

Holding Defender Europe 2023 Exercises in Kosovo Aimed Against Serbia and Russia

Deciding to host such provocative exercises in the heart of the Balkans only signals for Serbia recognise Kosovo's independence, and end its Russophilia.

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Next summer, Kosovo will host a massive NATO field exercise, with preparations already underway. The Kosovo Security Forces (KSF) will participate with two regiments in the exercises that are not only aimed at pressuring Serbia, but also Russia. The facts are that the actions of NATO in the Balkans, most particularly the US, is focussed around the construction of Kosovo's statehood as an independent entity from Serbia.

The participation of the KSF in these exercises is unsurprising because their forces have been present in previous exercises. By the West equipping and building the KSF, NATO and the US are trying to ensure Kosovo's survival and security. For Serbian leaders in Belgrade though, this is an alarming development, especially as it is an attempt to resolve the issue with Kosovo in a non-peaceful manner.

With this in consideration, it cannot be overlooked that perhaps the US wants violence to breakout in the heart of the Balkans to once and for all resolve Kosovo's separation from Serbia, particularly at a time when Russia is already occupied with its own military operation in Ukraine.

Holding a NATO exercise in Kosovo is a big challenge for the institutions in Belgrade in a legal, diplomatic, security and military sense. The problem, however, is that leading NATO members approach the statehood of Kosovo as if it were a country with complete international recognition, which does not correspond to reality. In fact, in recent years, several countries have reversed their recognition of Kosovo's independence, hence the need to disseminate and propagate information about NATO's upcoming exercises in Kosovo so far in advance.

Kosovo's authorities, as well as the leading countries of NATO and the EU, want to make it known that nothing can be expected from the strategic goals proclaimed by Serbia in any

negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina. Therefore, according to the West, Serbia should accept Kosovo as an independent state. In this way, the ultimate goal of all negotiations is to form pressure against Serbia.

These exercises are not only a direct type of pressure against Serbia, but also Russia. In other words, the message to Belgrade is that it should not resist too much against the West's demands regarding Pristina's efforts to integrate the Serbian-dominated region of northern Kosovo into the composition of the partially recognised state.

The West is signalling to Russia that it has no chance of expanding its influence in the Balkans, despite the friendly relations Belgrade has with Moscow. This is because the West wants to shape Serbia in a way that adheres to the interests of the Western alliance. For this reason, there are parallel pressures against the Serbian-dominated entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republika Srpska, as well as in Kosovo. This is effectively in order for the West to end Serbian national interests, which Russia has always supported.

By building NATO and American bases in Albania and trying to cover all territories with NATO forces, it shows that the Western alliance is working hard to ensure that the Balkans does not fall under so-called Russian-influence.

The Kosovo Army will participate in "Defender Europe 23" with two regiments, and during this exercise, the KSF infantry at the regimental level will demonstrate its capacities. "Defender Europe" is an annual exercise led by the US, in which troops from different countries participate. The exercise aims to increase the readiness of US, NATO and partner armies.

This year, "Defender Europe" was held in Albania with American troops landing in the port of Durrës, which was announced as the largest military exercise in the Western Balkans region. About 28,000 soldiers from 26 allied and partner countries participated in the exercise, and it took place in seven different bases in the countries of the region.

These exercises have always been held with a sight of the US forcing its European allies to go to war with Russia. Deciding to host such provocative exercises in the heart of the Balkans, especially in a territory which does not even have its independence recognised by all NATO members, only signals for Serbia to capitulate, recognise Kosovo's independence, and end its Russophilia.

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