George R.R. Martin. 2011.
A Song of Ice and Fire, books 1-5. New York: Bantam Books.

Clash of Kings – A Regional Security Perspective in "Songs of Ice and Fire"

One of the popular TV shows today is the "Game of Thrones", a series based on George R. R. Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire.* The work has become the most popular fantasy book since Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings.* This essay will look at the epic world of Martin's books through the lenses of regional security studies in general and Regional Security Complex Theory in particular. This analysis will use all the published books to date, and certain events will be revealed for those who have not read all the books (spoiler alert). Although it should go without saying, one caveat needs to be made. I decided to pick up on only a few limited events and relationships from Martin's work in order to shed light onto regional-level analysis in IR.

Our story takes place on the continent called Westeros, in a country where seven independent kingdoms existed throughout history, each with a strong sense of regional identities. It should however be noted that each kingdom is not a political unit in and of itself, but rather a regional constellation of feuds. The former kings became the greatest lords of the new, united, kingdom under the control of the House of Targaryen's dragons. Geography of this epic continent directly shaped the development of different regionalisms. The southern kingdom (Dorne) is separated from the rest of Westeros by a high mountain wreath of Red Mountains. Dorne was the last to enter the Seven Kingdoms and it is the only kingdom that is not involved in the civil war between the aspirants for the Iron Throne. The North Kingdom is detached by the cushion-dominated Moat Cailin on Neck, a fortress blocking the way to the North. To the East of Westeros, the Vale, surrounded by Mountains of the Moon, decided to stay out of the war. Pyke, an island kingdom, with a sea between them and the rest of the land lives a life faithful to the Drowned God. Just like in the real world, significant geographic isolation and the existence of specific historic traditions of the independent kingdoms led to the development of strong regional identities, which are an important security factor in the kingdom ruled by the Iron Throne. Perhaps, the best example of this are the Wildlings behind the Wall. Being isolated on the far north, they have constructed a completely different set of social relations based on individuality and freedom. The only thing that unites them is a common goal – survival and nothing else.

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The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) is one of the few comprehensive theoretical paradigms in security studies operating at the regional level of analysis. Here, I will show its applicability in explaining the world politics of the Seven Kingdoms. The basic premise of the RSCT is that threats travel faster over shorter distances than over longer distances, which makes security dynamics more intense inside a regional security complex. First, I will determine the patterns of amity and enmity, and then the problem of external influences in the regional complex of the Westeros.

Patterns of amity and enmity depend on securitization. Because of the constant "Game of Thrones", securitization is not an adequate theoretical framework. A lasting pattern of amity and enmity is based only in the north, behind the Wall. This epic world is a world of feudal social relations based on loyalty proclaimed by given word, limiting our analyses of the dynamics of amity and enmity, which are extremely blurred and problematic. In a world where given word is easily violated and oaths are broken as if they do not mean anything - it is extremely difficult to interpret how the structure of amity and enmity hangs together (and if there is any). Amity and enmity in this world are pragmatic, fast changing, and based on a leader's interest and perceptions (Waltz's first image).

I will show a few examples that significantly affected the security dynamics of the region. A good example is the relationship between the Frays and Starks after the arrival of the northern army in River lands. The Frays allow the Stark's army to cross the bridge over Green Fork River in Twins, on the condition of friendship and alliance between the two Houses. Their alliance is confirmed by the promise of an engagement between a lady of the House Frey with Robb Stark, the king of the North and the leader of the House of Stark. This friendly alliance had become the foundation for success in the war against the Banisters in River lands and resulted in a series of major military victories, including the one where Jaime Lannister, Kingslayer, and the leader of the Lannister's army, was captured, changing the fortune of war for the Starks. So now a series of raids in Lannister's lands near Lannisport and Casterly Rock can begin. But then Robb Stark, son of the most honourable man of the Westeros, Edard Stark, who, because of his honour, was executed at the end of the first book in the series, violates the given word and marries another woman, not one of the Freys. The violation of the given word results in a "Red Wedding" and the death of Robb Stark, which ends the dominance of the North in the war. The North now, at least ostensibly in the form of Roose Bolton, the new protector of the North, owes their allegiance to the King on the Iron Throne, Tomen Barateon, grandson of Tywin Lannister protector of the West and lord of House Lannister. This example shows us how changes in patterns of amity and enmity directly influence security dynamics between regional actors.

Another interesting example is the behaviour of Theon Grejoy, a friend and closest adviser of Robb Stark, who becomes the conqueror of Winterfell and the alleged killer of Edard Stark's last legitimate sons, Bran and Rickon Stark. While he was in doubt about how to act after he failed to convince his father, king of Iron islands, to help the Starks in the war against the Lannistera, Theon Grejoy decides to become the enemy of the House of Stark

because of his own House tradition characterized by a long hatred between the House of Grejoy and the House of Stark. This is similar to the hatred between the House of Tyrell and Martell of Dorne, which has gone on for centuries. Throughout the book we can see that the security dynamics of the civil war for the Iron Throne relies directly on the dynamics of amity and enmity of the Houses and their leaders. Because RSCT does not study the first image of international relations - individual and human nature - it cannot explain the changes in patterns of amity and enmity.

The next element of RSCT, which we will use in this analysis of Westeros regional security complex, is external influences. While reading the book, we first get the impression that Westeros is the only world in this epic fantasy. Later on, we realize that Westeros is only one of the continents, a region of the world in "Song of Ice and Fire", which exchanges influence with the rest of the world. Thus the war in Westeros is nothing more than a large regional conflict formation with regional actors waging war.

I will single out two theoretical external influences: overlay and penetration. Overlay, in theory, is an external force so dominant in the specific region that it completely abolishes the security dynamics between regional actors. In world history, this is exemplified by the U.S. or USSR relationship with Europe during the Cold War. When it comes to overlay, it is not present in the book so far. However, I claim that overlay exist, but only as a possibility. Currently, after the fifth book of this epic fantasy, we do not have enough reasons to believe that overlay will come, so it is just a possibility. The overlay is the Others, magical mythical creatures that come from the frozen north and magically revive the dead to use as soldiers. The only barrier that keeps them in the north is the Wall, a building of titanic proportions, which protects the north of Westeros and its inhabitants from the Wildlings – free people and Others. The Night's Watch, a millennium brotherhood that guards the Wall and the Seven Kingdoms, has a sacred testament of non-interference in internal conflicts of Westeros and in the battle for the Iron Throne. Why are the Others a possible overlay? Because they are the only ones who could, by breaking the Wall, completely halt the security dynamics within the Seven Kingdoms. Then there would not be a war between the Houses, and everyone would have only one enemy, the Others. This attack by the Others would probably influence a new form of security dynamics. Perhaps, the Seven Kingdoms can become a more unified, super state or at least some type of a security community.

Why is this possible? The Wall is a magical barrier and the Others cannot approach it. That's why the un-dead are the only ones who can potentially open the Gate and let the Others pass through the Wall. The second obstacle, the Night's Watch, is currently at the crossroads. Losing strength, the remains of the once famous brotherhood of protectors will not in itself constituted a significant barrier to the Others' attack, as the battle for the "Fist of the First Men" shows. With the mysterious fate of John Snow, Lord Commander, against whom his brothers turned, the power of the Night's Watch declines. The third obstacle, perhaps the largest, is the place of the Others' threat in the minds of the people of Westeros. For the people, the Others are just mythical creatures from folk tales and

nothing more. So the question is how would a knight from Dorne unite with the Knights of the North in case of an attack, because even in the North there is no belief in the Others? It remains to be seen how in his next book, Martin will describe the fate of the Others' threat and the fate of the North in general.

Another external influence, in the form of penetration, can be seen in the role of Deanerys Targaryen, the only legitimate successor to the Iron Throne. Penetration occurs when foreign forces are engaged in a region and can change the balance of power between the actors. In world history, we have such influence by the U.S. and USSR in the Middle East during the Cold War. Of course, at this point we have the appearance of Egon Targaryen, but since his role is currently vague, we leave him for now. Daenerys has the same weapon – dragons - that her ancestors used to unite the once independent kingdoms under the rule of the Iron Throne. A dragon would significantly disrupt the power relations between the warring Houses. But not as in the case of the Others; dragons will not become the trigger for the unification of the people against the invaders, or the reason for a fundamental change in the security dynamics. The very appearance of Daenerys Targaryen is extremely complex, it could be said even incomprehensible, because her interest in the fate of Westeros is lost in the pile of other plans and conflicts on the other end of the world. Neither she nor the Others have a real role in the security dynamics of the conflict between the Houses of Westeros. Only Martin can give us answer when the role of these influences will become real.

The epic fantasy book series, *Song of Ice and Fire*, is a worthy successor to Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. The great value of this series is that it is still far from the end, and that gives us great opportunities to use this epic fantasy as an educational tool to demonstrate and present international relations theories and security theories, especially at the regional level of analysis. *Song of Ice and Fire* is an open system because it is not yet finished and we do not know the destiny of this novel's heroes. *Lord of the Rings* is a closed, completed system because it came to an end and we know how the story finished. A completed system gives us the opportunity to successfully test the value of certain theoretical paradigms, their assumptions and results and, thus, determine the value of each. On the other hand, an open system allows us to test the usefulness of theoretical paradigms in predicting the movement of world politics.

This epic world, dominated by the game of thrones, is a great tool to understand how a stable security community implodes without external influences and becomes a conflict formation. Moreover, it shows how security dynamics depends on the actors and their mutual feelings and perceptions. Those of us who are teaching Security Studies can use the popularity of this book series and television show to attract students' attention and demonstrate practical value of the theoretical knowledge of our discipline.

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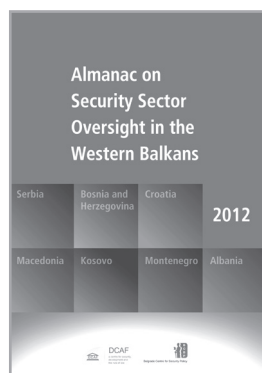
YEARBOOK OF SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN SERBIA (DECEMBER 2012)

YEARBOOK
OF SECURITY SECTOR
REFORM IN SERBIA

Legal state, general and financial transparency, representativeness of women and minorities, participation of citizens and civil society organisations, democratic and civilian control and oversight, legitimacy, human rights protection and human resources management – these are major topics of the new edition of Yearbook of Security Sector Reform in Serbia.

Being the key output of research project "Mapping and Monitoring Security Sector Reform in Serbia", the primary goal of Yearbook is to contribute to the development of practical policies. Additionally, it aims to raise awareness about the potential difficulties of measuring the process of SSR and encourage further academic research in this field. The research teams of Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP) conducted significant research that included desk reviews of primary and second sources, interviews, questionnaires and in some cases focus groups with relevant state authorities. In the second cycle of project (2009-2011), the methodology was enhanced and major change was a shift from an actor-oriented grading approach (Yearbook 2006-2008) to a sector-wide approach. Therefore, this time the grades were given for each criterion, instead of each security sector actor. This publication will be available for purchase by the December 2012.

ALMANAC ON SECURITY SECTOR OVERSIGHT IN THE WESTERN BALKANS (MARCH 2012)

Almanac on
Security Sector
Oversight in the
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Serbia | Bosnia and Herzegovina | Croatia | 2012
Macedonia | Kosovo | Montenegro | Albania

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This publication aims to provide an independent research-supported overview on the key achievements and weaknesses in the accountability of security sectors of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo, and to present what effect this has on the countries' democratic transition.

Almanac Security Sector Oversight in the Western Balkans answers the questions which security actor is in charge of wich domain, what their competencies are, who controls different actors, and what are the budgets of given security systems.

Main goal of this publication is to overcome lack of security governance transparency across the region. This book is the key result of joint research project of seven Western Balkan think-tanks and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF). The unique component of the Almanac is advanced methodology for mapping and monitoring security sector reform which was originally developed by the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy. It is available for free download on the www.bezbednost.org and in hard copy at the BCSP's library.

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The Journal of Regional Security will be the first peer-reviewed journal specializing in the field of regional security studies. Subject areas will include: security communities, regional security complexes, regional security sector reform and governance, security regimes, regional conflicts, security integration, region-building and comparative regional security research. The JRS is intended for international security scholars and policy makers from South East Europe but also from other established or emerging regions of the world. It aims to bring academic security studies communities from the Western Balkans not only closer to each other but also closer to security studies and security policy communities from other regions of the world thus enabling smarter and more sustainable regional policy solutions. Journal of Regional Security was established in 2006 by the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy and took its present title in 2012.

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