

## BOOK REVIEW

**Niall Mulchinock, *NATO and the Western Balkans. From Neutral Spectator to Proactive Peacemaker*, London: Palgrave MacMillan 2017.  
293 pp, ISBN 978-1-137-59723-6**

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The end of the Cold War constituted the start of a completely new chapter in the history of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). As the organization's main objective was the defense against the countries that were part of the Warsaw Pact, many put into question NATO's future after the Warsaw Pact ceased to exist and criticism about the need for its profound reform continued to this day. In his latest book, Niall Mulchinock argues that, in order to ensure NATO's relevance in the international security architecture, the organization needed to undertake a strong process of reform, that implied a total change of paradigm and approach. The aim of *NATO and the Western Balkans. From Neutral Spectator to Proactive Peacemaker* is thus to provide a critical overview of NATO's actions and operations in the specific region of the Western Balkans, that passed through the violent wars that followed Yugoslavia's disintegration. With a special focus on Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia, the volume follows the developments of both the conflict and the post-conflict phases. The book is organized in eight chapters, each analyzing NATO's specific involvement, combining historical overviews of the conflict and the post-conflict reconstruction efforts with a multidimensional analysis of the organization's approach towards the developments on the ground.

In the opening chapter, Niall Mulchinock explains the reason of his undertaking, almost two decades after – the need to focus on NATO's *raison d'être* following the end of the Cold War and the broad change of narratives during the evolution of the wars in the ex-Yugoslav area. At the same time, the author explains his multidimensional approach and defines the main levels of analysis: firstly, the positions of the United States, the United Kingdom and France (considered to be states that played a key role in NATO's policies towards the Western Balkans); secondly, NATO's interaction with other international organizations, such as the European Union, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe or the United Nations; thirdly, the role held by NATO's Secretary General and his influence in the decision-making process during the evolution of the conflicts. In this respect, Mulchinock focuses on both Manfred Wörner's (1988-1994) and Javier Solana's (1994-1999) mandates and their contributions on NATO's peace-enforcement deployments in the region.

Throughout the second chapter of the book, Mulchinock assesses the steps that NATO took at the beginning of the 1990s, as the organization was undergoing a process of reformation, marked by controversies and a greater role imposed by Secretary-General Wörner. Focusing on the conflicts that were developing in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, this section also deals with the reasons behind NATO's reluctance to intervene as the wars in the Western Balkans were expanding – divisions between member states regarding a more militarily forceful role of NATO (UK and US reluctance versus Denmark's firmness), caution about intervention in inter-ethnic / inter-state wars, fear of spill-over, a delicate relation of NATO leaders with Slobodan Milosevic. In this regard, the author emphasizes NATO's inability to understand and adapt to an unstable European security environment and this part of the study is one of the most well articulated in the whole book.

The next chapter focuses on a broad analysis of the final stages of NATO's involvement in Bosnia (1994-95), namely operation *Deliberate Force*. The most important aspects to be noted are the positions and the shifting roles of certain NATO members (mainly UK, USA, France and Germany), but also the extensive bureaucracy that defined many of the operations between 1992 and 1995. Giving these reasons (and not only), NATO only began to consider serious military

interventions in the latter half of 1994 (3 years after the start of the conflicts), and only after the failure of UN missions on the ground. Nevertheless, Mulchinock clearly states that US leadership was essential, questioning the use of force had it not been the shift in US policy towards this region.

Chapter 4 details NATO's intervention in Kosovo (1999) and how the organization used (some of) the lessons learned from Bosnia. Fear of another Srebrenica is given as the main reason of the military intervention, but he also mentions other possible cost of non-intervention (humanitarian catastrophe, spill-over in the region). Nevertheless, the author is keen on analyzing the evolution of the 1999 *Allied Force* operation and the individual policies of several NATO members, rather than discussing the quintessential relation between NATO and the UN throughout this period.

The following three chapters are dedicated to an in-depth analysis of NATO's Peace Support interventions in Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia respectively. While Bosnia is hardly seen as a successful story (due to the strong decentralization process promoted through the Dayton Agreement, the inability of international organizations to preserve political and social stability), Kosovo is perceived as a peaceful entity, mainly because the co-operation between NATO and EULEX in the establishment of independent security forces. This part of the argument could be easily challenged, especially if we look at current developments inside EULEX. The author also gives credit to the international community for supporting Kosovo's path towards independence, even if there are several burdens (especially the non-recognition policy carried out by Serbia, Russia, China and 5 EU member states). Macedonia is regarded as a success, if we consider the author's analysis on the country's multiple contributions to the international security environment (logistical support for KFOR missions in Kosovo – 2007, medical support for NATO in Afghanistan – 2011), even though it is not a member of the Alliance. As such, NATO is viewed as a net contributor to the security of Macedonia, building the ground for inter-ethnic reconciliation and a greater role of the country in the region's security architecture.

Overall, the multidimensional approach carried out by Niall Mulchinock allows the reader to understand the complexity of NATO's role in building and ensuring peace in the Western Balkan region at the end of the 1990s, while

creating a comprehensive map of interests, approaches, interactions and legacies, as perceived by NATO as a whole, (some of) its member states and Western Balkans elites. Each chapter offers both a comprehensive description of the events on the ground (including NATO's involvement) and an in-depth and multi-perspective analysis of the implication and the legacy of NATO's actions in the 1990s. To an attentive observer of security issues in the region, the book would not offer a fresh perspective on the topic, being in line with previous other works on NATO's military operations in the ex-Yugoslav space. Nevertheless, students interested in security studies and the process of peacebuilding in the Western Balkans might find this to be a good starting point for understanding the complexity of the issues at stake in the troubled region.