



Strategic Culture as a Driver of Continuity and Discontinuity: From GPD and SSS of the SFRY to the Concept of Total Defense of the Republic of Serbia

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.22647473

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received : 20-08-2026

Accepted : 27-08-2026

Available online : 07-09-2026

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Citation: Berisa, H., Stajkovic, N., Pavic, A., & Kovacevic, R. (2026). Strategic Culture as a Driver of Continuity and Discontinuity: From GPD and SSS of the SFRY to the Concept of Total Defense of the Republic of Serbia. *IKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (IKRJAHS)*, 2(5), 1-10.



ABSTRACT

Original Research Article

This research analyzes the evolution of defense paradigms within the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and the contemporary Republic of Serbia. Utilizing strategic culture as a primary analytical lens, the study examines the continuities and discontinuities between the legacy of General People's Defense and Social Self-Protection (GPD and SSS) and the modern Total Defense model. By evaluating these distinct strategic frameworks, the paper seeks to identify how historical, social, and ideological foundations have shaped threat perceptions and the symbiotic relationship between military and civilian sectors. Ultimately, the study proposes actionable solutions to optimize the implementation of the Total Defense concept within Serbia's current security architecture.

Keywords: Strategic Culture, Total Defense, Resilience, National Security, Healthcare Preparedness, Serbia.

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Introduction

Although the Republic of Serbia has adopted the draft Concept of Total Defense (TD) as a contemporary response to hybrid threats and the policy of military neutrality, there is insufficient research into the extent to which this concept represents an authentic adaptation to 21st-century security challenges, versus the extent to which it continues and modifies the ideological and doctrinal legacy of General People's Defense and Social Self-Protection (GPD and SSS) from the SFRY period. The research problem lies in the lack

of a systematic analysis of continuity and discontinuity between these two models through the lens of strategic culture.

In accordance with the defined research problem and theoretical framework, it is necessary to establish a clear research objective to guide the analysis and determine the scientific contribution of this paper. The objective of this research is to analyze, through the theoretical framework of strategic culture, the transformation of defense concepts from General People's Defense and Social Self-Protection in the

SFRY to the contemporary Concept of Total Defense of the Republic of Serbia. The aim is to identify elements of continuity and discontinuity, as well as their impact on the country's modern security and defense policy.

Based on the research objective and the identified problem, a general hypothesis must be formulated to serve as a starting assumption and a framework for further analysis and verification. The general hypothesis of this study posits that the Concept of Total Defense of the Republic of Serbia represents a strategic-cultural continuity of the SFRY's.

General People's Defense and Social Self-Protection model in terms of its philosophical paradigm (defensiveness, resistance, self-reliance), while representing a significant operational and institutional discontinuity regarding implementation particularly in the social component due to changes in the geopolitical context, the socio-economic system, and the nature of threats.

Achieving the research objective requires the application of adequate scientific methods that allow the general hypothesis to be critically examined and verified across different contexts. The choice of methods is of paramount importance, as the nature and complexity of the subject matter necessitate a multifaceted approach. This study employs fundamental methods of scientific research and reasoning. Among the general scientific methods, the hypothetico-deductive method is used as the primary approach, as it is based on verified experiences and general laws of security concepts. It enables the formulation of a hypothesis and its critical verification through the analysis of historical and contemporary frameworks. Its diagnostic-prognostic function allows for conclusions on continuity and discontinuity to be drawn from previous experiences. The comparative method is used as a supplementary tool to compare responses to security threats across different periods. It facilitates the identification of similarities and differences between the GPD/SSS model and the contemporary TD Concept, as well as the identification of causal relationships. Regarding data collection, the document analysis (content analysis) method will be applied, enabling in-depth insight into the doctrinal and normative foundations of defense concepts (strategies, laws, doctrines), which is crucial for understanding their evolution.

The paper will first outline the theoretical foundations of strategic culture, followed by a comparative analysis of the institutional and ideological aspects of GPD/SSS and TD, and finally provide arguments addressing the research question.

Theoretical and Legal Frameworks: Strategic Culture and Defense

In order to understand the evolution of the defense system from the concept of General People's Defense and Social Self-Protection (GPD and SSS) to Total Defense (TD), it is first necessary to establish a clear analytical framework that connects invisible, value-driven motivators with visible,

institutional mechanisms. This section lays the groundwork for the research through two key dimensions. The first is theoretical, explaining through the concept of strategic culture why a society perceives threats in a specific way and organizes resistance accordingly. The second is normative, defining through the legal framework how these cultural predispositions are institutionalized into specific defense policies and doctrines. The synthesis of these two aspects allows for a deep understanding of continuity and discontinuity in defense practice.

Strategic Culture - Theoretical Framework

In contemporary security studies, the concept of strategic culture serves as an analytical instrument of exceptional importance for understanding long-term patterns in state behavior within the spheres of defense and national security. According to Snyder (Snyder, 1977), strategic culture is defined as „the sum total of ideals, emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation” Meanwhile, (Johnston, 1995:32-64) presents strategic culture as an „integrated system of symbols that establishes pervasive and long-lasting strategic preferences and concepts for the use of military force.

One of the most influential strategic thinkers of his generation, whose work has sparked significant debate and criticism, Colin Gray (Gray, 1999, 49-69), posited that strategic culture is reflected in „modes of thought and action with respect to force, which derive from perception of the national historical experience.” While Gray (Gray, 1995) viewed strategic culture as a descriptive, almost natural characteristic of the state, Booth (Booth 1990, 121-128) analyzed it through a critical lens. According to him, „national traditions, values, attitudes, and symbols” elements that, when linked to the use of force, become powerful ideological tools. Elites utilize them to justify the maintenance of a militarized status quo, to mobilize the public for war, and to present aggressive policies as a natural or even moral expression of national identity. It is, therefore, a tool of domination rather than merely an analytical category. In this regard, Booth (Booth, 1990) describes it as „a nation's traditions, values, attitudes, symbols, and patterns of behavior concerning the threat or use of force.”

Consequently, strategic culture is not reducible to military doctrine; rather, it encompasses deeply rooted values, historical experiences, institutional practices, and cultural codes that shape threat perception, the choice of alliances, the type of defense strategy, and the degree of societal mobilization. In this context, defense is defined as the institutionalized expression of strategic culture, aimed at preserving sovereignty, territorial integrity, and vital national interests. The analysis of strategic culture enables the identification of patterns of continuity and discontinuity in defense concepts and determines the extent to which contemporary strategies are the result of rational planning

versus products of culturally conditioned narratives and historical imperatives.

Defense – Legal Framework

Understanding strategic culture allows us to perceive how historical experience, national myths, and institutional practices shape attitudes toward the use of force and security challenges. However, to translate these cultural patterns into concrete policies and protection mechanisms, it is necessary to introduce the legal framework of defense. While strategic culture explains why a particular society responds to a threat in a specific way, the legal foundations of defense offer an understanding of how that response is institutionalized through military doctrines, political decisions, and social mobilization mechanisms. Thus, defense represents the functional articulation of cultural predispositions into specific strategies and capacities.

Based on the above, we find that Article 3 of the Law on General People's Defense and Social Self-Protection SFRY (Official Gazette of the SFRY, 1982) defined defense as follows:

„General People's Defense is a unique system of organizing, preparing, and actively involving working people and citizens, self-managing organizations and communities, socio-political and other social organizations, and socio-political communities in deterring and preventing aggression and other dangers to the country through armed struggle and other forms of general people's resistance, and in performing other tasks for the defense of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the social order established by the Constitution of the SFRY.”

This system functioned until the breakup of the SFRY in 1991, followed by the deconstruction of the GPD and SSS framework. Based on the ideological foundations of Marxism-Leninism and the concept of socialist self-management, it aimed to defend the territory and social order through all-out, total war. The system comprised the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA), Territorial Defense (TD) as a mass reserve component, and Social Self-Protection (SSS), which encompassed all civilian organizations and economic entities (Begovic, Maričić, Blagojev, Radinović, Ockoljić, 1977).

During 1991–1992, the republics took over or formed their own Territorial Defense units, leading to the fragmentation of the unified system. In Serbia and Montenegro, the TD was either abolished or integrated directly into the Army of Yugoslavia (VJ). The disappearance of self-management socialism rendered the ideological function of Social Self-Protection (SSS) obsolete. Although largely retained in a formal sense, it practically died out due to the economic transition. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1992–2003) functioned without a new, harmonized defense doctrine at the highest level, with the VJ relying on reduced and adapted

plans of the former YPA (*Yugoslav People's Army*) (Krga, 2022).

After 2000, a phase of radical departure from the old model followed, adopting Western standards through a process of transition and reform. Rapprochement with the European Union and cooperation with NATO through the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program became primary foreign policy goals. Through the paradigm of professionalization, the GPD concept—as the pillar of a mass conscription model (with millions in reserve) was replaced by a model requiring a smaller, professional army, technically superior and efficient in peace operations and modern warfare (Anastasijević, 2004). This decision directly led to the suspension of mandatory military service. The focus shifted from „the entire people” (GPD), where defense became a specialized function of the state rather than a universal obligation of all citizens. The professionalization of the Serbian Armed Forces was strategically framed not only as a military necessity but as a key catalyst for European integration, aligning the national defense architecture with Western standards (Tanjug, 2010).

The final transition was formalized with the adoption of the new Law on Defense in 2007, which reflects this paradigm shift. Today, defense is regulated in accordance with Article 1 of the Law on Defense of the Republic of Serbia, which prescribes the competencies of state bodies, the Serbian Armed Forces, and the rights and duties of citizens and economic entities. In accordance with Article 2:

„Defense is achieved through the engagement of human and material resources and is ensured by the use of the Serbian Armed Forces and other defense forces for the protection of sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and security... The defense of the Republic of Serbia is carried out through a unified system of organizing the preparations of citizens, state bodies... companies, and other legal entities... for the preservation of the security of the Republic of Serbia and its citizens.” (Official Gazette of the RS 2007).

In the context of strategic culture, defense is not merely a reaction to a threat; it is an expression of deeply rooted cultural attitudes about what constitutes a threat, who the enemy is, and how resistance should be organized.

Factors of Serbian Strategic Culture

Serbia's strategic culture represents a historical and cultural pattern that shapes the relationship between the state, society, and the use of force, security, and defense. It is the result of a long historical experience—from the wars of liberation against the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the national state, through the experiences of the First and Second World Wars and the period of socialist Yugoslavia, to the conflicts of the 1990s and contemporary challenges.

From the aforementioned, we can derive the components of strategic culture using the example of Serbia. As Colin Gray defined it (Booth, 1990:121–128), strategic culture stems

from the perception of national historical experience; thus, Serbia's rich historical heritage has been shaped by a struggle for liberation and wars that have defined Serbian identity. This has fostered a „heroic” and „warrior” national character, prepared to defend its freedom (Vračar, Stanojević, 2019).

A key historical discontinuity occurred with the merging of Serbian statehood into the Kingdom of SHS (Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) and later Yugoslavia (Blagojević, 2019). During the Yugoslav crisis, the Serbian elite failed to develop a distinct national identity and strategic culture, as they were eclipsed by the ideas of Yugoslavism and Communism, leading to a series of strategic errors. The consequences of such strategic actions by the Serbian elite proved to be disastrous (Vračar, Stanojević, 2019).

Serbian identity is also clearly defined by its position as the westernmost nation of Eastern Christianity. Saintsavva (Saint Savaism) is established as the foundation of Serbian identity, representing a synthesis of the folk spirit and Church teachings, emphasizing the nation-state and spiritual-moral values. Within this framework, the Kosovo Covenant serves as the fundamental basis and most striking characteristic of Serbian strategic culture. It sublimates the „David vs. Goliath” struggle, unity, readiness for sacrifice, perseverance, and self-reliance (Blagojević, Gajić, Subotić, Igrutinović, 2025).

Geographical location is a vital physical factor in the formation of strategic culture. Serbia occupies the central area of the Balkans, often described as the „heart of the Balkan Peninsula” or a sort of „minor Heartland,” serving as both a bridge between civilizations and an arena for their competition (Blagojević, Gajić, Subotić, Igrutinović, 2025:14). Under these conditions, states in this region emerged and vanished-from the Kingdom of SHS to Yugoslavia, which became part of a cordon sanitaire, a buffer zone between Western Europe, Germany, and the Soviet Union. Following the Cold War, the Balkans became a space for the strategic expansion of the Atlanticist alliance (Vračar, Stanojević 2019).

Starting from the established social values and ideologies of the 20th century, Serbian identity was interrupted by ideological experiments with Yugoslavism and Communism under socialist self-management. While other nations within the former joint state developed their own national identities, Serbs remained preoccupied with the idea of Yugoslavism, which ultimately resulted in the violent breakup of the SFRY.

As the interests and rivalries of great powers have always been present in this region, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) was no exception. The NATO operation „Allied Force” in 1999 represented one of the key turning points affecting contemporary Serbian strategic culture. The lack of vision at the highest state level (i.e., the absence of a „White Paper” or „National Security Strategy”) meant that the Army of Yugoslavia and other security actors functioned without a unified, coherent political framework. As noted by the Head of the Intelligence Administration of the General Staff, General Branko Krga, actions were reactive rather than proactive. An over-reliance on international law and the assumption that a great power would not opt for aggression without a UN mandate led to delayed or inadequate political and diplomatic preparation (Blagojević, Gajić, Subotić, Igrutinović, 2025).

Once again, Serbian patriotism came to the fore-not as a result of a rational decision, but rooted in the subconscious, instinct, or intuition, perceived as an obligation to defend „Serbian hearths and graves” (Blagojević, Gajić, Subotić, Igrutinović, 2025). Given that a key historical discontinuity occurred with the merging of Serbian statehood into Yugoslavia (Blagojević, 2019), the question arises: now that Serbia is independent, can it utilize its inherited strategic culture to restore Serbian statehood to its full capacity?

Contemporary strategic reality places Serbia before a complex dilemma: how to preserve vital national interests, such as territorial integrity and economic development, given that these are often at odds with the conflicting expectations of its key economic partners (the EU) on one side, and its geopolitical allies (Russia and China) on the other.

Table 1. Systematization of Serbian Strategic Culture (Author's research)

Dimension	Characteristic	Explanation
Historical	Culture of resistance and sacrifice	Heritage of liberation wars, the Kosovo Myth, and tribulations in the First and Second World Wars
Political	Emphasis on the role of the state and military	Defense is perceived as a primary function of the state; the military plays a powerful role in national identity.
Social	Collective mobilization	Heritage of the Yugoslav doctrine of "General People's Defense"; inclusion of citizens and civilian structures.
Psychological	Perception of constant vulnerability	Experiences of foreign interventions and the wars of the 1990s have solidified a sense of external threat.
Cultural	National myths and symbols	The Kosovo Covenant, the cult of heroism, and suffering as integral parts of identity.
Geopolitical	Balancing between East and West	Traditional ties with Russia and Slavic nations, alongside the pursuit of European integration.
Contemporary	Military neutrality	Commitment to military neutrality as a strategy for preserving sovereignty and maintaining flexibility in alliances.

The systematization of Serbian strategic culture (Table 1) reveals that the social and psychological dimensions are not merely academic constructs but essential drivers of contemporary public health and societal resilience. Within the framework of Total Defense, these dimensions justify a move toward a more integrated approach to national security, where the healthcare system acts as a primary line of defense.

Social Dimension and Collective Mobilization: The heritage of collective mobilization from the GPD and SSS era has evolved into the modern concept of societal resilience. In the context of 21st-century threats-ranging from pandemics to hybrid warfare - the ability of a society to maintain functional healthcare services under pressure is paramount. The „social” legacy of including citizens and civilian structures ensures that the healthcare system is not an isolated sector but a deeply integrated part of a broader national effort to preserve human life and social order.

Psychological Dimension and Public Health Preparedness: The perception of constant vulnerability, rooted in historical experiences of interventions and crises, acts as a catalyst for high-readiness protocols within the medical and civilian sectors. This psychological predisposition toward self-reliance forces the institutionalization of robust emergency management frameworks. For a journal focused on healthcare, this indicates that the Serbian „Total Defense” concept is inherently linked to public health preparedness, where psychological resilience and the capacity of the medical infrastructure to handle mass-casualty or high-stress scenarios are critical components of national survival.

Consequently, the transformation from a mass-military model to a „Total Defense” model reflects a strategic shift where health security becomes a central pillar of national defense. This integration allows for a more flexible response to non-kinetic threats that directly target the biological and psychological well-being of the population.

The Concept of Total Defense in Contemporary Theory

The concept of Total Defense (TD) in contemporary theory is not a Cold War-era model; rather, it has evolved into a broader framework, most commonly referred to as Comprehensive Security or Integrated Defense. Contemporary theory often avoids the term „Total Defense” due to its historical connotations associated with socialism or, in some Western contexts, totalitarian regimes. Instead, terms such as Comprehensive/Integrated Security or the Whole-of-Government / Whole-of-Society Approach are utilized (Berezina, 2020).

This shift emphasizes that defense is not solely a military matter, but involves all civilian, economic, diplomatic, and informational resources of the state. While traditional TD was focused on armed resistance as a response to direct aggression, modern TD focuses on Resilience. Following

events such as the annexation of Crimea (2014) and the rise of hybrid warfare, which exposed vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure defense, NATO officially adopted Resilience as a key element of its policy at the 2016 Warsaw Summit. The Declaration proclaimed national resilience as the „first line of defense”, establishing a shared understanding that security is a civilian as well as a military responsibility. According to this framework, Resilience is: the ability of the political system, society, and critical infrastructure to successfully respond to sudden shocks and threats (military, non-military, and hybrid), minimize damage, and ensure the continuity of vital functions alongside rapid recovery (Booth, 2007)

This capability is linked to the „Seven Baseline Requirements for National Resilience,” derived from Article 4 of the Declaration. These requirements specify the vital functions a member state must protect:

- Assured continuity of government and critical government services.
- Resilient energy supplies.
- Ability to manage uncontrolled movement of people.
- Resilient food and water resources.
- Ability to deal with mass casualties (Medical/Healthcare resilience).
- Resilient civil communications systems.
- Resilient civil transportation systems.

An analysis of the seven baseline requirements indicates that these parameters, although initially established within the NATO doctrinal framework, currently represent a globally recognized benchmark for evaluating national civil preparedness capacities. For states that maintain a policy of military neutrality while simultaneously revitalizing or developing a Total Defense model, these standards serve as a vital tool for the external validation and internal optimization of civil sectors.

The implementation of these requirements into national legislation and strategic defense planning does not necessarily imply political alignment. Rather, it represents a process of doctrinal convergence toward the most effective solutions for countering contemporary hybrid and asymmetric threats. Within the sphere of healthcare, resilience to mass casualty incidents (MCI) serves as a critical indicator of overall state functionality.

It necessitates a transition from reactive to proactive planning, where civil medical resources, logistical supply chains, and early warning systems are integrated into a unified defense ecosystem. Consequently, the adoption of these standards enables countries striving for a Total Defense model to achieve a high degree of interoperability between civil systems and international humanitarian and security standards. This approach ensures not only a more efficient response to large-scale crises but also bolsters the psychological resilience of society, thereby directly deterring potential forms of national security destabilization (Booth, 2007).

These requirements demonstrate how TD has transformed; the emphasis is no longer primarily on weaponry, but on economic and infrastructural resilience. Meeting these standards requires full coordination between the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, health, energy, and civil services embodying the Whole-of-Government and Whole-of-Society approach that lies at the core of modern Total Defense. In contemporary security theory, the Swedish Model is noteworthy for its integrativity, civilian roots, and adaptability to hybrid threats. Under this model, total defense is the activity of preparing for war and defending the country, consisting of Military Defense (Militärt försvar) and Civil Defense (Civilt försvar). It is the responsibility of the entire government, all agencies, and all citizens to ensure the nation's defensive capacity (Larsson, 2021).

Swedish legislation defines a legal framework mandating all government agencies and 21 regional administrations to actively participate in Total Defense planning. Furthermore,

the law obligates private companies managing critical infrastructure (telecoms, airports, power grids) to participate in defense planning and build resilience against attacks. Sweden has also developed the concept of Psychological Defense (without the ideological connotations of the SFRY). As a reminder, this component was formalized within the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA) through "moral preparation," whereas the modern Swedish approach focuses on increasing citizens' critical thinking and their resilience to disinformation and propaganda.

The Singaporean Model serves as a key Asian variant of Total Defense, demonstrating how a small, high-tech state in a complex geopolitical environment utilizes TD as a primary mechanism for deterrence and survival. This model encompasses six pillars: Military, Civil, Economic, Social, Psychological, and Digital Defense (Ministry of Defence Singapore, 2023).

Table 2: Evolution of the Total Defense Concept in the Singapore Model (Author's research)

Component	Essence and Parallel with SFRY / Sweden
1. Military	(Defense on the ground): Protection of sovereignty, similar to Sweden's Military Defense.
2. Civil	(Citizen protection): Crisis management, civil protection; the role closest to Social Self-Protection (SSS).
3. Economic	(Economic resilience): Ensuring the continuity of the economy and supply chains. Parallel with Swedish requirements for energy and logistics.
4. Social	(Social cohesion / Brotherhood and Unity): This is closest to the function of "Brotherhood and Unity" from the SFRY: maintaining unity between different ethnic and religious groups to prevent internal divisions.
5. Psychological	(Morale and awareness): Maintaining high morale, patriotism, and the readiness of citizens for sacrifice. Parallel with the psychological defense of GPD/SSS.
6. Digital	(Cyber defense): The most significant innovation. Protection of digital sovereignty, countering cyber-attacks and disinformation. This element directly corresponds to NATO requirements for communication resilience.

In the Serbian context, total defense is defined as a comprehensive response of the defense system consisting of military and civil defense, with the joint engagement of defense subjects and defense potentials (Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Serbia. 2019).

The perception of total defense has also been defined by domestic authors as follows:

„Total defense represents a comprehensive system in which all resources of the state and society-military and civilian-are engaged to protect national interests in conditions of crisis, war, or emergency situations. It implies the integration of the armed forces, state institutions, local communities, the economy, civil society, and individuals into a unified defense effort” (Žunjić, 2019).

Defense is measured not only by the number of tanks but also by the stability of the banking system, the resilience of the energy grid, and the level of public trust in institutions. Based on the above, we can conclude that the contemporary conceptual understanding of total defense includes

comprehensiveness, integration, preventiveness, and resilience.

The Strategic Culture of GPD and SSS as a Matrix of Continuity

To discuss the strategic culture of the concept of General People's Defense and Social Self-Protection (GPD and SSS) as a matrix of continuity, one must start with the emergence of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). The creation of the SFRY corresponds to a unique historical phenomenon the People's Liberation War (PLW), which essentially possessed a dual character. Its first character was liberational, as the PLW represented an anti-fascist war for liberation from foreign occupiers. The second character was revolutionary, as, parallel to the armed struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY), a radical change in the social and political order occurred, resulting in the establishment of a new socialist government. It was precisely this revolutionary character that legitimized the principles of mass participation and integrality in the later

conception of General People's Defense, as the defense of the state was identical to the defense of the new, self-managing socialist order (Begović, Maričić, Blagojev, Radinović, Ocokoljić, 1977).

The key lesson from the Second World War (WWII), particularly from the experience of the PLW, became the fundamental postulate of GPD and SSS: „A regular army can be defeated, but an armed people can never be enslaved.” Here we see the principle of mass mobilization. Unlike conventional armies that were defeated in 1941, the partisan movement proved that resistance could be sustained if rooted in the entire population. This principle legitimized the creation of Territorial Defense (TD), which represented the million-strong expression of the „armed people” and the need for protracted guerrilla warfare across the entire territory of the SFRY (Begović, Maričić, Blagojev, Radinović, Ocokoljić, 1977).

Furthermore, the slogan of „Brotherhood and Unity” indicates that an ideological cohesive factor had to be constantly present. Miletić states that the period after 1948 brought the realization that threats to the integrity and sovereignty of the SFRY did not only come from Western imperialism but also from the East specifically from the Warsaw Pact countries (Miletić, 2021:19). This broke the monopoly of threat and imposed the need for a protracted war of attrition as a response to a potential conventional invasion from the East. The subsequent positioning of the SFRY between the blocs through the Non-Aligned Movement was not merely a diplomatic choice but a primary security one. In this context, GPD and SSS served as a deterrence mechanism, making aggression too costly and politically and militarily senseless, effectively transforming a geopolitical weakness into a strategic advantage (Rusinow, 1971:19)

In accordance with socialist ideology and the experience of the PLW, Yugoslavia institutionalized a strategic culture of resistance through GPD and SSS based on the idea that defense is the right and duty of all citizens, and that resistance to aggression must be organized through the mobilization of the entire society (Official Gazette of the SFRY, 1982). Cultural codes fully determined the development and implementation of the GPD and SSS concept, finding their foundation in historical experience and partisan warfare.

Strategic culture, as a matrix of continuity, shaped lasting attitudes toward defense through the GPD and SSS concept: that defense is collective and comprehensive, that resistance is a moral and historical duty, and that self-reliance and distrust toward alliances are necessary conditions for survival. Although there is no strict legal link or formal continuity, the creators of the Total Defense concept have attempted to maintain essential and functional continuity within altered geopolitical circumstances. While Territorial Defense sought to provide a large number of trained personnel for rapid mobilization through mass participation and reserves, the continuity of Total Defense attempts to

realize this principle through the active and passive reserve of the Serbian Armed Forces (Žnidaršič, Ostojić, 2018).

The process of decentralization and support for civilians was essentially determined by the principle of Territorial Defense, whose essence was the protection of local territory and infrastructure. In the current conceptual understanding, with the adoption of the Law on Emergency Situations (2009), civil protection tasks-previously divided between the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior-were unified into the Sector for Emergency Management within the Ministry of Interior (Official Gazette of the RS, 2018). It is also of interest to mention the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management (2018), which led to the creation of the current Directorate for Civil Protection and Risk Management (Official Gazette of the RS, 2018).

As Rusinow (Rusinow, 1971) noted, civil protection was once part of the military GPD concept (under the Ministry of Defense), whereas the modern 2018 structure positions it within the civilian sector (Ministry of Interior), emphasizing protection from natural disasters over military aggression (Official Gazette of the RS, 2018). Today, civil protection coordinates activities at the local level (municipalities, districts), which is closest to the function of SSS and the non-armed part of the TD in peacetime. This transition is critical for healthcare resilience, as it dictates the coordination between emergency medical services and civil defense structures.

The narrative of resistance is still preserved but has changed its form; instead of ideology (Marxism-Leninism, Brotherhood and Unity), it is now grounded through the Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia and in constitutional values such as sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Military Neutrality of the Republic of Serbia, proclaimed through the 2007 Resolution, represents a direct continuity of the narrative of independent defense inherited from the period of Non-Alignment and the GPD and SSS concept. (Official Gazette of the RS, 207)

From the presented evidence, we can conclude that the basic premises established during the creation of the GPD and SSS concept did not disappear with the breakup of the SFRY; rather, they have continued to shape the contemporary Serbian Concept of Total Defense. Modern military neutrality policy and the Total Defense concept represent a direct continuity of the cultural paradigm established through GPD and SSS (Vračar, Stanojević, 2019).

Discontinuity and Modification: Total Defense (Republic of Serbia)

The operational and institutional discontinuity of the Total Defense (TD) concept of the Republic of Serbia (RS) in relation to GPD and SSS is the most evident aspect of the transition. This did not emerge as a reform error, but as a logical consequence of abandoning the fundamental pillars of the former socio-economic system.

The most prominent conceptual discontinuity is the abolition of the principle of mass participation in its original form, which directly erodes the capacity for a protracted war of attrition the foundational value of the GPD and SSS concept. Specifically, by a decision of the National Assembly, mandatory military service in the Republic of Serbia was suspended as of January 1, 2011 [29]. Consequently, a transition to a professional military was implemented, accompanied by a new rationalization of costs. As previously mentioned, while defense is based on the active and passive reserves of the Serbian Armed Forces, the suspension of conscription has led to an aging and less-trained passive reserve, creating a gap in the mass mobilization capability once guaranteed by Territorial Defense. Instead of mass training, the focus has shifted to specialized teams and technological dominance, representing a total operational departure from the philosophy of mass engagement (Miletic, 2021).

When analyzing the value system in the SFRY, we see it was clearly defined, comprehensive, and ideologically enforced. Its primary value lay in providing a unified narrative and purpose for collective sacrifice. Marxism-Leninism was functional because it established a firm link between the political system, economic life, and defensive duty. In the system of socialist self-management, citizens who were effectively owners of the means of production possessed a distinct motivational factor: they were defending their own factories and system. The universally accepted narrative of „Brotherhood and Unity” served to overcome national divisions and create social cohesion, resulting in a strong psychological defense against the undermining of the system.

The abandonment of this value system, without a clear replacement, represents the greatest challenge to contemporary national resilience. The figure of Alija Sirotanović, the miner and hero of labor, and the symbolism of the banknote featuring him, serves as a perfect ideological metaphor for socialist morale as a pillar of defense. Unlike historical figures or military commanders, placing a worker-hero on official currency provided institutional confirmation that labor and productivity were primary social values. This built loyalty and a readiness among the working class to defend their order through SSS and continuity of production (Kradelj, 1970).

In modern Serbia, a discontinuity of values has occurred the philosophy of resistance and self-reliance is retained in the Constitution (as an ideal), but it lacks a material, ideological anchor that would compel citizens toward collective action. The „Narrative of Resistance” remains as a cultural code, but without a functional social mechanism. The shift to a neoliberal system, where the private sector is not obligated to be an integrated bearer of defense, weakens the system's comprehensiveness

Towards a Systemic Increase in Resilience

To increase resilience within the current conceptual framework, a significant adaptation of the socio-economic system is required. This would necessitate a cultural transformation—moving from the narrative of „getting by” (transitional egoism) to a narrative of solidarity. Neoliberalism, by favoring individual profit and interest groups, often leads to the erosion of public resources necessary for emergencies. Without dismantling structures that profit from neoliberal deregulation, the transition to actual systemic resilience remains purely theoretical.

The concept of Total Defense, as promoted by Western nations and Serbia today, is essentially technocratic and state-centric, whereas GPD and SSS were ideological and society-centric. To reconnect the worker with capital and motivate defense, it is necessary to revitalize models that encourage employee participation, such as the German co-determination model (Mitbestimmung). According to the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, this system allows workers not only a share in management but also a direct connection to the company's economic success, restoring a sense of common interest (Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, 2024).

In liberal capitalism, a worker has little motivation to risk their life defending a private corporation owned by a foreign investor. Legislation should stimulate the transformation of companies into employee-owned entities. This returns the feeling that „the factory is ours,” but under market conditions. Furthermore, the revitalization of cooperatives (cooperatives) in strategic sectors like agriculture (Nikolić, 2009) and the IT industry (Strugar et al, 2024) is imperative for national resilience.

Decentralization and Contemporary Threats

The legacy of GPD indicates that defense must not be an exclusive monopoly of the state apparatus, but an inalienable right and duty of citizens. In the modern context, we lack an institutional bridge to decentralize security and incorporate it into the daily activities of local communities. Decentralization would mean that people defend their own neighborhoods, power plants, or water supplies, as they know the terrain best.

Regarding Psychological Defense, while the old system focused on „Special War,” modern education must focus on Security Culture at the educational level to raise awareness of hybrid threats. This includes educating the population to recognize fake news, social engineering, and cyber-fraud.

A critical, yet often overlooked, vulnerability in the implementation of the Total Defense model within the Serbian healthcare sector is the systemic 'brain drain' of medical professionals. While the contemporary doctrine emphasizes the ability to deal with mass casualties as a baseline requirement for national resilience, this capability is directly dependent on the availability and retention of highly

specialized human capital. The ongoing migration of doctors and nursing staff toward Western European healthcare systems represents more than a socio-economic challenge; it constitutes a strategic discontinuity that undermines the „Whole-of-Society” approach. In a crisis scenario, the depletion of medical personnel at the local level effectively neutralizes the benefits of decentralized defense planning, as the infrastructure remains functional only if supported by a robust and present workforce (Bobić, 2009). Therefore, addressing the labor-market drivers of medical migration is not merely a matter of public health policy but a prerequisite for maintaining the biological and psychological resilience of the population against hybrid and kinetic threats.

Finally, the concept must offer mechanisms for the rapid engagement of human capital (IT experts, engineers, doctors) and the diaspora. Serbia's military neutrality necessitates that the concept of Comprehensive Security relies exclusively on national resilience and deterrence, as the state has no security guarantees from any military-political bloc. This is particularly relevant for the healthcare sector, where doctors and medical staff represent the backbone of societal resistance in any crisis scenario. The concept must define the roles of all elements (military, police, civil protection) in protecting the Serbian population, including those south of the Ibar river.

Conclusion

The primary findings of this research confirm the proposed hypothesis. A significant strategic-cultural continuity has been observed within the philosophical paradigm that defines both the concept of General People's Defense and Social Self-Protection (GPD and SSS) and the contemporary Concept of Total Defense (TD). Both frameworks are rooted in a deeply embedded Serbian historical experience that promotes defensiveness, resistance, independence, and collective mobilization as a response to perceived permanent vulnerability. This paradigm was materialized through the policy of Non-Alignment in the past and the current policy of military neutrality, representing a direct continuity in the narrative of independent defense.

However, significant operational and institutional discontinuities in implementation have simultaneously been identified. The abandonment of the socialist self-management system led to a radical transformation or the disappearance of the key pillars of the older model: the principle of mass mobilization (replaced by military professionalization), a robust and decentralized civilian component (SSS), and the binding ideological framework that ensured social cohesion and motivation. While the contemporary model, focused on hybrid threats and resilience, conceptually strives for comprehensiveness, it faces diametrically opposed tensions in practice between the cultural narrative of total engagement and the reduced institutional capacities for its realization.

Therefore, it can be concluded that strategic culture acts as the driver for the Total Defense concept, which represents a modernized and streamlined adaptation of the historical GPD and SSS model. It continues and reproduces its fundamental strategic-cultural codes but reinterprets and adapts them to the completely transformed geopolitical, socio-economic, and security context of the 21st century. This relationship between continuity in narrative and discontinuity in execution constitutes the essence of the strategic-cultural transformation of Serbia's defense and highlights a key challenge for the future: how to bridge the gap between a deeply rooted culture of collective defense and the actual capacities for its contemporary, effective institutionalization.

Future research directions should focus on the extent to which socio-political elites are prepared to adapt the current socio-economic system toward new ownership and management structures. The goal would be to align the system with the strategic culture of the Serbian national being to enhance overall social cohesion an ideal for increasing motivation, unity, and resilience within the contemporary strategic environment.

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