



One Hundred Sixteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
www.foreignaffairs.house.gov

January 17, 2020

Admiral James G. Foggo, III
United States Naval Forces Europe
United States Naval Forces Africa
United States Sixth Fleet
PSC 809 BOX 70
FPO AE 09626-0001

Dear Admiral Foggo:

I write to express my concern with an interview you gave on December 16, 2019 to European Western Balkans news service while visiting Belgrade, Serbia. In your interview, you made several comments about NATO-Serbian cooperation which do not adequately reflect United States policy and seem to conflict with a report sent to Congress earlier this year by the Department of Defense. (attached)

In particular, you said about NATO and Serbia, "I see the cooperation improving in my mind." You added, "Right now, they are partners and your country is very happy with that, and that's great. We are fine with that too." You then stated, "So you will pick and choose what you want to do and how far you want to take this relationship, and we will be there for you."

My concern stems from the omission of United States concerns about the expansion of Serbian-Russian security ties since 2012. In a report to Congress dated May 31, 2019, the Department of Defense (DoD) detailed the enhanced Serbian-Russian relationship:

Serbia provides the most permissive environment for Russian influence in the Western Balkans... Prior to President Aleksandar Vucic's Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) assuming power in 2012, Serbian bilateral military relations with Russia were minor.

Following Serbia's 2012 election, the SNS took steps to increase its military relationship with Russia, resulting in the signing of a formal defense cooperation agreement in November 2013... The first ever military exercise between Russia and Serbia,

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codenamed SREM-2014, took place later that year in Serbia, involving more than 400 Russian and Serbian airborne forces... In 2014, the Serbian Armed Forces (SAF) staged a military parade for Russian President Vladimir Putin, moving its annual Armed Forces Day celebration on the calendar to accommodate Putin's visit.

The pace of training and exercises has increased since 2014... Serbia received a donation of six used Russian MiG-29s in October 2017 [with four more arriving in February 2019] ... Serbia has ordered four Mi-35 attack helicopters and plans to order Pantsir S1 (NATO SA-22) surface-to-air missile systems. [Serbia also received a donation of 30 T-72 main battle tanks and 30 BRDM-2 vehicles from Russia at this time.]

United States diplomats have long expressed displeasure with Belgrade's willingness to straddle the boundary between East and West. Serbia has not aligned its foreign policy with the European Union, despite the requirement of its EU accession process and continues to reject a variety of shared US-EU priorities. In addition, "Serbia adamantly refuses to pursue NATO membership" according to the aforementioned DoD report. Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Europe concisely articulated the US consternation toward Serbia saying, "Countries must choose which path to follow, regardless of how difficult it would be, the country has to make its strategic choices, which must be part of official policy... *You cannot sit on two chairs at the same time.*"

I share your hope that Serbia might one day join NATO, but that day is not close. And its path to the European Union also remains closed unless it recognizes and makes peace with Kosovo. I, therefore, urge that in future comments about Serbia, you more carefully balance your statements so that United States concern about Belgrade's course and its alarming relations with Moscow are accurately expressed.

Thank you for your consideration of my thoughts. Please let me know if you would like to discuss United States policy toward the Balkans at any point in the future.

Sincerely,



ELIOT L. ENGEL
Chairman