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# Analysis of the Impact and Actuality of Challenges, Risks and Threats to the Security of the Republic of Serbia

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## Article Information\*

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## **Abstract**

Challenges, risks and threats to the security of the Republic of Serbia are defined by the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia. However, the concept of security at the global level can be considered before and after beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Consequently, the question arises of the need to analyze the relevance of the existing interpretation of challenges, risks and threats to the security of the Republic of Serbia. The goal of the work was stated, and for this purpose the research was conducted using: survey methods (survey technique) and statistical methods, with the fact that in the research process it was inevitable to implement the methods of expert evaluations, analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction. Respondents (experts) in the research were retired and active members of the military and civilian security services, members of the Committee for Defence and Security and the Committee for Control of Security Services of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, diplomatic representatives of the Republic of Serbia and members of the academic community whose sphere of interest is security science. The research, at the level of scientific description, resulted in the following outcome, an expert analysis of the list of dangers to the security of the Republic of Serbia from the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia was performed, and on the basis of which observed deficiencies can be eliminated. The analysis consisted of: checking the list of dangers according to changes in the strategic environment, determining their impact and selection by groups.

*Key words:* security, danger, challenge, risk, threat.

## **Analysis of the Impact and Actuality of Challenges, Risks and Threats to the Security of the Republic of Serbia**

### **Introduction**

Today, security is a key function in the development of any society (Seniutiene, 2020, p. 352). Globalization has complicated numerous security challenges, risks, and threats (See more: Bjelajac, 2017), and, among other things, has led to the increase and diversity of organized crime that undermines contemporary society. It is becoming increasingly difficult to combat this crime due to its mobility, inventiveness, and "invisibility" (See more: Bjelajac, 2015; Bjelajac, 2011). The modern world is characterized by unpredictability, interdependence, as well as extremely complex dangers to the security of the state, i.e. its constituents. In order to predict, prevent and limit occurrences of this kind, and control their impacts, special attention is needed from the competent institutions of the state, that is, permanent monitoring of the strategic environment and security trends. The basis for strategic analysis of the environment and security trends is the existence of a security conceptual-categorical apparatus (the paper presents one type of apparatus used in the Security Sciences).

In the modern age security from the organizational aspect can be analytically interpreted through separate coherent units: cognitive (theories), vertical (sectors: military, political, social, economic and ecological) and horizontal (levels: individual, national, regional and global) (Ejdus, 2012, p. 33). The basic concepts of security grammar are: danger (what threatens), reference object of security (what is threatened) and security means and measures (the way to protect) (Ejdus, 2012, p. 36). Depending on the probability of occurrence and the severity of the consequences, dangers are divided into challenges, risks and threats.

Challenge represents the least harmful form of danger in terms of content and consequences, and in terms of time it is the most distant danger from the safety reference object (Sheehan, 2022, p. 203). It is about the apparent phase of the danger which may or may not be

realized and which consists in the possible intention of its bearer (Pamučar et al., 2016, p. 24).

Risk is defined as a set of different processes, factors and relationships that independently or in interaction may or may not lead to the consequences of endangering the safety reference object. A risk contains a higher degree of danger compared to a challenge, a higher probability of causing some damage, it is untimely detection very quickly turns into a clear threat. (Herring, 2022, p. 48).

Threat is a conscious intention to cause harm to the security reference object in order to force it to comply with the imposed behavior. Security threat is a synonym for a form of security threat. It is concrete phenomenon whose occurrence is the least uncertain, while the harmful effects are the greatest and indisputable (Ejdus, 2012, p. 37).

Challenges, risks and threats to the security of the Republic of Serbia are defined by the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia (hereinafter referred to as the Strategy) (Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Serbia, 2020). The Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which actually represents a "proxy" conflict between the NATO alliance and the Russian Federation, i.e. the People's Republic of China, has led to changes in the concept of security at the global level (NATO-Official text, 2023). Consequently, there is a need to analyze the positions in the Strategy that relate to dangers to the security of the Republic of Serbia, i.e. to check the list of challenges, risks and threats according to changes in the strategic environment of the Republic of Serbia, determine their impact and selection by groups.

Consequently, for the purposes of the work, a research<sup>1</sup> was carried out whose goal, at the level of scientific description, is to answer the research question: "Is there a need to redefine the challenges, risks and threats to the security of the Republic of Serbia?". The research question is also the subject of research in the paper.

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<sup>1</sup> The research was conducted in order to prepare a doctoral dissertation entitled "Specificity of the intelligence-security function of the political system of the Republic of Serbia" at the University of Defense in Belgrade, candidate Antonio Mak.

## **Research Method**

The research method used in the work is a combination of several methods, of which the examination method and the statistical method are the basic methods, with the fact that in the research process it was inevitable to implement the method of expert evaluations, methods of analysis and synthesis, and induction and deduction. The goal of applying the research method and the statistical method is to determine the dominant attitudes from the subject of the research work, as well as to summarize the existing information on the subject of the research, while at the same time avoiding implementation the analysis of dangers to the security of the Republic of Serbia according to the free discretion and expectations of the researcher (Rietjens, 2006, pp. 8–9). The research approach that was applied in the paper includes three phases: (1) planning the research, (2) conducting the research and (3) reporting the results (Pamučar, 2020, p. 1).

## **Measurements and Research Procedures**

In order to realize the analysis of dangers to the security of the Republic of Serbia, a research protocol has been defined, with the following elements: research objective; research question that will be answered by analyzing the security risks of the Republic of Serbia; formation of a potential expert group; creation of a survey; filling in questionnaires by experts; analysis and processing of data obtained from experts; in the case of impossibility of forming a general group opinion of experts, the survey procedure is repeated in the necessary number of iterations, but only for issues for which there is no general opinion; in the event that after receiving the general group opinion there is a drastic deviation from it, an interview is also conducted with the experts (preparation of the basis for the discussion, conducting the interview and analysis of the data obtained through the interview and their implementation in the previously processed data); formation of an expert group (calculation of experts' competence scores); extraction of data and synthesis of extracted data (analysis of agreement of expert ratings – in case there is no agreement of expert's ratings, the opinions of individual experts that deviate are rejected, and then the

procedure of calculating the average rating of the expert group competence is repeated) (Kovačević, 2021, pp. 123–124). Here, it is important to point out that the dangers to the security of the Republic of Serbia (defined by the Strategy) were examined as independent variables from the point of view of the factors that determine the strategic environment of the Republic of Serbia and security trends. As dependent variables were examined: the probability of occurrence and the severity of the consequences of the danger, i.e. their impact on the security of the Republic of Serbia.

The aim of the research is to analyze the strategic environment of the Republic of Serbia from the point of view of security dangers at the level of scientific description, in order to determine whether there is a need to redefine the challenges, risks and threats determined by the Strategy.

Before forming a potential expert group, it is necessary to determine the number of experts, that is, the sample size of the population being examined. In order to determine the size of the sample, the size of the population to be examined through the lens of the sample should first be defined. Taking into account the fact that a part of the population consists of retired and active members of the military and civilian security services, diplomatic representatives of the Republic of Serbia, the publication of this data would represent the leakage of secret data, accordingly the size of the population cannot be determined. In order to determine the size of a representative sample for a population of unknown size with a reliability coefficient of 0.95, the method explained by Svetozar Vukadinović is applied (Vukadinović, 1990, pp. 239–242). By applying the mentioned method, the minimum size of the expert group is determined, which is 16 people.

Viewed from the aspect of knowledge of the strategic environment of the Republic of Serbia, persons who possess the characteristics that determine them as “general education experts” were consulted. The potential expert group was formed using the mutual recommendation method, that is, the “snow avalanche” method (Milićević, 2014, p. 84). The potential expert group consisted of 34 experts.

## Results

Survey questionnaire consisted of two parts, the first one related to questions regarding the assessment of expert's competence and the second one that contained questions related to the subject of the research. Due to the volume of the work, the survey questionnaire will not be shown here. The survey procedure itself was carried out by submitting the questionnaire in written form (directly to the experts) and in electronic form (via electronic addresses). The time for filling out the questionnaire was given for one working day, professional help during the survey was provided by the researchers.

The analysis and processing of the data obtained from the experts consisted of two parts: (1) formation of the expert group and determination of the expert's competence rating and (2) analysis of the expert ratings results. Formation of the group and the assessment of the expert's competence was carried out using the combined method of Dobrova and the Polish method (Alfares & Duffuaa, 2008, p. 127). An expert group of 18 persons was determined, which satisfied the condition regarding the reliability coefficient, and the competence rating of the group is 0.719. An acceptable coefficient of competence of a group of experts is a coefficient whose value is greater than 0.5 (Pamučar et al., 2012, p. 150).

During the first iteration of the survey, there was a general group opinion of the experts (this was confirmed based on the analysis of expert ratings), that is, there is a correlation in the answers of the experts. Consequently, other research steps defined by the research protocol were not applied.

## Discussion

Processing of the collected data was carried out using the techniques of the statistical method: positional values and the chi-square test. Correlation of expert's ratings for all questions from the questionnaire (except risk analysis) were processed using the chi-square test, and the value was 30.02 for a total of 17 degrees of freedom, the table value for the specified degree of freedom  $P=0.050$  is 35.70 (Petz, 1997, p. 369). Consequently, there is no statistically

significant deviation of the theoretical from the actual frequencies of expert's ratings. Expert's ratings from the part of the survey questionnaire related to the analysis of dangers were processed using the positional value – mode. The processing results showed the correlative nature of the experts' answers. Here, it is important to point out that the experts were given the opportunity to supplement the proposed threats to the security of the Republic of Serbia through the questions asked, all for the purpose of increasing the quality and coverage of the issues with their opinions.

Experts agree that the Strategy is a basic document, that is, the positions in the Strategy are the starting point for the development of other strategic-doctrinal and legislative documents that regulate the field of national security of the Republic of Serbia (Figure 1). The experts are unanimous in their opinion that the positions in the Strategy should be periodically redefined (a period of 5 to 8 years) and/or in the case of events that fundamentally change the concept of security at the global level, all for the sake of a timely review of changes in the strategic environment of the Republic of Serbia (Figure 2). The above unequivocally shows that the strategic environment of the Republic of Serbia has changed because of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and that a new strategic analysis of the environment is necessary in order to be able to define dangers to the security of the Republic of Serbia. Consequently, there is a correlation between security trends, strategic analysis and security dangers determination.

Experts agree that it is necessary to introduce a conceptual-categorical apparatus into the Strategy, where the terms: safety, danger, challenge, risk and threat would be clearly separated (Figure 3). Also, it is necessary to revise the positions in the Strategy from the point of view of clearly defining which danger according to the probability of occurrence and the severity of its consequences for the security of the Republic of Serbia, i.e. its impact (effect, intensity) belongs to a certain group (challenge, risk or threat). In accordance with the above, the experts agree that the impact of a certain danger on the security of the Republic of Serbia should be determined first. The general opinion of the experts on these issues is given in Table 1. Based on their competence, the experts evaluated each danger on a



scale from 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest, 5 the highest offered value) viewed from the point of view of the impact (probability of occurrence and severity of consequences) of the specific dangers to the security of the Republic of Serbia. It is important to emphasize here that the experts had the opportunity to add a danger that was possibly omitted and to evaluate it.

After that, the expert's ratings were processed using the mean positional value-mode, specifically the number in the field of a certain rating represents the number of experts who expressed their opinion with that rating regarding the impact of a certain danger on the security of the Republic of Serbia. The values in the "Size of impact" column were obtained by multiplying the number with the value of the scale division, adding them and dividing by the number 18. The values for the "Group" column were determined according to the levels of the influence value: challenge ending with 1.67; risk from 1.68 up to and including 3.33; and threat from 3.33 to 5.00. It can be seen from Table 1 that the experts agree with the existing list of dangers to the security of the Republic of Serbia from the Strategy.

Consequently, it is clear that there is a need to revise the positions in the Strategy regarding the strategic environment and challenges, risks and threats to the security of the Republic of Serbia. Also, all of the above implies the necessity of harmonizing other strategic-doctrinal and legislative documents that regulate the field of national security of the Republic of Serbia.

## **Conclusion**

Through the determination of dangers and their impact on the security of the Republic of Serbia, the factors that determine the strategic environment and security trends were examined, with the aim of analyzing the positions in the Strategy as a basic document that governs the field of national security of the Republic of Serbia (the starting points for the preparation of the Strategy are the determination of dangers, strategic analysis and security trends). The conducted research, i.e. examination of independent and dependent variables, proved the correlation between security trends, strategic analysis and determination of danger (their impact) on the security of

the Republic of Serbia, i.e. the need to redefine positions and concepts in the Strategy.

The sample that was examined represents a wide spectrum population from the point of view of dealing with the security of the Republic of Serbia. With the aforementioned, an effort was made to avoid bias, as well as to achieve the quality of the research results.

The research results confirm that there is a need to redefine the Strategy in the first and second chapters, which refer to the strategic environment and challenges, risks and security threats. The results of the research show that there is a general opinion of experts that it is necessary to redefine positions in the Strategy cyclically, following security trends, in principle every 5-8 years (the current Strategy was adopted after 12 years), or when an event that has an enormous impact on national security. Accordingly, a change is needed in the first chapter of the Strategy.

The results of the statistical test showed that the experts agree with the existing list of dangers to the security of the Republic of Serbia from the Strategy, but they also believe that in the second part of the Strategy it is necessary to implement a conceptual-categorical apparatus to avoid the misinterpretation of certain concepts and in order to create a basis for defining challenges, risks and threats. The impact of certain danger needs to be determined in order to determine whether they are a challenge, risk or threat. Under the influence, the probability of occurrence and the severity of the consequences of a certain danger are evaluated.

As a result of the above, an answer to the research question was reached, i.e. there is a need to redefine challenges, risks and threats to the security of the Republic of Serbia, and the paper presents one of the potential solutions to this problem.

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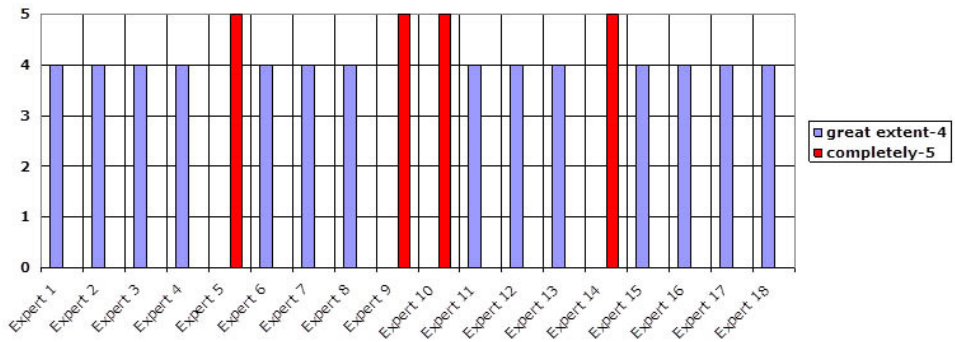
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## Appendix

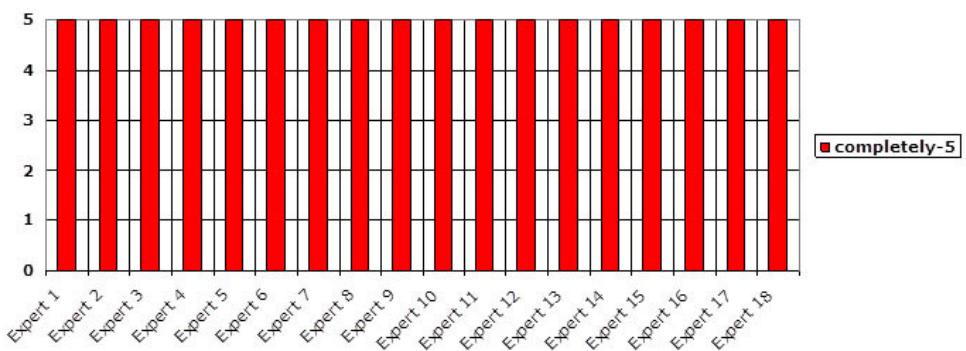
**Figure 1**

*The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia as a Basic Document*



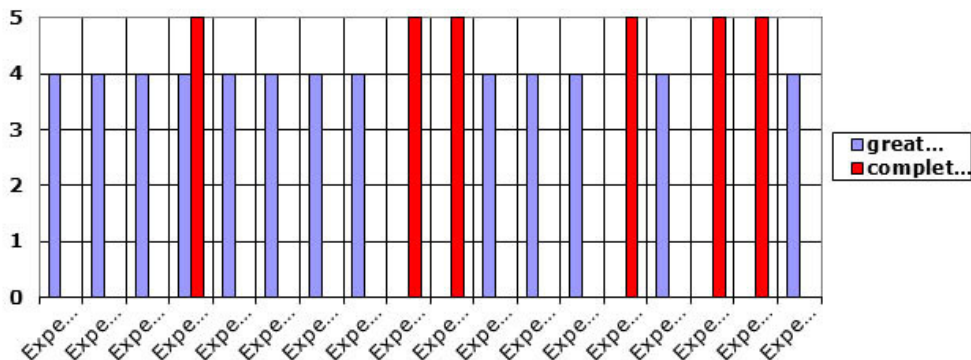
**Figure 2**

*The Need to Redefine the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia*



**Figure 3**

*Term-Categorical Apparatus in the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia*



**Table 1**

*Analysis of Dangers to the Security of the Republic of Serbia*

Name of danger to the security of the Republic of Serbia	Evaluation					Size of impact	Group
	5	4	3	2	1		
Armed aggression	2	4	5	3	4	2,83	Risk
Separatist aspirations	7	8	1	2	-	4,11	Threat
Illegally unilaterally declared independence of the territory administratively included in the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija	7	7	3	1	-	4,11	Threat
Armed rebellion	-	-	8	7	3	2,28	Risk
Terrorism	4	4	3	4	3	3,11	Risk
Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction	3	2	8	3	2	3,05	Risk
Ethnic and religious extremism	8	7	3	-	-	4,28	Threat
Intelligence activities	9	7	2	-	-	4,39	Threat
Organised crime	5	4	4	4	1	3,44	Threat

Name of danger to the security of the Republic of Serbia	Evaluation					Size of impact	Group
	5	4	3	2	1		
Drug addiction	-	1	8	6	3	2,39	Risk
Mass illegal migrations	6	8	3	1	-	4,05	Threat
Problems of economic development	8	8	1	1	-	4,28	Threat
Problems of demographic development	1	3	4	7	3	2,44	Risk
Epidemics and pandemics of infectious diseases	2	2	8	5	1	2,94	Risk
Energy security	4	6	7	1	-	3,72	Threat
The unfinished process of demarcation of the countries of the former SFRY	-	-	3	6	9	1,67	Challenge
Natural disasters and technical and technological accidents	-	3	6	5	4	2,44	Risk
Climate change	-	-	7	9	2	2,28	Risk
The rise of high-tech crime and threats to information and communication systems	8	9	1	-	-	4,39	Threat

## **Analiza uticaja i aktuelnosti izazova, rizika i pretnji na bezbednost Republike Srbije**

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### **Sažetak**

Izazovi, rizici i pretnje bezbednosti Republike Srbije definisani su Strategijom nacionalne bezbednosti Republike Srbije. Međutim, koncept bezbednosti na globalnom nivou može se razmatrati pre i posle početka rusko-ukrajinskog sukoba. Sledstveno tome postavlja se pitanje analize postojećeg tumačenja izazova, rizika i pretnji po bezbednost Republike Srbije. Navedeno je cilj rada, i u tu svrhu je sprovedeno istraživanje primenom: metode ispitivanja (tehnik anketiranja) i statističke metoda, s tim da je u proces istraživanja bilo neminovno implementirati metode ekspertske ocene, analize i sinteze, indukcije i dedukcije. Respondenti (eksperti) u istraživanju su bili penzionisani i aktivni pripadnici vojnih i civilnih službi bezbednosti, članovi Odbora za odbranu i bezbednost i Odbora za kontrolu službi bezbednosti Narodne skupštine Republike Srbije, diplomatski predstavnici Republike Srbije i pripadnici akademske zajednice čija je sfera interesovanja nauke bezbednosti. Istraživanjem se na nivou naučne deskripcije došlo do sledećeg rezultata, izvršena je ekspertska analiza liste opasnosti iz Strategije nacionalne bezbednosti Republike Srbije, a na osnovu koje se mogu otkloniti uočeni nedostaci. Analiza se sastojala iz: provere liste opasnosti shodno promenama u strategijskom okruženju, određenja njihovog uticaja i selekcije po grupama.

*Ključne reči:* bezbednost, opasnost, izazov, rizik, pretnja.