framework of cooperation, consultation and mutual confidence for finding common solution to the security problems.

²⁶⁷ Edison Zarka, "Strategic Concept – On the Partnerships of NATO: The Role of Albania and the Armed Forces," *Revista Ushtarake*, (March 2011), 70.

Albanian-NATO relations have been eased especially because of the big public support that NATO enjoys in Albania. It is in the best of both Albania and NATO to put efforts to maintain this support at the same levels. There are some specific issues that might decrease the public support for NATO and hamper the excellent relations on place.

First NATO, and Albania as a NATO member, should work hard for the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans as a whole. The peace and stability of the region can be achieved only under the collective security of NATO, sharing its principles and values.

Second, Albania and NATO should work together to find an accepted solution to the Albanian National Interest. Albania must channel her efforts to address its national interest under the Euro-Atlantic Umbrella. The independence of Kosovo proved the wisdom of this course of action. Failing to address the Albanian issue in the NATO framework might drop public support and revive the nationalist movements not only in Albania but in the whole region. This is very important in a region where the revival of nationalism might be still very easy. Albania should never give up to her role as a stability factor in the region.

Third, Albania and NATO should engage in a comprehensive informative campaign to enlighten Albanian people on the real benefits and obligations of NATO membership. This would prevent delusion, make the expectations more realistic and guarantee a strong public support even for tough decisions because Albania would be prepared to face the challenges of the membership and would maximize the profits.

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IV. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis examines Albanian-NATO relations from the very first stage, when Albania expressed its will to join the Alliance, until the present, with Albania a full member of NATO. During this time, Albanian-NATO relations passed through different forms of partnerships—including PfP, MAP, PARP, and finally, membership. During all these stages, Albanian-NATO relations transformed the strategic culture of Albania and enhanced security in Albania and in the region.

Furthermore, the examination of these relations in the light of the fight against terrorism provides a compelling case study that shed light on the ability of the Alliance to use these partnerships to engage partner/member countries in the fight against international terrorism and other 21st- century security threats.

A. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ALBANIAN ARMED FORCES

The analysis of the impact that NATO's counterterrorism strategy has had on the transformation of the Albanian Armed Forces provides an interesting case study of the process of transforming a nation's strategic culture through consequent and consistent institutional association. The Albanian Armed Forces were transformed dramatically from a massive "army of people" into a much smaller, professional, and modern armed force, able to adapt to the new security environment, fight successfully against the new security threats such as international terrorism and contribute in the international security under the Euro-Atlantic Alliance. Participating in the ISAF mission was an invaluable experience for the armed forces, which helped them integrate much faster with the allied military forces.

B. THE FUTURE OF ALBANIA'S COUNTERTERRORISM PARTNERSHIP WITH AND IN NATO

Both NATO and Albanian public opinion expects Albania to continue to be a committed member of the Alliance. Albania, being a partner country for two decades, is ready to play its role in fostering and extending the cooperation with partner countries in the fight against international terrorism. Under the "smart defense" concept, it might

create regional capabilities for the management of the consequences of terrorist acts, surveillance systems, boarding teams, border control, etc. Albania might be helpful in assisting partner countries to demilitarize their excessive stockpiles of ammunitions, denying terrorist to possess them, making themselves and the region more secure.

Furthermore, Albania might be of great help in fostering the partnership with the Islamic countries in the fight against international terrorism. Being a multi-religious country with an Islamic majority and also a long history of religious tolerance and a clear western orientation, Albania may act as a bridge between Islamic countries and NATO. Albanian troops may be engaged in CIMIC activities in the Islamic areas of NATO operations and may take advantage of the cultural similarities with locals to facilitate the civil-military relations.

While there are a lot of benefits for Albania engaging in the fight against the international terrorism, one should not forget that there is a cost to be paid, too. Albania should be careful to keep the cost as low as possible. Albania should be prudent while pursuing strategies against international terrorism that might delegitimize its mission in the fight against international terrorism and drop public support. Such strategies should not attack Islam as a religion but the Islamic extremism which hampers the religious harmony and tolerance that prevails in Albania. Furthermore, all counter terrorism efforts should be in accordance with the rule of law, respecting the civil liberties of Albanians as it is expected from a NATO country. In addition, Albania should be prepared to face terrorist acts that may target Albania or allied troops and interests in Albania as retaliation to the contribution in counter international terrorism missions.

Albanian-NATO relations in the fight against terrorism have been eased especially because of the overwhelming public support that NATO enjoys in Albania. It is in the best interests of both Albania and NATO to put effort into maintaining this support at the same levels. Albania and NATO should work together to find an acceptable solution to the Albanian national interest. It includes the recognition of Kosovo's independence by all NATO countries which might open the road of Euro-Atlantic integration of Kosovo suggesting a stable and acceptable solution of the coexistence of, virtually, two Albanian states in the region. In the same view, Albania and

NATO should work on respecting the rights of the ethnic Albanians who lives in other neighbor countries. Failing to address the Albanian issue in the NATO framework might diminish public support and revive the nationalist movements not only in Albania but in the whole region which, at the end, influences directly the security of NATO.

C. IMPLICATIONS OF ALBANIAN-NATO RELATIONS FOR ALBANIA

Albanian-NATO relations in the fight against terrorism have positive implication for both of them. First of all, the fight against terrorism provided Albania with an opportunity to convince the West that Albania holds true to the democratic values of the Alliance and that it was determined to seek its security within NATO-partnership/membership. Second, these relations shaped and reinforced the NATO's mindset in Albania to tackle the new security threats. Albania identified the terrorism as a security threat to itself and to the world and changed its security documents, doctrine and institution in accordance with NATO's documents in order to be able to fight it.

Third, Albania's Euro-Atlantic integration perspective and process provided strong incentives to make defense and security institution reforms, fight organize crime, illegal trafficking and terrorism financing thus denying Albania to be a safe haven for terrorists and improving significantly the domestic security. On the other hand, the embrace of NATO's values and the Albania's ascription to Euro-Atlantic identity, as noted in the thesis, has made it difficult for religious extremists to spread their ideology and conduct terrorist activities in Albania.

Fourth, the fight against international terrorism involves a large spectrum of measures and efforts in several fields such as intelligence sharing, border control, enacting counter terrorist laws, regional cooperation, developing military capabilities, participating in counter terrorism operations and a lot more. Therefore, the contribution of a small country in some of these fields might be as valuable as the contribution of a big one. This fact created the national awareness of Albania of making important contributions in the international fight against terrorism keeping Albania motivated. "Having the NATO intervention in Kosovo in the year 1999 to end the genocide

atrocities of the Milosevic's regime against the Albanians there, Albanians, in turn, wanted to play their gratifying role for the freedom and security of the other people."

Fifth, the fight against international terrorism united Albania with the regional countries, increasing cooperation, mutual trust and the awareness to tackle together the common threats that endanger the peace and security of the region. In this aspect we may say that it fostered the regional security and was a tool of integration in the Euro-Atlantic structures.

D. WHAT LESSONS CAN BE DRAWN FROM NATO-ALBANIAN RELATIONS?

The analysis of the Albanian-NATO relations in the fight against international terrorism in this thesis opposes the view that NATO is not the suitable organization to fight the international terrorism. The case study showed that NATO partnership frameworks with Albania were an effective tool to fight international terrorism for several reasons. First, it assisted Albania in improving its internal security, thus reducing the risk the country would become a safe haven for terrorists. Second, its engagement in the region improved the peace and stability of the Balkans, denying the terrorist activities in the region. Third, it promoted Albania's contribution to the ISAF mission. Fourth, it made very good use of soft power by engaging a Muslim majority country in the global fight against terrorism, emphasizing the justice of the cause showing that NATO's operations in Afghanistan do not amount to a war on a major world religion but rather a war on terrorism in a small band of mass murderers and criminals.

NATO-Albanian relations in the counterterrorism realm suggest NATO's ability not only to promote constructive cooperation, but also to wage "the war of ideas," both of which are two important fronts in the war on terror.²⁶⁸ The case study is important because it demonstrates that the power of the Alliance to fight international terrorism rests in the Alliance's ability to build partnerships and use them effectively. The partnership, as the case study showed, may include many fields of cooperation, in addition to military cooperation, which all together complement and enhance the efforts

²⁶⁸ Byman, *The Five Front War*, 173-179.

in the fight against international terrorism. The Albanian-NATO partnership in the fight against terrorism might be a model for the other regional PfP countries that aspire to join NATO. NATO should take into consideration the limitation that such a model might present due to lower public support and political consensus of other countries to join NATO.

This is why NATO should revitalize the PfP partnership framework²⁶⁹ and adopt a “more efficient and flexible partnership policy.”²⁷⁰ NATO should be “open to consultation with any partner country on security issues of common concern and offer them a substantial role in shaping the NATO-led operations to which they contribute.”²⁷¹ The PFP framework should be “better integrated with successful sub-regional initiatives” that have similar objectives, for example, the SEDM initiative.²⁷²

Furthermore, PfP and other partnerships should expand to include more nonmilitary activities and cooperation, such as police cooperation, intelligence sharing, emergency response cooperation, enhancement of law enforcement and training partner countries. This is fully in the accordance with the Strategic Concept 2010.

The Alliance acknowledged the importance of the partnerships in the NATO’s strategic concept 2010. The new strategic concept envisages Euro-Atlantic security to be “promoted through a wide network of partner relationships with countries and organizations around the globe.”²⁷³ Albania’s experience with—and continued presence in—the Alliance provides a very encouraging basis on which to advance this strategy and its manifest benefits.

²⁶⁹ Jeffrey and Simon, “Partnership for Peace: Charting a Course for a New Era,” (National Defense University Institute for National Strategic Studies, Fort McNair Washington, March 2004), 35 <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0c54e3b3-1e9c-be1e-2c24-a6a8c7060233&lng=en&id=135944>.

²⁷⁰ “NATO Reform Lite: An Evaluation of the Lisbon Summit (Part I),” *NATO Watch*, November 26, 2010, 2, www.natowatch.org/node/432.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Jeffrey and Simon, “Partnership for Peace, 35.

²⁷³ NATO Reform Lite, *NATO Watch*, 2.

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