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**BALKAN REGIONAL PROFILE: THE SECURITY SITUATION AND REGION-
BUILDING IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE**

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I. Introduction

The second Bush administration took office in January. US policy towards the Balkan nations depends on the shifts in the White House, the Department of State, and the Pentagon. The Balkan countries taking part in the occupation of Iraq (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, and Romania) were uncomfortable with criticism of the war voiced by the presidential campaign of Senator John Kerry. The initial indicators of US policy under the old and new administration towards the Balkans and its individual countries have yet to be studied and analysed. ISIS expects that US Balkan policy will continue as it has for the past 15 years.

What have the US president and his team said in this respect? First, the administration said in a policy statement in December 2002 that it would “create a balance of power that favors freedom”, according to a speech delivered by then-National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice.¹ Diplomacy is designed to be the priority instrument in reaching this goal. Second, Washington will work to unite the community of democracies on the basis of shared values and the rule of law. Third, the fight against political violence movements and other security threats is another common denominator of the diplomatic efforts announced by the US. According to these statements, Washington will increase its reliance on allies and multilateral institutions in reaching its goals on the international arena. Should the US manage to make headway in Afghanistan and Iraq, this would strengthen the ranks of the reformers throughout the broader Middle East.

In Southeastern Europe, the Western Balkans countries continued their stabilization efforts, their NATO enlargement policy, their support for full EU integration of the Balkans, and were eager to set up US bases in Romania and Bulgaria. The US continues to rely on NATO support in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The rapprochement in US-French and US-German relations is welcome news for the Balkan countries contending for EU membership and for US support in their modernization efforts.

The Balkan countries continued to display disparities in the national political agendas this month: In certain countries, preparations for EU membership and improving the

¹ Rice, Condoleezza, The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, The 2002 Wriston Lecture: A Balance of Power That Favors Freedom, at: <http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/wl2002.htm>

performance as NATO allies or preparing for membership in the Alliance focused the national political attention and energy. In others, the ineffective performance of the respective political leaders in dealing with the past wars, mainly with war criminals caused delays in the process of integration into Europe. Changing this imbalance continues to be a major challenge of the Balkan regional policies of the countries in Southeastern Europe.

II. Security Threats and Post-Conflict Developments in the Balkans

1. Insurgency and Post-Conflict Rehabilitation (PCR) in Iraq and Afghanistan

a. Terrorism

1) US-EU Counter-Terrorism Cooperation. On 13 January, US Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge told the European Policy Centre in Brussels that security for both the US and the EU depended on collective action in the fight against terrorism. Ridge also announced that the US would send a full-time attaché from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to the EU. This new position would not be just symbolic of the commitment to increase cooperation, but would serve as a direct link between the DHS and negotiating partners across Europe at the operational level. Ridge claimed there was a need for greater information-sharing between nations and the utilization of advanced technologies. He also called for common international biometrics standards. Shortly before, the US had established a registered traveller program, under which individuals could provide biometric and biographic information voluntarily for comparison against an extremist watchlist. The first international pilot scheme of this program was begun at Schiphol Airport in the Netherlands on 13 January. The registered traveller program enables participating travellers to move more quickly through customs checkpoints. This practice will inevitably be extended to the Balkan nations soon.

2) Germany. On 12 January, the German police detained 22 individuals suspected of being Islamic extremists. 800 policemen searched 60 apartments and mosques in the federal states of Berlin, Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, North Rhine-Westphalia, and Hesse. The operation took place after several months of observation and preparation. Among those arrested were individuals who had allegedly spent time in a camp in Pakistan as al-Qaida trainees. Other charges included human trafficking, forgery of

documents, and financing clandestine activities. The group was based mostly in the cities of Ulm, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt/Main, and Bonn. Many of the arrested were reportedly members of the Muslim groups 'al-Tawhid' and 'Ansar al-Islam'.

3) France. On 24 and 26 January, the French police arrested 11 suspects for allegedly having recruited fighters to combat US troops in Iraq. Some militants, it is feared, may gain experience in Iraq and then return back to Europe. French intelligence had clear indications that French citizens had been involved in the Sunni resistance fighting against US occupation forces in Iraq.

4) Bulgaria. On 10 January, the chief of Bulgarian National Intelligence, General Kircho Kirov, told the press that his agency had information about structures and functionaries linked to al-Qaida. According to Kirov, there were individual Islamic extremists in the Balkan region who had fighting experience in Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Bulgaria has attracted higher terrorist interest since the country decided to support the US-led occupation of Iraq, joined NATO, and made its territory available for US military bases.

b. Post-Conflict Reconstruction (PCR) in Iraq.

1) Elections and Efforts to Disrupt Them. (1) An audio tape, ostensibly featuring a message by Osama bin Laden, was broadcast by satellite channel al-Jazeera on 27 December 2004. It called on all Muslims to boycott elections in Palestine and Iraq, to fight a "holy war" in those countries, and condemned the UN and the Iraqi security forces. The statement, the authenticity of which is difficult to assess, also named Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as the leader of al-Qaida in Iraq.

(2) On 4 January, Iraqi resistance fighters assassinated the governor of Baghdad, Ali Al-Haidri, in the capital. Simultaneously, a suicide blast at a checkpoint in the city killed six and wounded 40. On 3 January 20 Iraqi soldiers from the National Guard were killed by terrorists.

In the preparation for the elections on 30 January, the involvement of Shi'ites, Sunnis, and Kurds was a key issue. Sunni conservative clerics called for a boycott of the elections. Terrorists and rebels purposefully targeted election activists, candidates for membership in the Assembly, and workers conducting election polls. More than one million expatriate Iraqis joined the elections in 14 countries.

2) Occupation Forces in Iraq

a. Poland. The new Polish foreign minister, Adam Daniel Rotfeld, said on 7 January that the 2'400-strong Polish contingent might remain in Iraq after this year. Poland had planned to reduce its troops to 1'700 after the elections. According to opinion polls in Poland, more than 70 per cent of the country's population are opposed to the Polish presence in Iraq.

b. Bulgaria. On 21 January, Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov told the National Assembly that Bulgaria's presence in Iraq needed to be discussed. The desired outcome of the debate should be a confirmation of the country's principled position not to make decisions under pressure from extremists, and to reassure the US of Bulgaria's value as a stable and predictable ally.

3) Democracy in Iraq. Iraqi society and the Iraqi state are at a social and political turning point. Whether Iraq will ever experience democracy - and if so, what kind of democracy - remains to be seen. However, it is doubtful that the Iraqi public perceives the struggle of the militants and insurgents as a fight against democracy and freedom. The high number of parties (more than 100) and of individuals competing for the National General Assembly may be confusing to many Iraqi people. But the 30 January elections may give additional clues as to the wishes of the Iraqi people. The southern and the northern parts of the country were relatively calm and many Iraqis were expected to turn out for the elections. Voting in the two predominantly Sunni central provinces was expected to be more problematic. The voter turnout, however, should not be considered the yardstick for measuring the success of the elections. The essential element of these elections was the transition from a US-appointed to an elected government. The National Assembly is to elect the new president, who will appoint the new government. The elections should be viewed as a start of a longer process that will be followed by a referendum on the constitution in October. It will be followed by elections that would lead to a stable government by the end of 2005. The danger of further destabilization did not disappear when the elections were called. The danger of democracy and freedom spreading to other Muslim countries is a threat to conservative clerics and extremists as well terrorist leaders.

4) EU-Iraq. On 28 January, the European Commission decided to provide €200 million for the post-conflict rehabilitation of Iraq. The announcement of the support hours ahead of the general elections demonstrated the EU's strong support for rebuilding Iraq.

c. PCR in Afghanistan. On 19 January, NATO issued an updated progress report on weapons cantonment in Afghanistan. The collection of artillery, tanks, and other weapons from armed factions in Afghanistan was 82 per cent complete, according to the report. Already, 7'360 operational and repairable heavy weapons have been locked in guarded compounds. The Heavy Weapons Cantonment (HWC) program recently began in the Panjsher Valley in Northeastern Afghanistan. All Balkan countries except Serbia and Montenegro are participating in the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.

2. Post-Conflict Developments in the Western Balkans

a. Kosovo. On 11 January, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office (CIO), Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, urged all the people of Kosovo to play an active part in the political process to help build a stable, multi-ethnic society.² He said in Pristina that Kosovo Serbs would only be able to shape their own future and ensure better protection of their rights by returning to the political process. The OSCE chairman also appealed to Kosovo's Albanian politicians to reach out to the Serb community. This should be the key priority for the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government. The OSCE Mission in Kosovo is the largest of the OSCE's 18 field missions. Rupel stressed that the review of standards scheduled for 2005, especially those concerning the protection of minorities, would be key to the future development of Kosovo. The proper implementation of standards and the Europeanisation of Kosovo represented two sides of the same coin, Rupel said.

The still unresolved status of Kosovo, together with uncertainty about the required standards of inter-ethnic attitude, impatience on the part of the international community, and a broad understanding among Serbs that Kosovo will never be Serbian, have prompted many analysts from the region and beyond to consider the question of dividing

² For this section, see US State Department summary of OSCE press release: http://www.usembassy.it/file2005_01/alia/a5011107.htm

the province and separating the Serbian territories (with less than 80'000 people) from the Albanian Kosovars. Serbian politicians in Belgrade consider Kosovo a burden for the whole country on its way of getting on board the European integration. This thinking coincides with Albanian ambitions for independence at any cost. It remains an open issue to what extent the 'separation' may be seen as a precedent and trigger events elsewhere in the Balkans. The viability of the potential Kosovo state is also doubted, though local leaders may be keen to secure prestigious positions within a state structure. This year promises important developments in Kosovo.

b. Bosnia and Herzegovina. Three events related to Bosnia and Herzegovina highlighted deficiencies– the slow and difficult reconciliation process and delays in the centralization of the state institutions, and the establishment of a security sector .

On 17 January, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague sentenced Bosnian Serb officer Vidoje Blagojevic to 18 years in jail for perpetrating and assisting in the genocide of 7'000 Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica in 1995. This was the second genocide conviction brought by the UN-established tribunal. Blagojevic had pleaded "not guilty".

On 20 January, a US federal court ordered the extradition of former Bosnian ambassador to the UN Muhamed Sacirbey to Bosnia and Herzegovina. He faces an investigation there into the disappearance of funds from the country's diplomatic mission to the UN.

Sacirbey is a naturalized US citizen who represented his country to the UN from 1992-2001. He took part in negotiating the Dayton Peace Accords.

On 15 January, Bosnian Serb war crimes suspect Sava Todovic was extradited to the ICTY in The Hague. Republika Srpska policemen and Bosnian state border police nearly clashed during the transfer of the indicted war criminal. Emotional scars from the war and the lack of professional security services continue to mar the post-conflict situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

III. The National Perspectives of the Balkan Countries: Specific Issues

1. Albania. "The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) welcomed the commitment by Albania's ruling Socialist Party and the opposition Democratic Party to ensure the passage of Electoral Code amendments and to agree on a

redrawing of electoral zones. The OSCE Presence in Albania facilitated the negotiation of a protocol that outlines the joint commitment of the two parties and will facilitate further talks on redrawing the zone boundaries.³

2. Croatia. (1) After two rounds of presidential elections in Croatia on 2 and 16 January the Croats re-elected President Stipe Mesic with nearly two-thirds of the votes. The candidate of the ruling HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) party, Deputy Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor, failed to beat the incumbent, who was supported by most of the opposition parties. In the first round 12 candidates ran for the post of Croatian President. Stipe Mesic noted that the ruling HDZ had waged a dirty campaign against him. The international community did not supervise the presidential election in Croatia – the first since Croatia became an independent state. (2) On 4 January, Croatian Foreign Minister Miomir Zuzul resigned after being accused of accepting a bribe from a Croatian businessman. Croatia starts accession negotiations with the EU on 17 March.

3. Serbia and Montenegro. On 13 January, US Secretary of State Colin Powell decided to withhold US\$10 million in assistance from Serbia and Montenegro for fiscal year 2005 because of Belgrade's continuing lack of cooperation with the UN ICTY in The Hague. In March 2004, the US State Department had withheld more than US\$16 million from the fiscal 2004 assistance budget. According to the US Department of State, there had been no improvement in the country's cooperation with the tribunal since Powell's decision in March 2004. The US called again on the authorities in Belgrade to cooperate fully with the tribunal by arresting and transferring fugitive indicted war criminals, particularly Ratko Mladic, to face justice in The Hague. The US government said it had examined alternative ways to use the withheld funds to further its policy objectives, including by redirecting them away from the central government and focusing the financial assistance on organizations and programs outside of the central government that are committed to reform. Powell was ready to review this decision if future actions by Serbia and Montenegro demonstrated the country's desire to cooperate with the ICTY.

4. Bulgaria. Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov and the political parties were close to agreement about holding the regular general elections on 25 June this year. The Bulgarian

³ US State Department executive summary of OSCE press release. US State Department, International Information Programs, at: <http://lists.state.gov/SCRIPTS/WA-USIAINFO.EXE?A2=ind0501a&L=WF-EUROPE&P=R6207>

Socialist Party (BSP) continued to lead the polls ahead of the elections, though there was little prospect of forming a coalition with other centrist parties. On 21 January, Socialist leader Sergey Stanishev said that the foreign-policy priorities for the BSP were the EU; the US; the Balkans; Russia; and the Middle East. He said that he wanted the US to know that the ‘left’ in Bulgaria would be a responsible and predictable partner.

IV. State of Bilateral, Multilateral, and Regional Relations in the Balkans: Bilateral Relations – Turkey-Bulgaria.

On 24-25 January, General Boyko Borisov, Chief Secretary of the Ministry of Interior – the highest-ranking police officer in Bulgaria - visited Turkey. He discussed bilateral cooperation in the fight against drugs trafficking, organized crime, and terrorism. General Borisov received a special reward by the Turkish Ministry of Interior in acknowledgement of his contribution to the fight against organized crime. While in Turkey, he coordinated a joint Bulgarian-Turkish anti-drug operation. It resulted in the confiscation of six tons of synthetic drugs destined for Middle East and worth of more than US\$1.5 billion.

V. The Economic Situation of the Balkan Countries and the Region

According to a Heritage Foundation Index of Economic Freedom for 2005, announced on 4 January, Bulgaria has been rated 52nd; Greece – 59th, and Croatia – 74th out of 155 countries. Serbia and Montenegro, though included in the study, did not provide the data for the rating. Bulgaria and Iceland marked the biggest jump in the rating of the Foundation. France was rated 44th. Hong Kong, Singapore, Luxembourg, Estonia, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Iceland and Australia were the ten most “free” economies of the world, according to the report. The Heritage Foundation is a neo-liberal, conservative think tank whose stated mission is “to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense”.⁴

⁴ <http://www.heritage.org/about/>

VI. The Process of Differentiated Integration of Southeastern Europe in EU and NATO

1. E U: EU-Bulgaria, Romania. (1) On 18 January, EC Commissioner on Enlargement Olli Rehn told the European Parliament's Foreign Relations Commission that Bulgaria and Romania had progressed considerably in their preparations for EU membership. However, said Rehn, the two countries need to do a lot of additional work to fulfill all of the required membership criteria. The discussion with the EU members of parliament focused mostly on enlargement issues concerning Turkey, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia. There were also special questions concerning the judicial reform and the fight against corruption in Romania. (2) On 25 January, after concluding his meeting with the new Romanian prime minister, Kalin Popescu Taricanu, European Commission President Jose Manuel Durao Barroso told the press in Brussels that there were no obstacles for Bulgaria and Romania to sign their Accession Treaties to the EU on 25 April. According to the EC president, Romania still has to progress in the fight against corruption as well as in the areas of competition, environmental conservation, and justice.

2. NATO

a. The Annual NATO Crisis Management Exercise. "NATO will conduct its annual crisis management exercise January 26 to February 1 to practice procedures for dealing with a hypothetical deployment outside the Euro-Atlantic area aimed at reducing tension between two fictitious states. The exercise includes addressing the risk of conventional conflict as well as a terrorist attack using weapons of mass destruction. Military and civil staffs -- but no actual troops -- from the 26 member countries, plus nine partner countries (Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Finland, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland, Macedonia), will participate from several locations."⁵ The exercise was sponsored by the NATO's Secretary General, and was jointly run by the International Staff and the International Military Staff, and the two NATO Strategic Commands – Allied Command Operations, and Allied Command Transformation.

b. NATO – Bulgaria. On 21 January NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told the Bulgarian press that the US bases in Bulgaria would bring stability for NATO

⁵ The following text is the State Department summary of a NATO press release, from the US Embassy in Addis Ababa website: <http://addisababa.usembassy.gov/wwwwh0312.html>

too. The security in the Black Sea region and the safety of the outer boundaries of the Alliance would be improved, said the Secretary General. He also added that they could also be used as training grounds by allied countries.

VII. The Influence of Other External Factors on the Region: National Great Powers and International Institutions

1. U S A: USA-Bulgaria, Romania. On 12-13 January, SACEUR General James Jones visited Bulgaria and Romania. He held talks with leading defense authorities and inspected potential US military bases in the two countries ahead of finalizing the official US position vis-à-vis Sofia and Bucharest. While in Bulgaria, Jones stressed his interest in the land base in Novo Selo, the Bezmer air base, and the Atia navy base. Poor weather in Romania prevented him from holding a final inspection of the Romanian military bases, but he received adequate information about them. The treaties for using the bases will be signed by the governments of Romania, Bulgaria, and the US. The parliaments of the signing countries would then need to ratify the treaties. The lease term of the treaties could be 10 years with options for prolongation. The treaties would describe in detail the life cycle of the rented bases, including their closure. The cost will be determined by the rules of supply and demand.

2. Russia: Russia-Turkey. From 10-12 January, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Russia and met with President Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov, and other leaders. He was accompanied by a delegation of 700, including one representative of the Turkish-backed Republic of Northern Cyprus. Putin had visited Turkey in December 2004. The January meeting focused on bilateral economic issues, Iraq, the regulation of the Cyprus issue, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the rapprochement between Turkey and Armenia. Erdogan asked Putin to recognize the Republic of Northern Cyprus.

VIII. Conclusions

The developments in January were a reminder of the impact of external great powers on the state of regional security. It became even more important for the individual nations and the region in general to realize that international attention could be turned to other

regions and locations, away from the Balkans, with negative consequences for the stability in the area.

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