

NATO IN KOSOVO-KFOR MISSION, INTENTIONS, SUCCESSES, FAILURES**URTAK HAMITI, PhD**Iliria College
KOSOVO**ABSTRACT**

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the end of Soviet Union in 1991, numerous security challenges were pushing NATO in search of a new mission especially with the ongoing civil war in Yugoslavia. In Bosnia in 1995 and Kosovo 1999 NATO redefined its mission in Europe from protecting its members to deploying troops in non-member countries as peacekeeping forces. In both cases NATO succeeded in preventing any more clashes between warring parties. Lessons learned from Bosnia were implemented in Kosovo where NATO's Multi National Brigades and Missions Central Command were granted full operational independence on the ground as the approach was *security first* while leaving the rebuilding of administration in Kosovo to UN's Mission to Kosovo. NATO has been on the ground in Kosovo for 17 years now and is still present with no exit strategy in sight. Its major successes were halt of ethnic violence between Albanians and Serbs, demilitarization of Kosovo Liberation Army, creation of stability in the country overall, assisting the creation of the Kosovo Protection Corps, later to be renamed Kosovo Security Force. Its major failure was insufficient engagement in northern Kosovo that became source of protracted insecurity in northern Kosovo where majority of the population is Serbian. It has taken years of diplomacy and engagement facilitated by EU and US for Prishtina and Belgrade to reach an agreement on diffusing the situation in northern Kosovo. Agreements have been signed and approved at the Parliaments of Kosovo and Serbia, but implementation of the Agreements on the ground are not being done in time therefore raising ethnic tensions again in Kosovo.

Keywords: KFOR, peace building, security, insecurity, northern Kosovo, law and order.

INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades NATO has undergone four phases of its transformation. First phase included adapting its mission to new post-Cold War conditions; second phase was cooperation with the United Nations and military engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, third phase was the first war NATO waged in its history against Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in defense of Kosovo Albanians, fourth phase was adapting to its new role in War against Terror. In this more expansive phase NATO is trying to use its abilities and efficiency in situations that require achieving a lasting peace and security in the world. In this paper we focus on the third phase or more precisely the aftermath of NATO's war against Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that produced deployment of peacekeeping NATO forces in Kosovo known as KFOR.

The capitulation of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on 10th of June 1999 paved the way for the deployment of NATO troops in Kosovo. First KFOR forces entered Kosovo on 12th of June 1999. Before that, in Kumanovo, Macedonia, a Military Technical Agreement was reached by which the dislocation of KFOR troops would be synchronized with the withdrawal of Serbian troops so that no security vacuum was left in Kosovo. Serbian troops left completely of 20th of June 1999 and 50.000 strong force of KFOR was deployed

consisted of 19 NATO member countries as well as 20 countries outside of NATO; all these troops came under the command and unified control of KFOR. On 10th of June, the responsibilities of the International Committee, that was to govern Kosovo during the internal administration, were specified with United Nations Resolution 1244. This Resolution, Military Technical Agreement, and NATO's operational plan 10413 provide the basis of responsibilities of KFOR in Kosovo. The Resolution is tied to the security issues and mandates from UN's Security Council mandate to maintain International Peace and Security in Kosovo, based on Annex 2 of the Resolution. Also United Nations Mission in Kosovo Police Force was created to work alongside KFOR, under a single command and control, authorized to create a secure environment for the entire population of Kosovo and to enable a safe return of the dislocated persons and refugees.¹ However the first international troops that entered Kosovo were not of NATO contingent but Russian troops deployed from Bosnia and Herzegovina with the aim of securing Prishtina Airport, that was to serve as a base for more upcoming Russian troops by air.²

The presence of NATO and Russian troops on the ground in Kosovo had to be regulated and after long discussions the role of Russian troops was determined as part of International Force in Kosovo on 7th of July 1999. Then came the process of demilitarization of the Kosovo Liberation Army. KFOR officials started negotiations with representatives of the KLA on 9th of July and by the end of the month all heavy weapons were handed over to KFOR. KFOR then concentrated on the main task of the mission which was "to create a safe and sustainable environment for citizens of Kosovo". This task include demining missions, securing the borders, securing religious sites, protecting the minorities, implementing a weapons amnesty program and supporting the establishment of civil institutions, laws and regulations, judicial criminal system, an overall assistance in political, economical and societal life.³

According to KFOR sources, its troops have cleaned over 16.000 houses, 1165 schools and about 2000 km of roads of ammunitions and unexploded mines. KFOR Medical Centers have treated 43.000 kosovars.⁴ After the demilitarization of the KLA, NATO in general has helped transform this army into Kosovo Protection Corps, which will later change to Kosovo Security Force. NATO planners, aiming not to repeat the mistakes from Bosnia and peacekeeping mission, where for military interventions NATO troops had to ask permission from international civilian authorities, gave KFOR full responsibility in dealing with military issues and missions.

From 1999 until today KFOR has played a key role in securing peace, security and stability in Kosovo. KFOR is perceived by majority of Albanians, that comprise 92,9 % of the population of Kosovo by latest estimates, as a liberation force and a friendly organization. This might be the key element of KFOR's successes in Kosovo. KFOR has proven it has the capacity to deal with serious crises when it tackled March 2004 unrests in Kosovo. Sparked by ethnic animosity between Albanians and Serbs, March riots were a serious threat to international mission in Kosovo as OSCE and UNMIK vehicles have been burned in the streets of the cities of Kosovo, while in some cases even international staff was in jeopardy. But as time went by and stabilization took place KFOR scaled down in numbers from 50.000

¹ UNSC Resolution 1244, Annex 2

² Wesley Clark, *Waging Modern War*, Prishtina: Zeri, pg 428

³ www.nato.int/kfor (accessed on 27th of October 2015)

⁴ Shaip Osmani, *KFOR Mission in Kosovo and its future*, *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* Vol.5 Nr. 19 August 2014

in 1999, to 10.000 in 2010, while now in 2015 4.800 troops are in Kosovo from 31 nations.⁵ Most of KFOR's initial mandate duties are fulfilled: deter hostility and threats against Kosovo by Yugoslav and Serb forces, establish a secure environment and ensure public safety and order, demilitarize Kosovo Liberation Army, support the international humanitarian effort, and coordinate with, and support the international civil presence. Linking the first and the third duty KFOR assisted in the creation of Kosovo Protection Corps. On 12th of June 2008, following the Declaration of Kosovo's Independence NATO started implementing additional tasks in Kosovo as assisting in standing down Kosovo Protection Corps and establishing Kosovo Security Force, as well as a civilian structure to oversee the KSF. The KPC ceased its operational activities on 20th of January 2009 and formally dissolved on 14th of June 2009. In parallel, the Kosovo Security Force was developed to ensure that key capabilities were available for emergency situations.

On 19th of April 2013, Prishtina and Belgrade authorities reached an EU-facilitated First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations; an implementation plan was agreed on 22nd of May 2013. NATO played an important role in securing the Agreement, and the Allies continue to strongly support the accord and its implementation. These were KFOR's intentions and successes that can be contributed to the troops resolve to carry out the mission and the support of the majority Albanian population. Things were not quite easy in the northern part of Kosovo, predominantly Serb populated area, where KFOR struggled to fulfill its mission.

The *security first* approach of KFOR mission and of the international community in Kosovo in general, dictates that within the context of peace building and nation building operation, security is weighted more heavily than any other component of peace building as it has a dual function on the field: it is not only a long term objective, but also the most fundamental precondition for overall success of the operation. Political transition and economic reconstruction are not possible without an effective control of violence.⁶ The narrative of establishing civilian security in Northern Kosovo has been completely different from other parts of the country. Against the rather positive security developments on the wider landscape of Kosovo the situation in northern Kosovo meant to become a source of protracted insecurity. Since June 1999, the security situation in this part of the country remains fragile. Over the years, recurrent incidents of violence have highlighted mistakes made by international agencies in the early phase of peace building; mistakes that have, in turn, rendered the central administration of Kosovo incapable to assert its authority and enforce executive law and order in that region since country's independence in 2008. The decisions made by KFOR during the first months of its deployment in northern Kosovo continue to affect the developments in the region until now.⁷

When KFOR moved into Kosovo, Multinational Brigade North (MNB-N) of KFOR, spearheaded by the French NATO troops was assigned all responsibilities of security situation in northern Kosovo, including ethnically mixed and much-disputed city of

⁵ <http://www.aco.nato.int/kfor.aspx> (accessed 27th of October 2015)

⁶ H. W. Jeong, *Peacebuilding in Postconflict societies: Strategy & Processes* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005) pg 36

⁷ Giorgos Triantafyllou, *KFOR and Provision of Security in Northern Kosovo: Tracing the sources of protracted insecurity*, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (Working Paper Nr, 48/2014) pg 6

Mitrovica. However, the French commanders of MNB-N did very little, if nothing at all, to establish law and order in northern Kosovo and Mitrovica, failing to carry out their mandate.⁸ The French deployed in Northern Kosovo had only two concerns: the physical safety of their own troops on the ground and how to prevent a recurrence of generalized violence between Albanians and Serbs. Thus instead of acting fast to deploy troops in Northern Kosovo, the⁹ French perceived the geographical division of Mitrovica by Ibar River as a very convenient way of keeping two ethnic groups separated. The absence of a robust KFOR presence in Northern Kosovo allowed Serbian authorities in Belgrade to step up and set up a thick network of parallel structures with its HQ in Northern Mitrovica. These parallel structures include security officers, social welfare, education, and health services funded directly from Belgrade and they exist even today.

Since 1999 and on many different occasions, Mitrovica has become point of reference for protracted interethnic violence, and every time KFOR has attracted severe criticism regarding its unwillingness to step up and enforce civilian law and order, as the mission was mandated. In February 2000, a killing spree in Mitrovica resulted in at least two Serbs and five Albanians killed. French KFOR personnel sustained several injuries trying to contain this wave of violence and the French commander of MNB-N at the time Brigadier General Pierre de Saquii de Sannes, made his priority that no French troops would be injured or killed no matter what reasons and consequences are. From that point on, KFOR adopted a passive approach against incidents of violence, refraining to engage with the aggressors unless safety of its troops was endangered.

In retrospect, it is indeed clear that NATO's KFOR bears significant responsibility for the security situation in Kosovo over the last 17 years. The decisions made by French commanders of MNB-N led not only to de-facto division of Mitrovica, but also the establishment of Serbian parallel structures that have controlled Northern Kosovo ever since. Moreover, the unwillingness of French troops to perform effectively their executive policing duties hindered the establishment of law and order in Northern Kosovo, and fuelled the resentment of both Albanians and Serbs in that region.

One might say that if KFOR had did what it was supposed to do in 1999 there would be no need for Brussels Agreement between Prishtina and Belgrade in 2013 and the implementation plan that is still being delayed. The Brussels Agreement is a major step forward in the right direction, but it remains to be seen in the coming years whether the measures that are written in the Agreement will be successful, or the decisions that were taken by French KFOR in 1999 will continue to maintain violence and insecurity in northern Kosovo.

CONCLUSIONS

In determining the role that KFOR has played in the peace building process it is important to consider that the line between traditional and expanded approaches to peacekeeping is not static. As exemplified by notorious March 2004 riots, the mere absence of violent conflict and presence of "neutral" peacekeepers does not ensure that sustainable peace can take root. With that being said, the NATO peacekeeping force in Kosovo has had a clear impact on the

⁸ International Crisis Group, Bridging Kosovo's Mitrovica Divide (Europe Report Nr. 165, September 2005, Executive summary and recommendations

⁹ Giorgos Triantafyllou, KFOR and Provision of Security in Northern Kosovo: Tracing the sources of protracted insecurity, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (Working Paper Nr. 48/2014) pg 8

improvement in the security situation since 1999. And, overall, while many of the “multi-dimensional” strategies and widened military roles that have been applied in Kosovo have not always resulted in successful, efficient, consistent initiatives or cooperative efforts, KFOR has rather effectively produced an environment where inhabitants of Kosovo from all communities feel increasingly safe as Kosovo strengthens its institutions.

As KFOR currently restructures and reduces forces under the “Deterrent Presence” and “Minimal Presence”, the issues are how will the transformation of KFOR influence the security situation in Kosovo. Activities of KFOR show that they are not in an “exit strategy” mode. In September 2015 KFOR signed an agreement with a US company “Momentum Aerospace Group” aiming to monitor Kosovo’s borders with Unmanned Aerial Vehicles. This means less troops patrolling, but also the contract is long-lasting. Also, KFOR is involved in the building up of Kosovo Security Force in several NATO support programs for this organization. The concept of “Deterrent Presence” against possible provocations from Serbian military can be reduced only with the increased numbers and equipment of Kosovo Security Force and its promotion to Kosovo’s Armed Forces. Only then can KFOR scale down and hand over security to Kosovo’s authorities and call the mission over. It is perceived in Kosovo that KFOR will not stay in Kosovo forever nor it needs to. The ultimate solution is in the hands of policy makers and if the Brussels Agreement is implemented and Kosovo’s authorities take hold of Northern Kosovo, alongside with the creation of Kosovo’s Armed Forces, than one can conclude KFOR’s mission as a successful one. Kosovo remains important in the minds of NATO planners because of its importance for stability of the region and it is hard to believe that NATO will abandon Kosovo. In fact it is more likely that in due course of time Kosovo will meet the standards to be a full NATO member.

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