



THE UNIVERSITY OF DEFENCE IN BELGRADE
MILITARY ACADEMY

PROCEEDINGS

Military Sciences

Social Sciences

Military Medicine

Defence Technologies



INTERNATIONAL
SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE
ON MILITARY SCIENCES

2025

Belgrade, Serbia, 11-12 September 2025

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OPENING ADDRESS – INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE "VOJNA 2025"

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, esteemed guests,

It has been two years since the Military Academy hosted the first Conference on Military Sciences. Unlike the inaugural event, which we are, of course, proud of, this year's conference brings an added dimension of quality, for at least two important reasons.

First of all, thanks to our friends from partner countries, this year's conference has gained an international character. I would like to take this opportunity to extend a special welcome to our guests and participants from abroad, and to thank them for honouring us with their presence and trust.

Second, the "VojNa 2025" Conference is being held in a year of great significance for us, as one of the key activities marking a major jubilee: the 175th anniversary of the Military Academy. For 175 years, the Academy has withstood the test of time, fulfilling its honorable mission to educate and train the necessary number of highly qualified, well-prepared, physically resilient, and morally strong officers, ready to serve their military and their country. Its long-standing tradition rests on firm foundations laid by the knowledge, skills, achievements, ideas, and even the lives of our predecessors, commandants, professors, and all the officers who were educated and trained within its walls. That is why the Military Academy, as the home of all officers, nurtures a special form of gratitude towards those who came before us, as well as toward all its current members, who, despite many challenges of our time, remain steadfast in their commitment to the noble vocation of educating and mentoring future officers.

The main objective of the international scientific conference "VojNa 2025" is to foster scholarly and scientific exchange and enhance cooperation among experts and researchers in the fields of military, military-technical, social sciences and humanities, and medical sciences. The conference provides a platform for presenting the latest findings, theoretical approaches, and practical solutions related to contemporary challenges in the field of defence and security, and there are many such challenges.

Over the course of the two-day event, a total of 100 scientific papers will be presented, divided into several subject areas. What truly underscores the international character of this conference is the fact that 13 of the presented papers are authored by members of foreign armed forces. This stands as clear evidence of the international recognition and reputation of the Military Academy, the University of Defence, and the Serbian Armed Forces within the global academic and professional community.

As in previous years, this event will serve as a platform for strengthening scientific cooperation, sharing experiences, and promoting new ideas that may contribute to the advancement and development of defence and security systems, both in the national and broader international context.

A particularly valuable contribution will come from discussions on the future development of military education systems and the challenges that lie ahead, bearing in mind that military education holds strategic importance for the development of modern defence and security systems.

Once again, I would like to thank all the participants of our conference, to the Rector of the University of Defence, and the organizational units of the Ministry of Defence for their support in organizing the conference. I wish you all a successful and productive conference.

Professor Colonel Srdjan Blagojević, PhD
Commandant of the Military Academy (Dean)

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DEFENSE DIPLOMACY IN SERBIA: UPHOLDING MILITARY NEUTRALITY IN A SHIFTING SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

Over the past few decades, defense diplomacy has gained increasing relevance in both academic and policy discussions. In contrast to traditional demonstrations of military power, defense diplomacy prioritizes collaboration and confidence-building, aligning more closely with diplomatic engagement than operational military aims. Building on this understanding, the paper explores the role of defense diplomacy in Serbia's efforts to preserve military neutrality within a shifting and often unpredictable global security environment. Anchored in Hans Morgenthau's theory of political realism, the analysis considers how Serbia seeks to safeguard its sovereignty and maintain strategic autonomy while managing external pressures and advancing its path toward European integration. The paper is organized into three sections. The first section explores the complex balancing act that Serbia faces as it maintains its neutrality while simultaneously striving for deeper European integration and stronger regional ties. The second analyzes how Serbia balances its national interests within the broader security landscape. The third examines how defense diplomacy supports Serbia's neutral position, enabling international engagement without alignment. In doing so, the paper offers insight into how smaller, non-aligned states can navigate today's geopolitical complexities while upholding independent security policies.

Keywords: defense diplomacy, military neutrality, international engagement, regional security, geopolitical dynamics.

Introduction

The concept of diplomacy, while practiced for millennia, only started to be labelled with the term we recognize today during the 17th and 18th centuries. Historical records indicate that Cardinal Richelieu of France, an influential statesman in the early seventeenth century, was one of the earliest to apply the concept within the realm of official statecraft, especially in his role managing foreign relations (Rehman, 2019, p. 40). Others credit François de Callières, an ambassador under Louis XIV, who used the term in his influential 1716 work *On the Manner of Negotiating with Sovereigns*, which outlined the principles of negotiation and diplomatic conduct (Berridge et al., 2001; Callières, 1919/2022, p. viii). What these sources agree on is that the emergence of the term coincided with the

institutionalization of foreign relations, as diplomacy evolved into a distinct and professional practice. Over time, diplomacy evolved beyond simply the art of negotiation to encompass a comprehensive framework for representing state interests and managing international relations through peaceful means. Within this broader diplomatic practice, the specific concept of defense diplomacy¹ emerged later, particularly in the aftermath of the Cold War. This shift was driven by changes in the global security environment, where the reduction of ideological tensions and the easing of the arms race allowed states to employ military tools not just for deterrence but also as instruments to support diplomatic engagement and international cooperation (Blagojević, 2016, pp. 467–479). As its name implies, defense diplomacy emphasizes diplomatic engagement over operational military effectiveness and it should not be conflated with “gunboat diplomacy or reduced to simple military cooperation” (Charillon et al., 2020).

In the realm of international politics, especially in periods of strategic uncertainty, the principles of sound diplomacy become essential for preserving national interests without provoking unnecessary conflict. For Serbia, which pursues a policy of military neutrality in a shifting regional and global security environment, the framework offered by Hans Morgenthau in his seminal work *Politics Among Nations* (1968) offers enduring guidance. *Ergo*, this paper employs a qualitative, interpretative approach grounded in Hans Morgenthau’s theory of political realism to examine Serbia’s use of defense diplomacy as a tool for maintaining military neutrality. The analysis is framed within the broader changes in the global security environment, characterized by renewed great power rivalry, shifting alliance patterns, and the evolving regional security challenges directly impacting Serbia’s strategic position. By focusing on Serbia, a militarily neutral, yet internationally active state, the paper contributes to the broader debate on how small powers deploy defense diplomacy to navigate geopolitical constraints without compromising sovereignty or aligning militarily with larger blocs.

Navigating Between Neutrality and Integration: Serbia’s Strategic Balancing

It is essential to emphasize that neutralism, neutrality, and non-alignment are three distinct but related concepts that describe different approaches a state can take to maintain independence and avoid entanglement in external military conflicts or alliances. To be exact, neutralism is a general political stance characterized by a country’s decision to remain impartial in international conflicts, avoiding formal military alliances and refraining from participation in wars (Boczek, 1989, pp. 5–22). It reflects a broader attitude of non-involvement, often motivated by the desire to protect sovereignty and peace. Neutrality, by contrast, is a legally defined and often formally declared status under international law and it obliges a state to abstain from supporting any party in an armed conflict and imposes specific restrictions, such as prohibiting the establishment of foreign military bases or the passage of troops through its territory (Convention (V) respecting the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers and Persons in Case of War on Land, 1907). Neutrality thus carries recognized rights and responsibilities, particularly during times of war. Non-alignment differs from both in that it represents a strategic foreign policy choice to avoid formal alliance commitments, especially to major power blocs, while still allowing for pragmatic cooperation and engagement in international relations (Boczek, 1989, pp. 5–22). Non-aligned states seek to preserve their autonomy by balancing relations among competing powers without exclusive military commitments. Together, these three concepts

¹It is important to note that there is no scholarly consensus on the precise definition of defense diplomacy.

illustrate different levels and forms of maintaining sovereignty and independence in international affairs: neutralism as a general attitude, neutrality as a legal status with specific obligations, and non-alignment as a flexible strategic policy.

Serbia formally adopted military neutrality in 2007, committing to avoid joining military alliances and participating in conflicts that do not threaten its sovereignty, which includes not hosting foreign military bases and emphasizes self-reliant defense capabilities to protect against potential aggression (Vračar & Ćurčić, 2022). According to Blagojević (2016) “this legally non-binding document was adopted as a political platform for negotiations intended to regulate the status of Serbia’s southern province... most of the document addresses those issues, except for point six, which states the reasons for declaring military neutrality”: *“Due to NATO’s overall role, from the unlawful bombing of Serbia without the UN Security Council decision to Annex 11 of the rejected Ahtisaari Plan, which designates NATO as the ‘final authority’ in ‘independent Kosovo’, the National Assembly decides to declare the military neutrality of the Republic of Serbia concerning existing military alliances until a possible referendum on the final decision regarding this issue.”* (Blagojević, 2016, p. 249).

Beriša and Barišić (2016) highlight a central question: whether Serbia’s accession process to the European Union is compatible with its declared military neutrality, and what the main strategic challenges to maintaining this neutral status are in that context (Beriša & Barišić, 2016, pp. 259–269). They identify three critical strategic issues that could significantly impact the sustainability of Serbia’s military neutrality and its EU accession: the status of Kosovo and Metohija, Serbia’s relations with the Russian Federation, and the political position of a militarily neutral Serbia within the European Union (Beriša & Barišić, 2016, pp. 259–269). These challenges have become even more pronounced in the aftermath of the Russian-Ukrainian War in 2022, which has reshaped the geopolitical landscape in Europe and intensified the EU’s expectations regarding alignment with its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Serbia, as an EU candidate country, is under increasing pressure from Brussels to demonstrate commitment to European values, particularly in the area of foreign policy alignment. One of the most visible manifestations of this pressure has been the repeated calls for Serbia to impose sanctions on the Russian Federation in line with the EU’s restrictive measures (Balkan Insight, 2022). However, Serbia has so far refrained from aligning with these sanctions, citing its strategic partnerships, energy dependence, and national interest. Such pressure places Serbia in a difficult position: on one hand, it seeks to maintain its declared military neutrality and balanced foreign policy; on the other hand, it must navigate the political and normative demands of EU integration.

Morgenthau’s Framework: Key Rules for Navigating Security Challenges

Morgenthau outlines *nine fundamental rules* of diplomacy, more precisely, nine principles that remain profoundly relevant for small and medium powers seeking to preserve sovereignty, stability, and strategic flexibility through diplomacy (Morgenthau, 1968, p. 584). Interestingly, although these “rules” were formulated nearly a century ago, many of them remain strikingly relevant to the challenges Serbia faces today as it strives to maintain military neutrality within an increasingly complex and dynamic security environment (Beriša & Barišić, 2025). According to Morgenthau the first rule implies that “diplomacy must be divested of the crusading spirit”, warns against conducting foreign policy based on ideological zeal or moral absolutism (Morgenthau, 1968, p. 584). The second

rule insists that the objectives of foreign policy must be defined in “terms of the national interest and must be supported with adequate power” (Morgenthau, 1968, p. 586). The third rule holds that diplomacy must look at the “political scene from the point of view of other nations” (Morgenthau, 1968, p. 587). The fourth rule argues that nations must be willing to compromise on issues that are not vital to them (Morgenthau, 1968, p. 587). The fifth rule encourages states to give up the shadow of worthless rights for the substance of real advantage (Morgenthau, 1968, p. 586). The sixth rule warns: *never put yourself in a position from which you cannot retreat without losing face and from which you cannot advance without grave risks* (Morgenthau, 1968, p. 588). The seventh rule is that one must never allow a weak ally to make decisions for you (Morgenthau, 1968, p. 589). The eighth rule stresses that the armed forces are the instrument of foreign policy, not its maker (Morgenthau, 1968, p. 590). Finally, the ninth rule asserts that the government is the leader of public opinion, not its slave (Morgenthau, 1968, p. 591).

Taken together, Morgenthau’s rules offer a coherent framework for assessing the logic and limits of defense diplomacy in today’s complex international system. For Serbia, these principles help define a diplomatic posture that is neither passive nor provocative, one that seeks cooperation without compromising neutrality, and one that emphasizes strategic maturity in an era of growing polarization (Barišić, 2025; Nedić & Mandić, 2025; Beriša & Barišić, 2016). Morgenthau (1968) argues that foreign policy must be grounded in a pragmatic understanding of national interest, assessed not through abstract ideals or ethical absolutes, but through the lens of power and strategic necessity. Central to this view is the alignment of diplomatic objectives with national interests, supported by appropriate instruments of power, he further highlights the importance of understanding international affairs from the perspectives of other states, recognizing the diversity of their interests and constraints. Strategic adaptability, he notes, is vital, states must avoid entanglements that limit their freedom of action or expose them to unnecessary risk.

Considering these rules, a more compelling argument would emphasize that defense diplomacy serves not merely as a tool of cooperation but as an essential mechanism of strategic balancing for militarily neutral states such as Serbia. Encircled by the NATO members and situated at a geostrategic crossroads, Serbia faces a persistent imperative to preserve both its sovereignty and security autonomy. In such a context, Morgenthau’s insistence on aligning foreign policy with national interest, supported by credible instruments of power, provides theoretical justification for cultivating bilateral and multilateral military relationships short of alliance commitments. Rather than viewing neutrality as passive detachment, Serbia can leverage defense diplomacy to actively shape its security environment, signal its strategic relevance, and avoid marginalization in regional security frameworks. This aligns with Morgenthau’s eighth rule, that the armed forces must serve as instruments of diplomacy, by positioning the military not only as a guarantor of defense but as a proactive agent of trust-building, confidence measures, and conflict prevention (Vračar & Ćurčić, 2025). Such an approach mitigates risks of strategic isolation while reinforcing Serbia’s image as a responsible, constructive actor in European security affairs, fully in line with realist principles (Vukadinović & Milenković, 2024, pp. 105–126).

The Role of Defense Diplomacy in Sustaining Serbia's Military Neutrality

Early efforts to define the concept of defense diplomacy can be traced to the work of British scholars Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forster, who argue that it evolved from the more narrowly defined notion of military diplomacy (Cottey & Forster, 2004, pp. 7–15, as cited in Drab, 2018). Lech Drab (2018) builds on this by noting that, traditionally, military diplomacy referred to the specific responsibilities of military attachés and other defense officials engaged in peacekeeping operations and international military cooperation (Drab, 2018). Drawing on Berndt von Staden's interpretation, Drab highlights that military diplomacy often involved participation in disarmament negotiations and arms control talks, emphasizing its limited scope. On the other hand, defense diplomacy reflects a broader strategic function, encompassing a wider array of activities that support a state's foreign and security policy objectives through peaceful military engagement (Drab, 2018). While it has gained significant traction in both academic and political discourse, there is still no universally accepted definition. Various countries interpret and apply the term in ways that align closely with their specific security policy objectives. As defense diplomacy increasingly becomes a key instrument of a state's foreign policy, it has begun to replace the previously dominant term “military diplomacy”, which is now viewed as more limited in both scope and function. Defense diplomacy must avoid commitments or alignments that limit flexibility or risk escalation (Blagojevic, 2017, pp. 58–61).

The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Serbia carries out a range of activities relevant to defense diplomacy through its Military Representation, which includes the Office of the Serbian Armed Forces and the Defence Office in Brussels, as well as the Liaison Team at the NATO Military Cooperation Division in Mons (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije, n.d.). Through its presence in Brussels, the Ministry engages in multilateral cooperation by participating in dialogue and processes within NATO's Partnership for Peace framework and by maintaining regular contact with institutions of the European Union and with representatives of allied and partner countries (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije, n.d.). These offices also serve to strengthen bilateral defense relations, enabling coordination of joint military exercises, training programs, and expert exchanges with the NATO and the EU member states. In addition, the Liaison Team in Mons provides a direct operational and technical communication channel with the NATO's Allied Command Operations, and its function plays a key role in coordinating military cooperation, overseeing joint activities, and ensuring transparency and confidence-building between Serbia and the NATO (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije, n.d.). Through these diplomatic and operational engagements, the Ministry promotes and defends Serbia's defense policy positions, particularly its commitment to military neutrality, while informing partners of defense reforms and priorities.

Furthermore, Serbia's military-diplomatic presence in Brussels supports the broader process of European integration in the field of security and defense. By engaging in the EU-led crisis management missions and participating in relevant security initiatives, the Ministry of Defence contributes to aligning Serbia's defense system with European standards and strengthening its role as a credible and constructive partner in the international security environment (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije, n.d.). Serbia's strategic balancing depends on maintaining maneuverability, engaging in cooperation without becoming locked into binding alliances or confrontational positions. Serbia continues to clearly articulate its national priorities, such as the preservation of territorial integrity and the promotion of regional stability, while ensuring these objectives are supported by

credible defense capacities and carefully designed diplomatic efforts (Defence Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, 2021, p. 25). Therefore, defense diplomacy serves as a means of demonstrating both preparedness and a constructive commitment to peace, without necessitating alignment with any military bloc.

Conclusion

Defense diplomacy represents a strategic asset for military neutral states seeking to engage constructively in regional and global security without compromising their sovereignty or military neutrality. Serbia's example demonstrates how a carefully calibrated defense diplomacy enables a state to participate in important security initiatives and cooperative frameworks while deliberately avoiding entanglement in the rivalries of great powers. This balanced approach allows Serbia to assert its agency in an increasingly complex and unpredictable international environment, enhancing its security and diplomatic standing without abandoning its fundamental principle of military neutrality. By fostering transparent communication, building trust with diverse security actors, and actively contributing to multilateral and bilateral cooperation, Serbia has strengthened its resilience and flexibility as a security actor. In a world marked by renewed global tensions and shifting alliances, Serbia's use of defense diplomacy underscores the continued relevance of political realism, illustrating how states outside formal military alliances can pursue pragmatic engagement to safeguard their national interests and promote regional stability. While the scope and length of this paper do not permit a thorough analysis of what would represent a fully successful defense diplomacy strategy, the findings here nevertheless point to its growing importance. This paper indirectly appeals to Serbia's political leadership to dedicate greater attention and resources to the concept of defense diplomacy, recognizing it as a vital tool for enhancing both regional and global cooperation. By actively promoting defense diplomacy, Serbia could strengthen its international partnerships and contribute more effectively to stability and security in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment.

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