

## **GEOPOLITICAL DIMENSION OF ASYMMETRIC THREATS TO THE NATIONAL SECURITY OF SERBIA**

Dušan Proroković\*

Institute for International Politics and Economy, Belgrade,  
Republic of Serbia

**Abstract:** Asymmetric threats undermine national security; it is necessary to anticipate them and act preemptively. In the context of safeguarding national security, key asymmetric threats are: terrorism, depopulation, migration, organized crime, and threats caused by unfavorable economic and social environment. Certain threats characteristically occur in particular regions of the Republic of Serbia, thus pointing at their geopolitical dimension. Particular asymmetric threats threaten the security of the Republic of Serbia as a whole, but above all they threaten individual geographical areas, and it is necessary to tackle this issue from this angle as well. This paper consists of four parts. In the first part, several approaches to the notion of asymmetric threat are presented, along with the definitions. The second part answers the questions of what constitutes national security, how it is affected by geopolitical factors, and why asymmetric threats can have geopolitical features. Particular asymmetric threats and their connections with certain regions of Serbia are described in the third part. The fourth part provides concluding remarks.

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**Key words:** national security, asymmetric threat, geopolitics, terrorism, depopulation, organized crime, economic and social environment.

### THE NOTION OF ASYMMETRIC THREAT

The notion of asymmetric threat is increasingly used in political analyses and comments, as well as in various national strategies. For former US Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld, who made a major contribution to the affirmation of this term, these are “unconventional threats”. In 2003, he wrote that the United States should develop strategies not only for conventional wars, but also for “detering enemies who rely on the factor of surprise,

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\* The author has a PhD in political science and works as a lecturer at the Faculty of Diplomacy and Security in Belgrade and as a researcher at the Institute for International Politics and Economy. E-mail: prorokovic@yahoo.co.uk

deception and the pursuit of an asymmetric war in order to achieve their goals. Before plans for major operations and even before plans to run small wars against certain states, the Pentagon should develop a strategy to combat unconventional threats by states or non-state actors who would want to attack American interests.”<sup>165</sup> Therefore it can be said that “asymmetric armed acts are conflicts involving unequal rivals, in which the weaker opponent resorts to the use of unconventional methods of warfare.”<sup>166</sup> In terms of armed conflicts, “asymmetric threats are not new phenomena, and neither is the attention that strategists devote to this issue. In all times, from the pre-modern to the present, the weaker opponent used surprise, technology, innovative tactics, or other approaches, in order to counter the stronger one.”<sup>167</sup> Conflicts may have been sporadic, limited to several actions or stretched indefinitely, turning into “asymmetric wars”. “In other words, it means that war is waged between the opponents that are very different in the amount of power they possess. Such wars are also called asymmetric wars. One party to the conflict has power expressed through the number of troops, combat systems capabilities and their destructive power, economic and industrial power, mass media control, domestic as well as international support, while the other party to the conflict has a limited number of soldiers (without uniforms, as a rule) who have a limited choice of weapons and other assets, but who are determined in their intentions”<sup>168</sup>

Certainly, “armed conflicts remain a key aspect of state policy”<sup>169</sup>; in armed conflicts “imbalance is something strived for.”<sup>170</sup> However, it is necessary to differentiate between the notions of asymmetric threat, war, and conflict. Undoubtedly, the whole notion of asymmetric threat came from a military context and it primarily concerned asymmetric war. “The notion of asymmetric conflict has been introduced into scientific research by Andrew

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<sup>165</sup> Michael Rubin, „Asymmetrical Threat Concept and its Reflections on International Security“, *Middle East Forum, Strategic Research and Study Center*, May 31, 2007, [http://www.meforum.org/1696/asymmetrical-threat-concept-and-its-reflections#\\_ftn3](http://www.meforum.org/1696/asymmetrical-threat-concept-and-its-reflections#_ftn3)

<sup>166</sup> А. С. Тетерюк, А. С., Я. А. Чижевский, „Асимметричные конфликты в теории международных отношений: современные аспекты изучения“, *Сравнительная политика*, 4 (21), 2015, p.24

<sup>167</sup> Michael Rubin, „Asymmetrical Threat Concept and its Reflections on International Security“, *Middle East Forum, Strategic Research and Study Center*, May 31, 2007, [http://www.meforum.org/1696/asymmetrical-threat-concept-and-its-reflections#\\_ftn3](http://www.meforum.org/1696/asymmetrical-threat-concept-and-its-reflections#_ftn3)

<sup>168</sup> Др Славољуб Ранђеловић, „Савремени концепт сукоба у инфомационо-комуникационој сфери“, *Војно дело*, Год. LX, Број 1, 2008, pp.140-141

<sup>169</sup> А. С. Тетерюк, А. С., Я. А. Чижевский, „Асимметричные конфликты в теории международных отношений: современные аспекты изучения“, *Сравнительная политика*, 4 (21), 2015, p.24

<sup>170</sup> Бартелеми Курмон, Дарко Рибникар, *Асиметрични ратови, сукоби јуче и данас, тероризам и нове претње*, НИЦ „Војска“, Београд, 2003, p.29

Mac, who published the article entitled “Why Great Powers Lose Small Wars: Politics of Asymmetric Conflict” in 1975.<sup>171</sup> Military scholars looked for the answer to the question: how to confront the less armed and less numerous enemies that use unconventional methods of warfare? Despite the fact that the possibility of an armed attack is probably the biggest threat to the security of states, wars are not the only threats. “A threat, in the widest sense, is a conscious intention to cause harm to a person, a property or a right, in order to force the object of the threat to behave in a certain way. A threat is also the intention to cause harm or to punish, as an indication of an unwanted or unpleasant event, or the possibility of causing harm. Compared to challenges and risks, a threat is stronger in its manifestation, with clear indications that harm will be inflicted very soon if rapid response is lacking.”<sup>172</sup> (Tatomir, 2011: 46) Harm can also be inflicted due to the action of other factors, and not only because of the enemy's armed attack. Admiral Vern Clark states that in addition to armed attacks in the form of terrorism, unconventional guerrilla warfare and possible (mis)use of weapons of mass destruction, information wars and cyber warfare are also asymmetric threats<sup>173</sup>. Zoran Dragišić recognizes three groups of asymmetric threats: terrorism, organized crime, and “the consequences of unfavourable economic and social environment and high unemployment” suitable for the spread of various types of extremism.<sup>174</sup>

This list can be expanded with new threats because asymmetric threats arise as a result of “the use of new technologies and the increase in the impact of non-traditional threats (organized crime, terrorism, environmental and

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<sup>171</sup> Лариса В. Дергилазова, „Асимметричный конфликт в современной американской политологии“, *Международные процессы*, Т. 8, № 2 (23), 2010, p. 52.

<sup>172</sup> Драган Татомир, „Процена изазова, ризика, претњи безбедности Републике Србије у функцији планирања употребе Војске Србије“, *Војно дело*, Год. LXIII, Број 2, пролеће 2011, pg 46.

<sup>173</sup> Vern Clark, „Sea power 21: Projecting Decisive Joint Capabilities“, *Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute*, Conference Paper, Washington D.C., October 2002, pp. 36-37. Steven Metz and Douglas Johnson II describe asymmetric wars in more detail and complement this list with the use of biological and chemical weapons, urban warfare and the “scorched earth strategy”. In: Steven Metz, Douglas V. Johnson II, *Asymmetry and U.S. Military Strategy: Definition, Background, Military Strategy*, Strategic Studies Institute: U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks (PA), 2001, p. 1.

<sup>174</sup> Зоран Драгишић, „Безбедносни идентитет Балкана и ЕУ“, *Култура полица*, Год. X, Бр. 22, 2013, pp.149-152. Zoran Dragišić gives special attention to organized crime. “Organized crime, in the circumstances of weak and incomplete states, represents a serious security threat due to political aspirations that main organizers of criminal activity develop. Such political aspirations are fulfilled through corruption which takes over the most lucrative industries; besides the legalization of the money acquired in illegal ways, it blocks the economic basis of institutional strengthening of the state.” *Ibidem*, p. 150.

demographic threats, etc.).”<sup>175</sup> With the continuous development of technologies, the number of current and potential unconventional threats is rising. Ultimately, it depends on how the concept of security is defined, or how certain phenomena are investigated. If, as in the period of the Cold War, focus is on military security, then asymmetric threats are the intentions that can cause an asymmetric war. However, if security is observed in the widest possible perspective, a list of asymmetric threats cannot be conclusive, as new causes of threats keep emerging. Stephen J. Lambakis warns of this as he questions the validity of the entire concept of asymmetric threat. If the interpretations of this notion are too broad, it is impossible to generalize and define asymmetric threats in more clear-cut terms.<sup>176</sup> It is therefore necessary to determine the notion of asymmetric threat in parallel with the level of analysis.

In terms of global security, asymmetric threats are primarily the processes of disrupting the natural balance by excessive resource depletion (the problem here is that although the consequences of their acts are obvious, actors do not initiate these processes in order to harm the planet and humanity, whereas a threat is a conscious intention to harm the security of others). In terms of regional security, asymmetric threats are increasing mass migrations that are changing ethnic and religious structure in different parts of the world. In terms of national security, asymmetric threats differ depending on each state. Of course, global and regional threats endanger not only humanity as a whole, but also states directly, just as destabilization of certain states jeopardizes regional and sometimes even global security. This depends of course on the character of the threats and the importance of the state in the world political system. “Global security and security of Europe are increasingly endangered by the new challenges, risks and threats that have emerged as a result of the negative effects of globalization, national and religious extremism, conflicts over territories and a growing deficit in natural resources. Terrorism, illegal armed groups’ rebellions, national and religious extremism, organized crime, and natural and industrial catastrophes present high security risks and threats on global, regional and national levels. They show a tendency of spilling over from one area to another and therefore can present a security threat to the Republic of Serbia.”<sup>177</sup> As it can be seen from

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<sup>175</sup> Снежана Васић, „Утицај међународних безбедносних субјеката на безбедност земаља Западног Балкана“, *Војно дело*, Год. LXVI, Број 3/2014, 2014, p. 8.

<sup>176</sup> Stephen J. Lambakis, „Reconsidering Asymmetric Warfare.“ *Joint Forces Quarterly*, February 2005, pp. 102-108.

<sup>177</sup> Драган Татомир, „Процена изазова, ризика, претњи безбедности Републике Србије у функцији планирања употребе Војске Србије“, *Војно дело*, Год. LXIII, Број 2, пролеће 2011, p.54

the most of the previous quotes, asymmetric threats are usually connected with the state level and aspects of endangering state security. Thereby asymmetric threats cannot be understood only as intentions that can lead to war, but also as processes that endanger national security.

## NATIONAL SECURITY AND ASYMMETRIC THREATS

Unlike the notion of asymmetric threat, the term *national security* is more clearly defined. The term *state security* can sometimes be found as a synonym, but this is usually the result of different translations of the term *national security* from English, and it does not change its essence. The term *national security* was introduced into wider use in a 1943 article by Walter Lippmann, who explained it in the context of war, stating that this is a situation “when a nation is certain that it will not have to sacrifice its legitimate interests if it wants to avoid war, or if provoked, it can maintain its legitimate interests by participating in the war.”<sup>178</sup> From this explanation of national security it may be possible to see what the threats to the emergence of an asymmetrical armed conflict are, but not more than that. Lippmann, as well as his contemporaries, saw threats from the perspective of military security. Therefore, in the post-Cold War period there was a growing number of definitions by different authors who gave national security a wider interpretation, for example, that it is “a situation that enables functioning, stability and development of the state, ensures peace, sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders, internal order in the country, basic rights and freedoms of citizens, protects their lives, health, property and living space”<sup>179</sup>, or “capability of a nation to overcome multidimensional threats regarding the welfare and survival of the state at any time by keeping the balance of all state policy instruments through governance.”<sup>180</sup> In the modern world “the national security policy of a state depends on the type and reach of the state and national interests and on the current and potential threats that endanger or can endanger these interests. The threats can be: political, economic, military, demographic, social, confessional, educational, ecological, and those caused by long-term covert action of retrograde forces in all areas of social life. Problems of defining the term *national security* are fully seen when

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<sup>178</sup> Walter, Lippmann, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic*, Little&Brown, Boston, 1943, p. 49

<sup>179</sup> Ladislav Šimák et al., *Terminologický slovník krízového manažmentu*, Fakulta špeciálneho inžinierstva Žilinskej univerzity v Žiline, Žilina, 2006, p.5

<sup>180</sup> Prabhakaran Paleri, *National Security: Imperatives and Challenges*, Tata McGraw Hill, New Delhi, 2008, p.54

values that can be endangered have to be identified and when one has to identify the vital state and national interests that should be protected by elements of the national security system. Most of the contemporary authors who deal with exploring national security claim that vital social, state, and national interests are in fact general needs of the state and its citizens and that they come from general values and goals stated in constitutions of nation states and also from the potential for action and the actual position of each state in international affairs”.<sup>181</sup>

By safeguarding national security, elementary prerequisites for all other activities at the state level are fulfilled, whether elementary freedoms and rights of citizens, sustainability of the institutional order, or planning for long-term economic development. Without firmly established national security, the achievement of any of the goals set is difficult or at least less attainable. Hence, it is important to monitor and analyze all processes and phenomena that may present an asymmetric threat to national security. At this point, it is necessary to go back to the difference between asymmetric war and asymmetric threats. Stephen Blank asks: Who is the enemy that endangers our national security by asymmetric threats?<sup>182</sup> Can it also be a state? Donald Mrozek describes how the North Vietnamese forces used an asymmetric approach to counter the superiority of the US Air Force and concludes that they succeeded: US forces were able to obstruct certain enemy activities, but not to change the outcome of the war.<sup>183</sup> Still, this is an example of asymmetric war. Blank points out that what is asymmetric to our security strategies (the author refers to US strategies) can, but does not necessarily have to be, an asymmetric threat. It can be that the enemy is just using different tactics and adapting the organization to the current circumstances, using the available resources accordingly.<sup>184</sup> Such claims are understandable, because from the point of view of the one who is attacked, it is asymmetric, but from the attacker’s point of view, there is no asymmetry, but attempts to create symmetry. The weaknesses of the enemy are utilized to disrupt its security and reduce the potential for defense. If our perception of challenges, risks and threats is correct, possible moves of the enemy have been anticipated; there are

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<sup>181</sup> Радослав Гаџиновић, „Класификација безбедности“, *Наука, безбедност, полиција*, Год. 12, бр. 2. 2007, p.12

<sup>182</sup> Stephen J. Blank, *Rethinking Asymmetric Threats*, Military Strategy, Strategic Studies Institute: U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks (PA), 2003, p.7

<sup>183</sup> Donald J. Mrozek, „Asymmetric Response to American Air Supremacy in Vietnam“, in: Lloyd J. Matthews (ed), *Challenging the United States Symmetrically and Asymmetrically: Can America Be Defeated?*, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, 1998, pp. 82-103

<sup>184</sup> Stephen J. Blank, *Rethinking Asymmetric Threats*, Military Strategy, Strategic Studies Institute: U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks (PA), 2003, pp.1-2

no surprises and asymmetric threats, only preemptive action and the elimination of threats. It is therefore necessary to focus on phenomena and processes that endanger national security.

Simply stated, what appears to be a threat (phenomena and processes that may pose a problem to our national security) can only be exploited by the enemy in order to achieve victory in war (using conventional or non-conventional means). For example, criminal structures or certain political and religious groups in the territory of the state can be (mis)used by the enemy to violate our national security. In this context, the emergence of organized crime and legitimization of certain political ideas (separatism, religious fundamentalism directed towards change of order) are also asymmetric threats, besides those who perform these activities. Removing the performers of such activities does not eliminate the threat. “Asymmetric threats and challenges are not suppressed by conventional, symmetric means. These threats need to be addressed by the destruction of their roots and causes.”<sup>185</sup> In order to ensure national security, it is necessary to direct action towards the elimination of the threat as such, which is achieved through the application of measures and resources to stop adverse processes and prevent the recurrence of adverse events. The measures to be applied and the means to be used are defined by the adoption of strategic documents aimed at eliminating the threats.

Regarding national security of the Republic of Serbia, as evident in all strategic documents adopted so far, key asymmetric threats are: terrorism, depopulation, migration, organized crime, and threats caused by unfavorable economic and social environment. It is also noteworthy that certain threats are present in particular parts of the country, which points to their geopolitical aspect.

## GEOPOLITICAL DIMENSION OF ASYMMETRIC THREATS

The *geopolitical dimension* of asymmetric threats, but also of other phenomena and processes, implies their frequency or scope of expression in a certain geographically limited area. For a long time geopolitics has been perceived as an “aggressive discipline” aimed at spreading “living space” and securing access to resources.<sup>186</sup> However, since the 1990s this approach has changed significantly. Miloš Knežević states that “spatial metamorphosis and territorial dynamics in different segments of the physical world have re-acknowledged the need for understanding the principles of space policy and

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<sup>185</sup> Efrem Radev, „Promene u bezbednosnom okruženju: izmenjena percepcija bezbednosti“, Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku, Beograd, Januar 2011, p. 4.

<sup>186</sup> Vjačeslav Avijucki, *Kontinentalne geopolitike*, Clio, Beograd, 2009, pp. 14-15

increased the importance of understanding it”.<sup>187</sup> He adds that contemporary geopolitics “has been renewed as a particular tendency in exploring and interpreting the macro and micro phenomena of political space, politics in a space and space of politics.”<sup>188</sup> Therefore, as he concludes, “geography is politicized” and “politics is geographycized”.<sup>189</sup> Milomir Stepić also claims that there is an obvious “geography of political processes”<sup>190</sup>, and certain phenomena are frequently or exclusively connected with particular geographic areas. The manifestation of these phenomena and processes cannot be characterized as a “geographic dimension”; tentatively, this can be done in the broadest possible (imprecise) context, because the socio-geographical factors are dynamic and rapidly transforming, which affects political processes. Explaining this trend in the case of water resource management in the Middle East, Ahmet Davutoğlu characterizes this as a *geopolitical dependency*.<sup>191</sup> The geopolitical dimension of certain processes is conditioned by geopolitical dependence. The approach to and management of water resources, primarily on the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers, has its ecological, energy-related, economic and security-related dimensions for the southeast of Turkey, which is reflected on the overall policy of this country, its strategy, foreign policy positioning, etc.

The goals of geopolitical research, therefore, are not only related to foreign policy, macrostrategies and interests of great powers, but also include microgeographic entities within which (in)adequate processes are developing that affect the overall political situation in the country. If, due to negative political or social processes in a region, there are new challenges, risks and threats to the security of the state, which are tentatively referred to as “micro-geopolitical”, it adversely affects its “macro-geopolitics” and entails a series of consequences, worsening the position of the country in international relations. Without solving open “micro-geopolitical” issues, “macro-geopolitics” cannot be planned nor performed. In order to analyze the geopolitical dimension of asymmetric threats, it is necessary to make a distinction between the social and political processes that are associated with a particular geographic area. Undoubtedly, asymmetric threats can come from other states or non-state

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<sup>187</sup> Милош Кнежевић, *Призма Геополитике*, Институт за политичке студије, Београд, 2013, р. 35.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibidem*, р. 92.

<sup>189</sup> Милош Кнежевић, *Мозаик геополитике. Идентитет – транзиција – српско питање*, Институт за политичке студије, Београд, 2008.

<sup>190</sup> Миломир Степић, *Геополитика: идеје, теорије, концепције*, Институт за политичке студије, Београд, 2016, р. 57.

<sup>191</sup> Ахмет Давутоглу, *Стратегијска дубина*, Службени гласник, Београд, 2014, рр. 146-147.



actors; they can be both conventional and unconventional. Can the establishment of armed forces of the so-called Republic of Kosovo, or occasional threats from certain politicians from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina directed towards Serbia or (more often) towards the Republic of Srpska, be considered as an asymmetric threat? The answer is affirmative, of course. However, such threats are directly generated by the development of particular political processes in these geographic units. When threats are a direct consequence of political processes, they can lead up to an asymmetric war. Asymmetric threats that cannot produce an asymmetric war, but nevertheless pose a threat to national security are examined in this paper. They are related to social processes obvious in particular regions, which are then indirectly and gradually reflected on political processes. Numerous studies of the interdependence between social and political processes have confirmed a high degree of their interconnectedness, but there remains the unresolved question of when and to what extent one of these two processes is induced by others, or in other words, when political processes shape the social ones, and vice versa. In fact, this question resembles the chicken and egg dilemma. Due to the limitations of space, this issue cannot be covered in more detail here. Suffice it to merely point to the existence of theoretical grounding for the thesis that social processes gradually affect political processes, regardless of their causes.

Political processes specific to particular geographic areas, viewed from within this context, refer to macro-geopolitics, while social processes are related to micro-geopolitics. These social processes often go beyond the wishes of political structures, i.e. they continue despite attempts at preventing them through institutional action. States adopt strategies and laws, trying to prevent or slow down what they see as negative processes, but they fail. Over time, instead of transforming social processes into political ones, there is a completely reverse phenomenon of social processes shaping the political ones, placing new topics on the agenda for institutions to tackle. The asymmetric threats identified in this paper are of such kind. They are present in a limited geographic area, state institutions fail to influence their transformation, and their action affects national security adversely. Hence the reliance on the definitions from the first part of the paper, where asymmetric threats were described as non-traditional threats such as organized crime, terrorism, poverty, as well as environmental and demographic threats.

The aforementioned asymmetric threats are causal to a certain extent. The emergence of one inevitably leads to the appearance of another. Acceleration of an unfavorable process generates identical development in other cases. Deteriorating economic and social environment is one of the causes of increased migration, both internally, from rural regions to more developed communities, and externally, from Serbia to West European

countries; organized crime ruins the institutions that are left incapable of maintaining order. This weakens trust in the rule of law and affects many social processes. Weakened state structures and the growth of mistrust in institutions are perfectly suited for the propagation of various extremist movements, among which the most radical ones are transformed into terrorist cells. No one invests in communities that are seen as an “extremism nursery”. Economic and social conditions deteriorate even further, and so on. Asymmetric threats therefore jeopardize national security, and in possible armed conflicts these weaknesses can be used in the conduct of operations against the Republic of Serbia. An important characteristic of certain asymmetric threats is their geographical scope. Three threats should be analyzed in this context: terrorism, depopulation (caused by internal migrations) and economic-social environment. Despite the best intention to analyze the threat of organized crime from a similar point of view, this is not possible because of the limited space for the research results presentation, but also because the most likely conclusion would be that it is not feasible. Organized crime is not linked to a single clearly defined area in the territory of the Republic of Serbia (unlike in Italy, for example, where organized criminal structures are primarily active in the regions of Sicily, Naples and Calabria; or in Mexico, where cartels are most active in the states of Sinaloa and Guerrero). Unlike other aforementioned threats, it cannot be concluded that organized crime has a geopolitical dimension.

Terrorism is thus linked with extremist groups’ activities, tied up with radical Islamist movements or with the actions of Albanian paramilitary formations infiltrating Serbia from the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, or organized by their supporters in the municipalities of Bujanovac and Preševo. The actions of radical Islamists (members of the Islamic State, Al-Qaeda, Al-Nusra, Muslim Brotherhood and similar organizations) present a challenge to the entire international community (however the term is defined). To some extent this can be seen as a global phenomenon and a threat that reaches far beyond national borders. In Serbia there have already been examples of individuals converting to Islam, quickly adopting radical ideas in the new environment, and participating in terrorist acts.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> In 2014, media reported that one Goran Pavlović, aged 49, from Belgrade, together with his wife Mirjana (47) and daughter Nevena (23) converted to Islam, and moved to B&H for a short time. The whole family finally ended up in Syria, where he fought in the Jamaican Muhammad Islamic State (Glory to Muhammad) under the name of Abdullah. In addition, in December 2016, Boban Simeonović (36) born in Šarbanovac near Bor, was arrested in Berlin on charges of being part of a group that organized an attack on civilians during a Christmas bazaar in the capital city of Germany.

*Table 1: Basic demographic indicators<sup>193</sup>*

per 1000 inhabitants	2002	2011	average age	2002	2011
live births	10.6	9.0	of mothers at birth of all children	26.7	28.7
deaths	13.2	14.2	of mothers at birth of the first child	25.1	27.5
population growth	- 2.7	-5.2	of men at death	67.8	71.0
marriages	5.5	4.9	of women at death	72.9	76.1
divorces	1.0	1.1	of grooms at wedding	31.5	33.0
			of brides at wedding	27.6	29.5
dead infants per 1000 live births	10.2	6.3	of grooms/first marriage	28.5	30.5
live births (unmarried parents) per 1000 live births	204.2	239.5	of brides/first marriage	25.1	27.4
divorces per 1000 marriages	189.2	230.4	life expectancy for men	69.6	71.6
total fertility rate	1.6	1.4	life expectancy for women	74.8	76.8

Therefore, such threats can emerge anywhere, and from this perspective, they are most likely to appear in urban centers, where most of the country's inhabitants live. However, it should also be stressed that, logically, Islamic radical groups are most active in the parts of the country where Muslims constitute a large share of the population.

Such is the case primarily with the municipalities of Novi Pazar, Tutin, and Preševo, or seen from a wider perspective, the whole Raška region.

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<sup>193</sup> Michael Rubin, „Asymmetrical Threat Concept and its Reflections on International Security“, *Middle East Forum, Strategic Research and Study Center*, May 31, 2007, [http://www.meforum.org/1696/asymmetrical-threat-concept-and-its-reflections#\\_ftn3](http://www.meforum.org/1696/asymmetrical-threat-concept-and-its-reflections#_ftn3).

Although the headquarters of the Furkan mescit<sup>194</sup>, from which volunteers were recruited for Syria, was in Novi Pazar, it turned out that the commander of this group was Abid Podbićanin from the village of Velika Župa near Prijepolje.

Therefore, when speaking of terrorism as an asymmetric threat, attention must also be paid to Prijepolje, Sjenica, Priboj, Nova Varoš and Bujanovac.

Depopulation is one of the features of border areas. Two processes affect the decreasing number of inhabitants in certain municipalities: a dramatic decline in the number of newborns and the emigration of the working-age population due to poor economic and social conditions. Comparing the results of the 2002 and 2011 censuses, the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia came to alarming conclusions, stated for the entire territory of the country (without the data for Kosovo and Metohija) and shown in Table 1. According to Goran Penev's projections, if current trends continue, Serbia will have around 5,566,400 inhabitants in 2040, and in 2060 this number will decrease to 4,906,700.<sup>195</sup>

Continuous decrease in population and population aging are asymmetric threats to national security, but adverse trends are most evident in some municipalities in the south and east of the country. On the other hand, the number of inhabitants of Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš and Kragujevac is growing, as can be seen on Map 1.

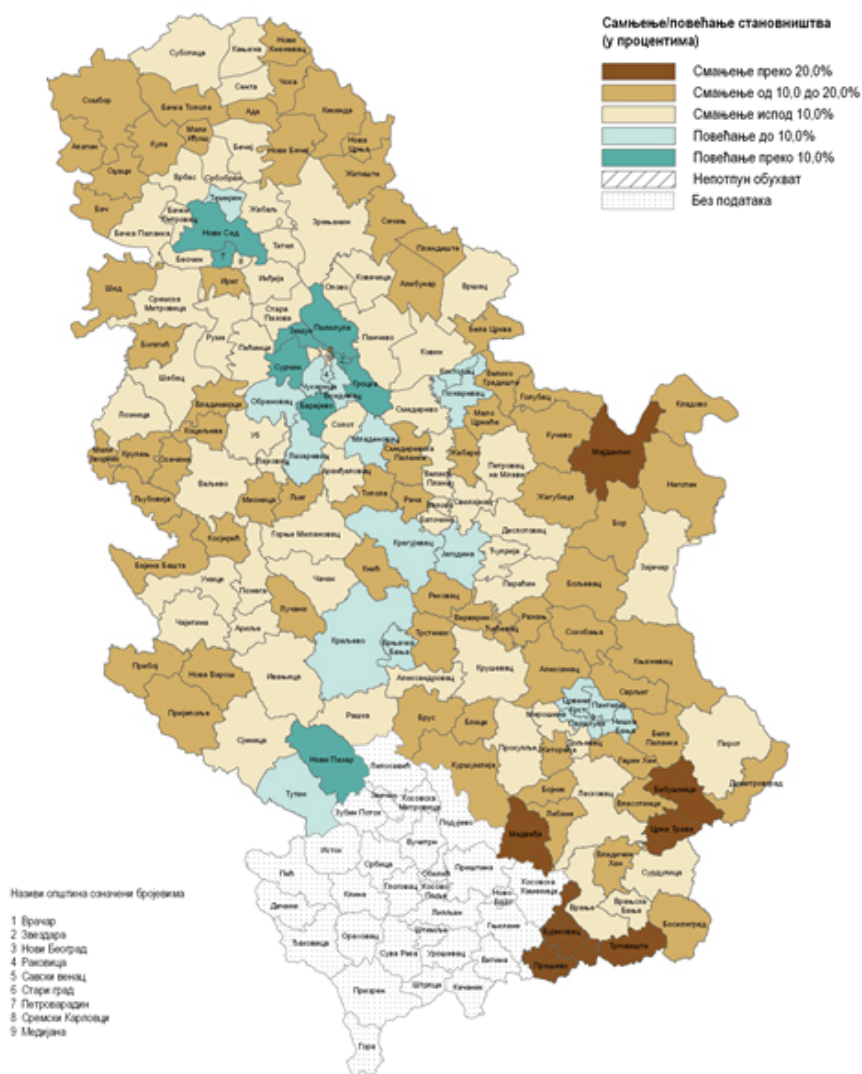
The largest decrease in population, in terms of relative indicators, was noted in Crna Trava, Babušnica, Trgovište, Medveđa, and Majdanpek (over 20% in the period between the two censuses).

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<sup>194</sup> A mescit is a small place of worship, a place where prayer is continually exercised. Most often, it is one room, the size of a small apartment, where Muslims who have similar views on certain issues gather.

<sup>195</sup> Goran Penev, *Projekcije stanovništva Srbije od 2010. do 2060. godine*, Fiskalni savet, Beograd, 2013, p. 17.

Општине и градови према порасту-паду броја становника у периоду 2002-2011.



*Map 1: Municipalities and towns according to population increase/decrease in 2002-2011<sup>196</sup>*

<sup>196</sup> Бранислав Турђе, Даниела Арсенић, „Популациона динамика у међуопшном периоду. Просторна дистрибуција становништва“, у: Владимир Никитовић (ур.),

It is also disconcerting that on the north-south axis, from Majdanpek to Crna Trava, population decreased by over 10% in another 18 municipalities in the observed period (Golubac, Veliko Gradište, Malo Crniće, Kučevo and Žagubica west of Majdanpek; Kladovo and Negotin east of Majdanpek; Dimitrovgrad east and Vlasotince west of Crna Trava; between Majdanpek and Babušnica there is a belt of such municipalities, including Bor, Boljevac, Sokobanja, Ražanj, Aleksinac, Knjaževac, Svrljig, Bela Palanka, and Gadžin Han). To the north-west and north-east of Medveđa there are 3 municipalities where population decrease is also over 10%: Kuršumljija, Blace, Brus, Lebane, Bojnik, and Žitorađa. Decrease in population by over 10% is also noted in northern Banat and partly in southern Banat, in western Bačka, in parts of western Serbia (Mali Zvornik, Ljubovija, Bajina Bašta, Krupanj, Osečina), and in three municipalities in the Raška region (Priboj, Prijepolje, and Nova Varoš). Comparison of the aforementioned data with the figures in Map 2 shows that this threat is most obvious in the south-east part of Serbia (in more than 29 municipalities). Map 2 shows municipalities and towns according to the average annual population growth. Namely, in these areas both problems are evident: in addition to emigration, the number of births, which is below the average, is lower than the number of deaths. This indicates that the existing trend will continue, and in the years to come further depopulation is to be expected in the regions that include most of the territory, or even the entire territory, of the following districts: Bor, Zaječar, Pirot, Jablanica, Pčinja, and Toplica, as well as parts of the Nišavski and Braničevski districts. They all comprise an area of 18,500 km<sup>2</sup>. (For comparison, the area of Montenegro is 13,812 km<sup>2</sup>).

Besides depopulation, deteriorations of the economic and social environment can also be seen as an asymmetrical threat to the whole territory of Serbia. A socio-economic environment is comprised of the circumstances in which socio-economic processes take place in a given area (socio-economic indicators are mainly observed at the level of local self-government units). Socio-economy is a discipline that studies the effects of economic activity on social processes, i.e. on the behavior of individuals and groups (social dynamics research).<sup>197</sup> Analyzing socio-economic indicators in municipalities in Serbia, Mirjana Rašević and Goran Penev examined the unemployment rate, the number of educational institutions, the level of health care, the share of the

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*Популација Србије почетком 21. века*, Републички завод за статистику, Београд, 2015, стр. 42-62.

<sup>197</sup> Steven Durlauf, H. Peyton Young, „The New Social Economics“, In: Steven N. Durlauf, H. Peyton Young (eds.), *Social Dynamics*, Brookings Institutions Press: MIT Press, Washington D.C.: Cambridge, 2001, pp. 1-11.

households of the elderly, visits to counseling centers for mothers of infants, etc. The data obtained were compared to the national average. Municipalities were classified into different categories accordingly.<sup>198</sup>

Map 2 Average rate of natural increase in municipalities and cities, in the period 2002- 2011

Општине и градови према просечној годишњој стопи природног прираштаја у периоду 2002-2011.



Map 2: Municipalities and cities according to the average annual rate of natural increase in the period 2002-2011<sup>199</sup>

<sup>198</sup> Др Мирјана Рашевић, мр Горан Пенев, „Социоекономски показатељи: картографски приказ по општинама“, *Демографски преглед*, Год. X, број 36/2010, pp. 2-4.

Nebojša Katić states devastating facts: “Serbian GDP, as a standard measure of economic success, does not give cause for celebration. The real growth of the domestic economy in 2016, according to preliminary estimates, amounts to a modest 2.7%. This is a high growth rate for developed economies, but it is more than modest for the countries with a low GDP as the basis for calculation. In 2016, among the countries in the region, only Croatia and Macedonia, their rates being around 2%, had a lower growth rate than Serbia. (According to the IMF categorization, the region to which Serbia belongs includes 11 states and “Kosovo”.) Looking four years back, the picture gets even grimmer: the average growth rate of the Serbian economy was around 1% annually. Croatia excluded, this is the lowest average rate in the region. The situation does not get better when Serbia is compared to itself either. The average annual GDP growth rate from 2001 to 2009 was around 5.9%. When the catastrophic period of 2009 to 2012 is included in the calculation, the average for the period of 2001 to 2012 is about 3.7%. If GDP is measured per capita, Serbia's rank is at the bottom in the region, only Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina lagging behind Serbia. Serbian GDP per capita is for example lower than Croatian GDP by 37%, Bulgarian GDP by 29%, and Romanian GDP by 36%. If Serbia were to develop at a rate continually higher than Bulgarian and Croatian rates by 2 % annually, Serbian GDP per capita would reach Bulgarian and Croatian GDPs per capita in approximately 18 years and 23 years respectively.”<sup>200</sup>

However, looking at the socio-economic indicators by municipalities and the level of local self-government units' development in comparison to the Serbian average, significant differences can be observed at the local level. The most threatened are 44 underdeveloped local self-governments units, whose level of development is below 60% of the Serbian average: Aleksinac, Babušnica, Bela Palanka, Bojnik, Blace, Bosilegrad, Brus, Bujanovac, Varvarin, Vladičin Han, Vlasotince, Gadžin Han, Golubac, Dimitrovgrad, Doljevac, Žabari, Žagubica, Žitorađa, Knjaževac, Krupanj, Kuršumlija, Kučevo, Lebane, Ljig, Mali Zvornik, Malo Crniće, Medveđa, Merošina, Mionica, Nova Varoš, Opovo, Petrovac na Mlavi, Preševo, Priboj, Prijepolje, Ražanj, Raška, Rekovac, Svrlijig, Sjenica, Surdulica, Trgovište, Tutin, and

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<sup>199</sup> Бранислав Ђурђевић, Даниела Арсенић, „Популациона динамика у међупописном периоду. Просторна дистрибуција становништва“, у: Владимир Никитовић (ур.), *Популација Србије почетком 21. века*, Републички завод за статистику, Београд, 2015, pp. 42-62.

<sup>200</sup> Nebojša Katić, „Između stvarnosti i iluzija: Bilans stanja ekonomije u Srbiji“, *Le Monde diplomatique* (prilog časopisa *Nedeljnik* od 19/01/2017), 2017, str. 1.



Crna Trava.<sup>201</sup> As in the case of depopulation, it is noteworthy that these municipalities are grouped in the south-east and south-west of the country. This asymmetric threat is therefore primarily present in these particular geographic areas.

## CONCLUSION

Although there is neither a unison stance on the notion of asymmetric threat nor a unison definition of what it implies, it does not mean that the strategies concerning this issue should not be elaborated. In this research, the various views were used in order to examine the geopolitical aspect of asymmetric threats and to make a distinction between political processes that can cause asymmetric wars, and social processes that generate asymmetric threats in particular geographic regions. There are asymmetric threats to national security of the Republic of Serbia. Significantly, two threats concern one region, and as many as three threats concern two regions in Serbia. In southeast Serbia (with the exception of the agglomerations of Niš, Leskovac, Pirot, Zaječar, and Vranje), from the Danube in the north to the Pčinja in the south, increased emigration has been noted, as well as a decline in socio-economic indicators and deterioration of the overall economic and social environment. This area has been experiencing depopulation, with economic activity markedly declining for a relatively long time. In the circumstances of the migrant crisis, volatile ethnic relations, and active organized crime groups, national security is indisputably threatened. An even greater problem is encountered in the southernmost areas of central Serbia as well as in the Raška region, where besides depopulation and economic devastation, an increasing influence of radical Islamic groups has also been observed. The processes that represent asymmetric threats to national security practically involve entire southern and eastern areas of the country. This is, in every respect, far more evident in these areas than in other parts of the country. Hence the necessity for urgent adoption of strategies to solve open issues and remove asymmetric threats. Otherwise, further depopulation and economic decline will leave these areas completely deserted, which will inevitably lead to further shrinking of the territory of the Republic of Serbia, with all the consequences that it brings.

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<sup>201</sup> Nacionalna agencija za regionalni razvoj, „Stepen razvijenosti za 2014. godinu“, Beograd, 2017, <http://www.regionalnirazvoj.gov.rs/Lat/ShowNARRFolder.aspx?mi=171>.

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## **GEOPOLITIČKA DIMENZIJA ASIMETRIČNIH PRETNJI NACIONALNOJ BEZBEDNOSTI SRBIJE**

Dušan Proroković\*

Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu, Beograd,  
Republika Srbija

**Apstrakt:** Asimetrične pretnje narušavaju nacionalnu bezbednost i zbog toga je neophodno anticipirati ih, a zatim i preventivno delovati. U kontekstu osiguravanja nacionalne bezbednosti ključne asimetrične pretnje su: terorizam, depopulacija, migracije, organizovani kriminal i pretnje uzrokovane nepovoljnim ekonomsko-socijalnim ambijentom. Karakteristično je da se pojedine pretnje javljaju u određenim regionima Republike Srbije, te otuda i ukazivanje na njihovu geopolitičku dimenziju. Ispoljavanje konkretnih asimetričnih pretnji ugrožava bezbednost Republike Srbije u celini, ali pre svega njene pojedine geografske celine, te je ovo pitanje neophodno sagledati i iz tog ugla. Rad se sastoji iz četiri dela. U prvom delu se izlažu različita viđenja pojma asimetrične pretnje i određuje šta se pod njom podrazumeva. Drugi deo je posvećen objašnjavanju šta predstavlja nacionalna bezbednost, kako na nju utiču geopolitički faktori i zašto asimetrične pretnje mogu biti geopolitičkog karaktera. Konkretno asimetrične pretnje i njihova povezanost sa pojedinim regionima Srbije se opisuju u trećem delu. Četvrti deo su zaključna razmatranja.

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**Ključne reči:** nacionalna bezbednost, asimetrična pretnja, geopolitika, terorizam, depopulacija, organizovani kriminal, ekonomsko-socijalni ambijent.

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\* Autor je predavač na Fakultetu za diplomatiju i bezbednost u Beogradu i istraživač Instituta za međunarodnu politiku i privredu. E-mail: prorokovic@yahoo.co.uk.