

The Soviet Legacy: Transforming Bulgaria's Armed Forces for Homeland Security Missions

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War is much too serious to leave to generals

George Clemenceau¹

National security is much too serious to leave entirely to civilians

John M. Collins²

Introduction

At the Istanbul Summit in June 2004, the member states of NATO confirmed that collective defense remains the main goal of the Alliance. The nations “remain fully committed to the collective defense of the people, territory, and forces” of the Alliance’s member states, and stated, “transatlantic cooperation is essential in defending our values and meeting common threats and challenges, from wherever they may come.”³ The processes of defense transformation have to ensure that the means match the ends, that the available capabilities match the missions.

A number of processes that have the character of a military revolution affect the latest developments in military affairs. Militaries undertake new additional missions and tasks. The Bulgarian armed forces are fully involved in these processes.

National Policy on Deployment of Military Forces in Domestic Contingencies

Bulgaria’s Military Strategy defines three broad missions that encompass the relevant tasks for the Bulgarian armed forces: “Contribution to the national security in peacetime; contribution to peace and stability in the world; and participation in the defense

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¹ Former French Prime Minister.

² John M. Collins, *Military Strategy: Principles, Practices, and Historical Perspectives* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2002), xvi.

³ Istanbul Summit Communiqué, 28 June 2004, Press Release PR/CP (2004) 0096.

of the country.”⁴ These three missions were slightly modified by a Strategic Defense Review, and once again reconfirmed in a policy framework document.⁵

Extraordinary Cases: Armed Attack on the Nation, Including CBRNE Attacks

The participation and role of the Bulgarian military in the process of crisis management and defending the country against an armed attack on the nation is very clearly described in the Military Strategy. The armed forces should be prepared to face “military threats” in specific actions in the event of “deliberate violation of borders, large-scale sabotage and other activities, use of another country’s armed formations and direct military aggression; mass epidemics and damage as a result of bacteriological, biological and chemical contamination.”⁶ But they also have a role to play in cases of violations of “security and public order like organized crime, terrorism, and ethnic and religious tensions.”⁷

Emergency Consequence Management for Disasters and Terror Attacks

In peacetime, the armed forces can participate in operation in cases of crises of a non-military character within Bulgaria’s borders. They can conduct preventive activities or provide direct support and protection of the population and the national economy in the event of natural disaster, industrial failure, or other catastrophes. When a state of emergency is declared, they can participate in operations against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, illegal trafficking in weapons, and international terrorism, guarding strategically important sites and interdicting terrorist activities.

Temporary Support to Civil Authorities

Units and formations of the armed forces can participate in operations against the traffic in drugs, people, or weapons. The military can also aid in guarding objects or sites that are potential targets for terrorist attack. Because these tasks are primarily the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior and the civil law enforcement agencies, the military would only participate when the civil authorities’ efforts and resources are not sufficient or spent, and the sovereignty and security of the country are threatened. The armed forces contribute to the collecting and processing of information on potential security risks and threats; operations to deter and neutralize terrorist, extremist, and criminal groups; protection and support of the population; and providing support (as appropriate) to other state bodies and organizations.

Traditional Missions

The Bulgarian military develops and maintains capabilities of “collection, processing, and analysis of information necessary for the purposes of early warning and support to

⁴ *Military Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria*, approved by the Council of Ministers in June 2002; available at www.mod.bg.

⁵ Strategic Defense Review, “Policy Framework,” adopted by the National Assembly on 25 March 2004; available at www.mod.bg.

⁶ *Military Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria*.

⁷ *Ibid.*

making political and military decisions on issues related to the military aspects of national security.”⁸ They provide capabilities and contribute to the control of Bulgarian airspace and territorial waters.⁹

Air force units help ensure the security of Bulgarian airspace, and navy ships and units implement maritime surveillance and interdiction tasks. The armed forces participate in the process of air traffic control jointly with the respective state authorities, as well as in the control and safeguard of the sea. Duty forces and assets are ready to act against airspace violators and safeguard the air and maritime sovereignty of the country, provide surveillance and control of the traffic at sea, and to offer forces and assets for response to vessels that violate the country’s maritime sovereignty.¹⁰

Historical Precedents

Post-War: How Military Forces Were Employed from 1945–1990

It might be useful and interesting to start the history overview a bit earlier than many twentieth-century histories do, and go back to the period after the First World War. In 1919, the Bulgarian armed forces were exposed to heavy international restrictions with regard to manpower strength, quantities of armament, equipment, and heavy weapon systems. At the same time, the country’s population and economy were suffering tremendous difficulties that were considered a national catastrophe. The prime minister at the time, Alexander Stamboliisky, leader of the party of the Bulgarian Agrarian Popular Union, passed a law through the parliament establishing a new “obligatory labor conscription,” mobilizing men over the age of twenty and women over the age of sixteen for the building of public construction projects; this effort became one of Stamboliisky’s most famous and admired reforms.¹¹ Even though it was announced as a temporary measure aimed at rebuilding the country after the war, and particularly at reconstructing vital infrastructure and economic installations, the “labor corps” (based on “labor conscription”) outlived Alexander Stamboliisky’s government by about eight decades.

In the period 1945–1990, the “labor corps” developed further, and split up into a series of armed and paramilitary formations subordinate to the different ministries, including the Ministry of Infrastructure and Construction and the Ministry of Transportation and Communications. They were building, maintaining, and in some cases guarding important infrastructure installations such as power plants, large administrative or cultural buildings, bridges, roads, and even blocks of flats. The Ministry of the Interior also had its own troops. They consisted mainly of internal forces and border guard troops.

Another tradition also began from a lesson learned during the rule of Alexander Stamboliisky’s government. He became a victim of a military *coup d’état*, which was

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Strategic Defense Review, “Policy Framework.”

¹⁰ *Military Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria*.

¹¹ Stefan Gruev, *Crown of Thorns* (Sofia: 1991), 109.

later followed by yet other coups. That was seen as a reason to keep the armed forces out of internal security issues as much as possible, and particularly out of any political struggles.

Post-Cold War: Examples from 1991–2001

The period 1991–2001 was a period of transition. Changes took place in the state government, the political system, and the economy. The military faced questions about the role of the armed forces in a liminal period, when the guarantees of collective defense were not in effect, since the Warsaw Pact had collapsed, but Bulgaria had not yet become a member of NATO. The armed forces are constitutionally obligated to maintain their readiness to provide reliable defense of the country; at the same time, however, they began implementing changes, and moving toward a “new qualitative status.”¹² The Bulgarian armed forces implemented a reform plan with key parameters that have no equivalent in the history of the country.¹³

Similar processes of changes took place with regard to the forces, troops, and formations subordinate to other ministries. The labor corps was terminated, along with the practice of labor conscription. The troops belonging to the Ministry of Infrastructure and Construction and to the Ministry of Transportation and Communications were disbanded. Within the Ministry of the Interior, a civilian border police service replaced the border guard troops, and the Internal Forces were transformed into a form of “Gendarmerie.”

Post-9/11

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the world is no longer the same. The importance of the availability, deployability, and usability of a capable military force was especially strongly outlined as a result of these tragic events. Bulgaria had begun to act as a real ally to the Atlantic Alliance long before it was invited to become a NATO member. Bulgarian troops have taken part in the operations in the Western Balkans, and at present Bulgaria is also providing host nation support and transiting of people and equipment for KFOR and SFOR (and now for EUFOR). With the formation of the global coalition against terrorism, the country has contributed in different ways, ranging from providing political support, to opening its airspace and providing an airfield for coalition forces, to sending a mechanized platoon to Afghanistan and an infantry battalion as part of the Polish multinational division in Iraq.

¹² *Military Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria.*

¹³ “Updated Plan 2004.” Some of the key parameters are: reduction of the military’s peacetime strength to 45,000, and wartime strength to 100,000; significant cuts to the main armament systems and military infrastructure; increasing interoperability with NATO; professionalization of the force; establishment of a permanent reserve; and implementation of important modernization projects.

Legal Authority for Deployment

The main law of the country—the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria¹⁴—defines the role of the armed forces. They are to “guarantee the sovereignty, security, and independence of the country, and protect its territorial integrity.” Together with the constitution of the country and the Law of Defense and the Armed Forces in the hierarchy of fundamental documents, there are some other documents that have a special role relating to the possible use of the military in domestic contingencies. These include the National Security Concept, Military Doctrine, Military Strategy, Joint Operations Doctrine, Operations Other Than War Doctrine, Special Operations Doctrine, the Doctrines of the Services, and Tactical Level Documents.

The National Security Concept provides a definition for security as a situation when “the major rights and liberties of the Bulgarian citizens are protected,” along with “the state borders, territorial integrity, and independence of the country.”¹⁵

The Military Doctrine¹⁶ defines the primary goals in the area of defense. The first goal is to “guarantee the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the country against threats of a military, armed, or *terrorist* nature,” and also the “protection of the population in times of natural disasters, industrial accidents, catastrophes and hazardous pollution.”¹⁷ The doctrine takes into account the risks to Bulgaria’s security and territorial integrity that result from “destabilizing effects of more limited military and/or armed formations and/or *terrorist groups*.”¹⁸

According to the Law of the Ministry of the Interior and the rules and regulations governing its implementation, this ministry is tasked with the responsibilities related to providing internal security. The participation of the armed forces in the implementation of tasks related to providing internal security is done “under conditions and in order established by the Constitution and the Laws. The legally established mechanism guarantees that the tasking of the Bulgarian armed forces is in the interest of the society and for the protection of the national values.”¹⁹ It is based on the provisions of the Military Doctrine and the Law of Defense and the Armed Forces. According to these documents, during peacetime, in an emergency situation (or when a state of emergency is declared), the military shall provide support to the civil law enforcement agencies against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the illegal traffic of weapons and people, and terrorism. The military takes part in guarding strategically important sites, and in operations directed at stopping terrorist activities. A state of emergency

¹⁴ *Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria*, adopted by the Parliament (Grand National Assembly) on 13 July 1991; changed and amended on 26 September 2003.

¹⁵ *National Security Concept of the Republic of Bulgaria*, adopted by the Parliament in April 1998; available at www.mod.bg.

¹⁶ *Military Doctrine of the Republic of Bulgaria*, Amended and Added, *State Gazette*, issue 200 (2002); available at www.mod.bg.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Article 22.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Article 13.

¹⁹ “Operations Other than War Doctrine 3.01,” 29 November 2000, in *Doctrines and Concepts of the Bulgarian Armed Forces*, Volume 1 (Sofia: Military Publishing House, 2001).

could be declared with a decision by the National Assembly (the parliament), or with an edict by the president when the parliament is not in session. Either the decision or the edict should specify the tasks, the number of troops involved, the period of use, and the command and control arrangements for the armed forces' units and formations that are involved. Some of the tasks described by the laws can also be implemented when a state of emergency has not been declared.

The Minister of Defense can give authorization for the participation of units and formations of the armed forces in the mitigation and resolution of the consequences of natural disasters, industrial catastrophes, and dangerous pollution on Bulgarian soil. The Minister of Defense and the Chief of the General Staff have to sign a special order for such authorization.

The military personnel implementing these tasks are instructed to strictly obey the provisions of the constitution and the laws. Limitations of the rights of citizens, freedom of movement, or violation of the sanctity of their property are permissible only as an exception and in cases of the highest emergency. The law or the act of declaring state of emergency describes these exceptions.

Types and Capabilities of Available Forces

The protection of the country and its population is realized through different types of forces and assets for domestic contingencies. This pool includes “forces and assets, established for direct implementation of the protection tasks and also forces and assets of ministries and departments, economic and scientific organizations, executing their basic functions, part of which sometimes have defense implications.”²⁰ For the protection of the civilian population, forces are provided from the Agency of Civil Protection; formations belonging to the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense; personnel and assets of the Ministry of Health; and resources from other ministries and organizations, central and local governments and administrations, non-governmental organizations, and volunteers.²¹

It is very important that the government have capabilities for fast and adequate reaction to terrorist attacks. Such a response would be faceted in nature; it would include “specialized detachments for rapid reaction in situations with hostages, to prevent chaotic massacres similar to the one in Beslan; technical teams; emergency medical personnel.”²²

Active Military Forces

Units of the three branches of the armed services maintain readiness for participation in different activities anywhere on Bulgarian soil. They are operational formations, and can be used only with the permission of the Minister of Defense and the Chief of the

²⁰ *Military Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria.*

²¹ *Military Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria.*

²² Brian Jenkins, “The Four Defenses Against Terrorism,” *24 Hours* (Sofia, 25 September 2004).

General Staff. Modular formations—created on the territorial principle, taking into account the location of the units—and combined detachments conduct specialized training to act in different situations.

Combat commando teams are prepared as part of the special operations forces. The specific structure of the special operations forces, along with their armament and special equipment, enable them to act in all kinds of conditions and allows flexible planning with a variety of options.

The Air Force Tactical Aviation Command can also bring to bear some of its special capabilities, such as aerial photography, reconnaissance and escort, transport of personnel and materials (including combat commando teams), and close air support. For the Air Defense Command, one of the biggest challenges is the detection, identification, and elimination of high-speed, small-size air targets, flying at low altitude, and coming into sight suddenly. The navy is able to contribute with their surveillance assets, aviation, and ships.

Paramilitary Police Forces

The Ministry of the Interior supervises a number of national law enforcement elements that have forces and assets with specific tasks. The Security Service specializes in counterintelligence and information gathering. The national police are an operational search and protection service for maintaining the public order and the prevention and investigation of criminal activity. The Counteraction to Organized Crime Service is dedicated to neutralizing the activities of local and transnational criminal structures. The Fire and Breakdown Safety Service provides fire control, firefighting, and search and rescue support on the national level. The Border Police guards the national border and controls the observation of the various legal regimes governing the nation's borders with its neighbors. The gendarmerie replaced the Internal Forces in 1997; it is a specialized guarding and operational search service for guarding strategic sites and other objects of critical importance, fighting terrorist and sabotage groups, maintaining public order, and preventing crime. Its units are highly mobile police structures, and can act individually or in concert with other services to deal with crisis situations, maintain the public order in civil disturbances, and also serve as reserve of the Ministry of the Interior for guaranteeing internal security.

Some specific tasks are assigned to the specialized anti-terrorist detachment. They may be implemented in interaction with other services of the Ministry of the Interior and armed forces units and assets, and include counteraction and neutralization of terrorists, searching specific regions, detaining terrorists and transferring them to the police, securing certain areas from terrorists, establishing contact with terrorist groups, and working for the release of hostages.

Reserve Forces

All forces and assets of the Bulgarian armed forces, regardless of which command structure or branch of service they belong to, or their level of manpower, are obliged to participate in activities in cases of crisis situations within the boundaries of their garrisons.