

KFOR XVI

A KFOR soldier overlooking a barricade in the northern part of Kosovo





Crowd Riot Control
Equipment

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KFOR since 1999

Thirteen years after the beginning of the KFOR mission, and four years since the institutions in Kosovo declared independence, many challenges remain. However, the open antagonism witnessed in earlier times between Pristina and Belgrade has been replaced by dialogue and attempts of both to focus on the improvement of daily lives of all people living in Kosovo. Hostilities have ceased, however discord remains, especially with regard to the Northern part of Kosovo, where the overwhelming majority of the population remains reluctant to accept administration directed by the institutions in Kosovo. Clearly, the operational theatre has changed significantly since forces of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) were forced to withdraw from Kosovo by NATO's 78 day air campaign, Operation Allied Force (23 March- 10 June 1999). 50,000 NATO troops entered Kosovo simultaneously as the Serbs pulled out. This synchronised deployment of KFOR and the departure of Yugoslav forces was in accordance with the Kumanovo Military Technical Agreement (MTA) concluded between NATO and FRY on 9th June 1999. The following day, the NATO-led Kosovo Forces (KFOR) authority to act was mandated by United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR 1244). Two days later, on the 12th of June, KFOR entered Kosovo, Operation Joint Guardian had begun.

With a continuously improving security situation throughout Kosovo, KFOR gradually downsized to currently approximately ten per cent of its original strength. These continuous reductions ought not be viewed as an engine of success in themselves, rather as a consequence of it. However successfully achieved, it was not without encountering problems. A sudden unforeseen eruption of interethnic violence in mid-march 2004 ignited riots across Kosovo. Caught largely unaware an overall imperfect response from the International Community did however in places see

reaction by KFOR troops who in facing down the difficulties restored the peace. This was maintained by the rapid deployment of an additional 2,500 troops to speedily reinforce the existing KFOR strength. Subsequently, for greater flexibility, KFOR was reconfigured into Multinational Task Forces with physically reduced areas of responsibilities to ensure more rapid response capacity. Additionally a large number of individual national caveats were removed. KFOR completed its transition from four Multinational Brigades (MNBE, Centre, Northeast and Southeast) to five Multinational Task Forces (MNTF Centre, North, East, South and west) in June 2006. Also included were the Multinational Specialized Unit (MSU); a Portuguese Battalion serving as KFOR Tactical Reserve Maneuver Battalion (KTM); and a headquarters support group (HSG).

By February 2008, efforts by both UN special envoy for Kosovo, former President of Finland Marti AHTISAARI and subsequently those of the Troika team of negotiators of the EU- Russia- US, proved unsuccessful in bringing the parties to an agreement on Kosovo's status, an issue being left open by the UNSC resolution 1244. Not all EU, NATO and UN member states recognized Kosovo's independence after it's Assembly's declaration on the 17th of February 2008. NATO, as an inter-governmental organisation does not recognise states, nor not recognise them. At the Bucharest Summit in April 2008, NATO heads of state and government agreed that NATO and KFOR would continue to work with the institutions in Kosovo, remaining impartial with regard to the status of Kosovo. Two months later KFOR agreed to commence implementation of additional tasks in Kosovo, namely to assist in the standing-down of the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) and the standing up of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF).



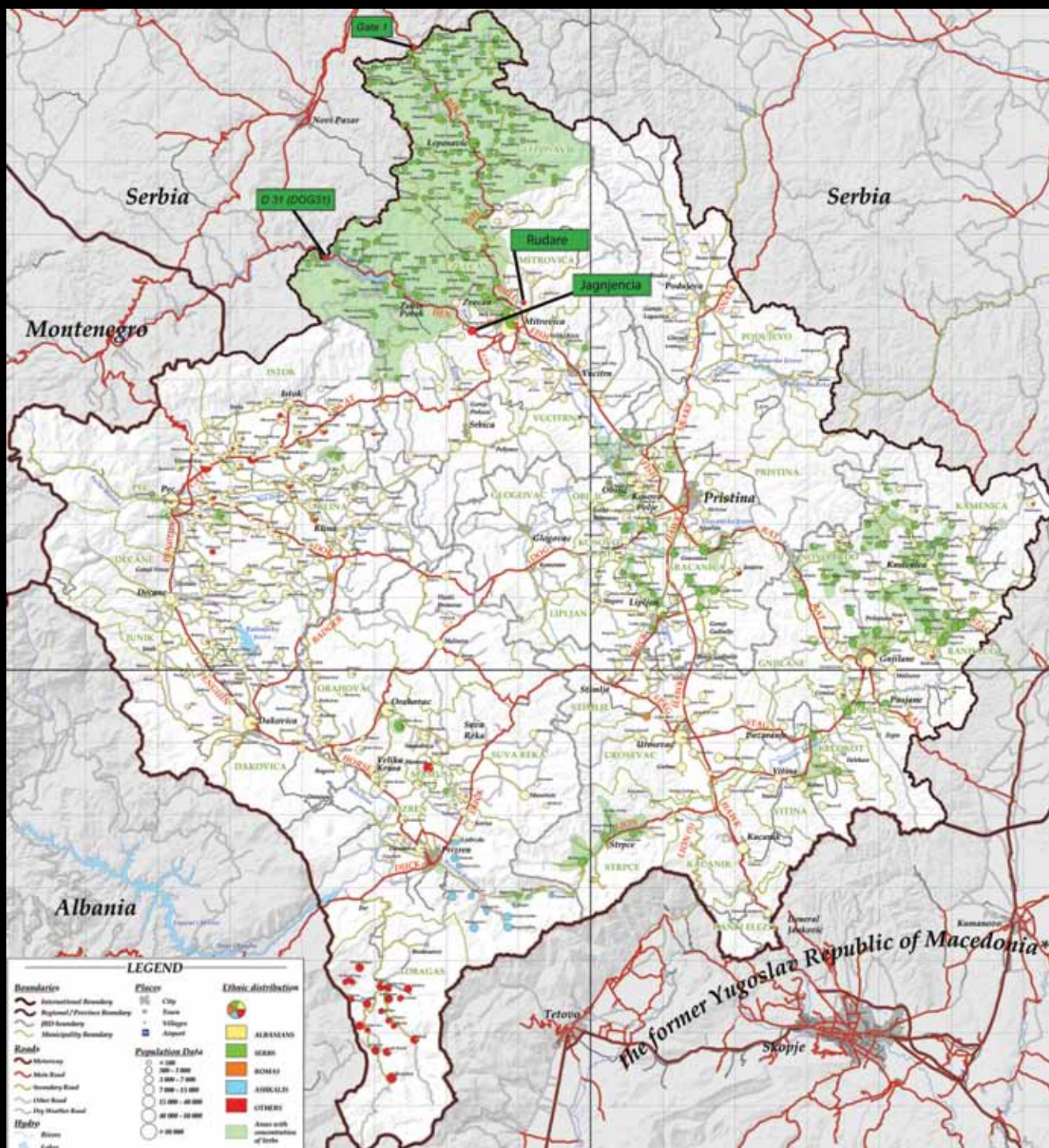
KFOR since 1999

Based on the improved security situation and the prevailing calm situation in Kosovo, KFOR was further reduced in strength and restructured. On its implementation in late January 2010 KFOR's strength reduced to 10,200, and the Multinational Task Forces were restructured into 5 Multinational Battle Groups (MNBs). KFOR was now to operate a "deterrent presence".

In light of the performance of the Kosovo Police (KP) and the support to Law enforcement by the European Rule of law mission (EULEX), by March 2011 KFOR saw a further troop reduction to 6,200 as well as yet another restructuring. The 5 Multinational Battle Groups were reduced to 2. HQ MNBG-East located at Camp Bondsteel and HQ MNBG-West at camp Villagio Italia. An on-call, over the horizon, quickly deployable, Operational Reserve Force (ORF) remained available to support KFOR if necessary. Liaison and Monitoring (LMT) elements, now operated in 5 separate Joint Regional Detachment (JRDs). These are the forward sensors of KFOR, with its soldiers meeting daily with the inhabitants of Kosovo. This important interaction allows the LMTs to gain a timely appreciation of their feeling regarding

issues on the ground. This overall reorganisation and new structure became possible, as the institutions in Kosovo assumed more and more responsibilities and tasks formerly executed by KFOR. At the same time, the force retained the capability and flexibility to respond to any potential crisis.

One example of tasks taken over by the institutions in Kosovo was the policing of borders with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Albania and Montenegro. Tensions erupted in late July 2011 when unknown individuals attacked police officers attempting to enforce customs policies at two custom control points along the Administrative Boundary Line with Serbia. One police officer was shot dead, and the Jarinje (Gate 1) crossing point was burned down by a violent group. Roads throughout northern Kosovo were blocked with trucks, trailers, logs and car tyres. KFOR, tasked to ensure Freedom of Movement and contribute to a Safe and Secure Environment, took over responsibility of both authorized crossing points Gate 1 and Dog 31 until EULEX, Kosovo Police and Kosovo Customs reinstalled their presence in mid-September.



BARRICADES and BYPASSES



In late July last year, attempting to forcefully implement custom policies at the northern crossing points of the Administrative Boundary Line, the institutions in Kosovo deployed members of its Regional Operations Support Unit (ROSU), a specialized police component, to take control of the Jarinje (Gate 1) and Brnjak (Dog 31) boundary crossing points. Serbs living in the area

reacted by erecting barricades on many of the main roads. Along with the barricades, alternative routes, rough paths, and remote tracks, to cross unchecked into and from Serbia, bypassing these two crossing points, were either utilized or newly constructed. Local leaders were adamant that they had no desire to tolerate the establishment of a fully functioning customs regime.

Many Serbs living in the Northern part of Kosovo saw this ROSU action as a provocative attempt to impose a "state border" between them and Serbia proper. In like manner to their rejection of the institutions in Kosovo, so too they rejected this effort to establish a functioning customs regime and a confrontation followed, resulting from which, one ROSU member lost his life. Subsequent to an initial calming of the situation tensions flared again two days later when a group of masked individuals burned down the Jarinje crossing point. Major tensions were to follow,

with KFOR confronted by roadblocks and road blockers, many of whom were woman, children and the elderly. KFOR succeeded in taking control of some of these barricades using surprise and swiftness. However serious clashes occurred as a small group of individuals reacted using violence, including fire-arms and grenades. KFOR's response was one of resolve and a series of planned roadblock removal and bypass blocking operations proved successful while the focus at all times was not to cause casualties. This photographic yearbook tells that story.



A PERSPECTIVE

COMKFOR



MAJOR GENERAL ERHARD DREWS

Undoubtedly, my term as COMKFOR was one characterized by the challenge of either tolerating or confronting restrictions on Freedom of Movement that occurred in the Northern part of Kosovo. The Barricades and the complex context within which they resided were a severe test for KFOR's resolve. However, having just begun my mission, I identified this intricate issue as only one symptom of a severe political burden stemming from the past conflict. In spite of all complexities KFOR adopted a clear and determined approach to the barricades. Freedom of Movement is a key principle of the international community. The obstructive actions of a minority of individuals – at times out of sheer self-interest - could not go unchallenged. Not only did they obstruct Freedom of Movement: obstructions also became an impediment to progress towards the improvement of the daily lives of people living in the affected area. KFOR reacted professionally, proportionately and patiently. This reaction was completed sensitively and conducted without further escalating events. Those opposing KFOR's actions displayed no such restraint: November 2011 brought clashes at Jagnjencia resulting in the wounding of many soldiers. Then, early in June, a group of individuals shot at KFOR soldiers safeguarding the removal of a large roadblock in the vicinity of Rudare. Once more KFOR soldiers were wounded while in turn acting in a fair and measured manner. After all: as soldiers, we are trained, equipped and prepared for such situations. On both occasions, however, the clashes resulted from the violent reaction of a minority of individuals hiding behind peaceful protestors. I must point out that, in my daily encounters, people in the Northern part of Kosovo are as respectable and honorable as anywhere else in Kosovo. At the end I am glad, that other occasions on which KFOR troops skillfully, successfully and without force seized such roadblocks, were not accompanied by such violent reactions. I am pleased and very proud of how KFOR troops conducted themselves throughout these Roadblock Removal Operations, in a correct, considered and constrained but also a wholly resolved manner.

Yet another operation was of great importance for KFOR: when on the 6th and 20th of May 2012 the OSCE facilitated the balloting for Serbian voters wishing to partake in the Serbia parliamentary and presidential elections, KFOR was again on post, ready to react to any challenge to a Safe and Secure Environment. The smooth process in 90 polling stations in 28 locations was a great success for all organizations involved, be it the Kosovo Police, the OSCE, EULEX or KFOR. It was a highly noteworthy day for Kosovo and its people and, in my view, a joint effort to maintain democratic values. The elections passed without problems, no incidents were reported Kosovo-wide. To me this extremely challenging undertaking, planned and executed on very short notice, demonstrated how international organizations and the institutions in Kosovo can cooperate effectively and to the benefit of the people.

In spite of the wide range of military means over which KFOR disposes of, military action never has and never will positively influence obstacles that exist in people's minds. Real progress can only be found where dialogue and peaceful interaction takes place. It will be reached though communication, concession and compromise. KFOR, in the meanwhile, will continue to contribute to a Safe and Secure Environment and Freedom of Movement for all.

Returning to Germany I will be happy to tell people that Kosovo is not about barricades, violence or administrative challenges. It is foremost about the hope of many gifted and respectable men and women for a better future. To the people in Kosovo, I can only extend my best wishes for the future, thank them for their hospitality and ensure them, that I will always fondly remember the time I was able to spend with them here.



FACING THE BARRICADES



KFOR, throughout autumn of 2011, faced a sensitive challenge with regard to the barricades that were established in most of the Northern part of Kosovo, especially from mid-September. With negotiations and key leader engagement proving fruitless this impasse continued into months. Freedom of movement had however not to be compromised on. The deadlock could not continue. The barricades had to be dismantled. Tensions gave way to scuffles and skirmishes, with small-scale confrontations following. More serious clashes occurred in late November 2011 at Jagnjencia with KFOR withstanding a violent reaction to its earlier seizure of the roadblock there, that had been peaceful and successful.











LIVING AT THE BARRICADES



With the fast-fading light of the late November and early December mid-afternoons in northern Kosovo it started to get cold very quickly. There were few creature comforts and it was uncertain what the next few days, even hours would bring. Violent clashes had occurred at the barricades and dozens of KFOR soldiers had been wounded, some seriously. Life on the barricades was very tough. KFOR soldiers were however far from being alone and the camaraderie of colleagues was very comforting to the individual soldier's spirit and morale. Their training, equipment, leadership structure and supplies supported them but it was the close comradeship of fellow soldiers that sustained them most of all.















DISMANTLING THE BARRICADES



The removal of road obstacles at Jagnjenica by the local population and KFOR in the Zubin Potok valley in early December involved lengthy negotiations, on-the-spot coordination, the use of heavy equipment, considerable effort and much patience. A week earlier it had been the scene of heavy clashes between violent individuals and KFOR troops. It took a full two days to dismantle the barricades and a further one to install a KFOR checkpoint.







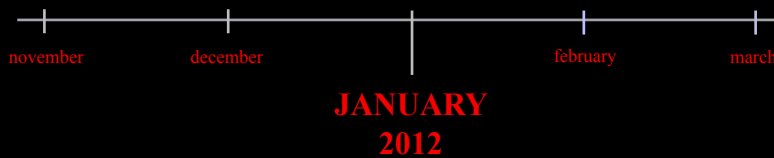








SUSTAINABILITY



The dust had turned to mud. The clear skies were gone replaced by mists and freezing fog. The last rays of wintery sun given over to sheets of falling rain, sleet and snow. Winter was upon Kosovo. Resupply became more challenging because of the adverse effects of the bad weather on KFOR transportation along the air and road supply corridors. Already made difficult by man-made barriers in northern Kosovo, the sustainability issue became more complex, interfered with now by nature. Like many things in life however and especially in the military, matters have to be made happen, KFOR soldiers welfare were dependent on it. This responsibility was met by a combination of highly competent, comprehensive and committed KFOR teamwork. Sustainment was achieved by the relentless persistence and continuous efforts involving the foresight of the planners; the organization of the logisticians; the involvement of the Joint Logistic Support Group; the skill of the helicopter pilots; the stamina of the transport drivers ; and finally the forbearance and patience of the KFOR soldiers themselves.











A BAD WINTER



Light snow, heavy snow, driving snow, plummeting day and night-time temperatures; Lunsparing wind-chill factor; all these harsh freezing conditions meant real winter had arrived in Kosovo. With the entire Balkans caught in the grip of an icy freeze, the severe snow and bitter winter cold meant it was, as some said, the worst winter in Kosovo since 1984. While dangerous driving conditions were experienced, meters high snow drifts blocked many roads, falling temperatures forced schools to close, and some areas even experienced avalanches. One such, in Restelica proved deadly, claiming 10 lives. Amidst this tragedy, the Kosovo Security Force, conducted operations very successfully in providing emergency relief in the Dragash area. Winter conditions meant much disruption to normal life throughout Kosovo. Notwithstanding the extreme adverse weather conditions, the work of KFOR soldiers too had to continue in order for it not to have a negative impact on KFOR operations. With Camp Bondsteel having record levels of snowfall, in the North the raw arctic biting cold was not allowed to hamper those tasks which had to be performed by KFOR. All over Kosovo it was soldiering in the snow time for KFOR troops and they proved they were equal to the challenges presented by the heavy snow storms and the hard winter weather.













Multinational Battle Group East (MNBG-E) was ordered to secure the Jarinje Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) Crossing Point (Gate 1), while KFOR's Operational Reserve Force (ORF Battalion) was responsible to secure Dog 31, the ABL crossing point at Brnjak. In the subsequently created adjacent KFOR camps, on the nearby temporary Vehicle Checkpoints (VCPs), out on the patrols and recons, creature comforts were few, conditions Spartan, and the harsh unfavourable weather of recent month made an already difficult, demanding duty, a much tougher task. Regular resupply and rotation of troops contributed to mitigate against such circumstances and helped the KFOR troops there endure the onerous hardships. In March these two crossing points had begun to operate more in line with their potential capacity as a result of the EU facilitated agreements reached between Belgrade and Pristina regarding Kosovo's regional representation and the future implementation of Integrated Border Management.







RIISING TENSIONS



An explosion in a ground floor flat in the so called 3 towers area of Mitrovica early in the month caused the death of one adult and slight injuries to 2 of 4 children sleeping in the affected apartment. The subsequent setting up of a Kosovo Police static point within the 3 towers complex itself, resulted in a violent mob of 200 attacking this, destroying the container and causing the Kosovo Police to abort the effort. In response to heightened tensions, one Company of the Tactical Reserve Manoeuvre Battalion (KTM), on a rotating basis, deployed into the area. In the meantime the Multinational Specialized Unit (MSU) focused on the “little Bosnia” area, another ethnically mixed part of the city.





Early April KFOR physically closed the unauthorized bypass in the vicinity of the Jarinje official Boundary Crossing Point (Gate 1). This action was undertaken in order to enhance its contribution to a Safe and Secure Environment.



SERBIAN ELECTIONS IN KOSOVO



A wake early on Sundays 6th and 20th May, Serbian Election Days in Kosovo, were the HQ Staff manning the Joint Operations Centre (JOC). Neither were they alone, because throughout Kosovo, already fully deployed was the entire Force, with reinforcements, some 6,600 in all. Special emphasis was placed on the provision of presence patrols close to selected areas. Vehicle checkpoints were conducted locally, including at unauthorized boundary crossing points along the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL).





KFOR's deterrent presence proved an effective contribution to the overall effort in conjunction with the Kosovo Police and EULEX thereby ensuring the elections days passed off safely. May 2012 was an important month in the region witnessing the successful OSCE-facilitated balloting process for those residents eligible and keen to participate in the Serbian Elections.

KFOR's fully deployed deterrent presence in a state of readiness to react proved an effective contribution to the overall effort in conjunction with the Kosovo Police and EULEX thereby ensuring the elections passed off peacefully.







RUDARE ROADBLOCK REMOVAL



On 1st of June 2012 KFOR successfully removed a roadblock in the vicinity of Rudare. This operation was conducted in order to improve Freedom of Movement not only for KFOR, but also for international organizations and for all people in Kosovo. The denial of Freedom of Movement for all was contrary to KFOR's mandate and became the subject of clashes and tense stand-offs. Specifically along route "BULL", the road leading from Mitrovica all the way to Leposavic and Gate 1, the roadblock hampered access requiring KFOR to resupply Camp Nothing Hill and Gate 1 by helicopter. In late September 2011 the roadblock had been reinforced with concrete, railroad iron, gravel and concrete blocks. On 24th of November KFOR soldiers were injured by thrown rocks and reversing gravel-laden trucks. Later that month near Zupce, west of Cabre/Cabra village, KFOR successfully secured the removal of a significant roadblock at Jagnjencia, the seizing of which gave access to an important route. 30 KFOR soldiers were wounded in a violent nighttime reaction to the seizure of this roadblock, two receiving gunshot wounds earlier that day, fortunately not life threatening. While the successful operation at Jagnjencia led to the removal of most of the remaining roadblocks, Rudare roadblock remained in place.





A planned KFOR effort to remove the Rudare roadblock was executed to good effect on 1st of June when a cordon was rapidly put into effect to secure the area surrounding the roadblock. Surprise and swiftness played their part as reinforcements were quickly helicoptered in, others moving rapidly by road to consolidate these key position and allowed the KFOR engineers to commence their dismantling works. Two and a half kilometres away and hours later a clash occurred at the Iron Bridge in the vicinity of Zvecan when protestors reacted by throwing stones.





KFOR responded by firing rubber bullets and the use of nonlethal gas. Shots were fired at KFOR soldiers with aimed shots at soldiers fired on at least three separate occasions. The incoming fire impacted immediately near the KFOR soldiers, on and into KFOR vehicles, even on the helmets of the KFOR soldiers.

Two KFOR soldiers were wounded. Acting in self-defence KFOR returned fire. Items of evidential value highlighting the in-coming bullet impacts were subsequently presented to the media some days later by KFOR to convincingly counter misinformation. Freedom of Movement was achieved. The Rudare roadblock was removed.



















BLOCKING BRNJAK BYPASS



In Mid-June KFOR completed an operation to physically close a bypass in the vicinity of the authorized Boundary crossing point at Brnjak (Gate 31). On this operation's successful conclusion unauthorized movements across the Administrative Boundary Line were prevented. It was carried out in order to permit KFOR troops to concentrate on the conduct of priority tasks. Prior to the closure work KFOR established several check points and cordoned off selected areas for safety reasons. This allowed the physical blockage of the bypass by KFOR continue unhindered until satisfactorily completed. The closure of DOG 16 resulted in a demonstration by protestors in the vicinity of Gate 31 and Zupce as some displayed their displeasure in KFOR's action to close said bypass. KFOR efforts then focused on engaging in dialogue with local representatives. Earlier KFOR troops had to fire three rubber bullets into the air to discourage protestors from climbing onto KFOR vehicles. Apart from this isolated incident the situation remained largely calm.







The unauthorized bypass made impassable, the reaction contained through dialogue, the operation was stood down. Three morning's later a hand grenade exploded in the vicinity of the Administrative Boundary Crossing Point at Brnjak (Dog 31). A second hand grenade which did not detonate was destroyed by means of a controlled explosion carried out by a KFOR Ordnance Disposal Team.

PEOPLE and PLACES

Placed in a part of Europe so rich with history, Kosovo is many things to many people. Geographically landlocked, within its landscapes are lakes, hills and mountains. To the foreigner mosques, monasteries and mountains are the most often remembered images. Kosovo displays treasures of great heritage value: architecture of past time rulers from the Ottoman to the era of Habsburg, traditional and modern, Kosovo is diverse and, amidst all its traditions, changing. Most of all it is vibrant, young and emerging. There exists a palpable pulse of life, because Kosovo is above all else, a place of young people. This is its greatest treasure. It's nearly two million inhabitants comprise the youngest population in Europe, one in which every second person is under 25. In spite of persisting economic and social challenges there is a sense of youth and the energy that comes with it. The experience of the older generation combined with the enthusiasm and energy of the young; the ideas and vision; the confidence and self-belief of the younger, generates an empowerment derived from looking favourably towards the future.





















There are three main religious beliefs in Kosovo, Islam, Orthodox and Catholic. Islam however is by far the system of faith and worship which predominates. Kosovo's religious affiliation corresponds roughly with the ethnic make-up of the population, 92% Muslim, 6% Serb Orthodox, 2% Catholic. It is accurate to say the majority Muslim population has a relaxed observance of their religion, not seeking to chose to define their identity through it. There is tolerance too, to-day, towards and between the different faiths, denominations, and religious communities. Muslims mosques, Catholic churches and Serb monasteries are spread throughout Kosovo, many important ones having Designated Special Status and are much visited.







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TOGETHER as ONE



The previous twelve months, unique though they were, were not all about barricade erections, Serbian elections, roadblock removals and bypass blockages. There were many other activities that KFOR also positively participated in and progressed. These were the many everyday elements contained within KFOR's mission in Kosovo.

The role of the KFOR Gender Advisor is external. It concerns the population here in Kosovo. It is about increasing situational awareness and operational effectiveness. To build a safe and secure environment KFOR needs to have a knowledge of not only the security of the different ethnic groups but also of men, women, boys and girls in Kosovo. Understanding the role of gender is important when building stability. The more complete KFOR's information, the more precise its strategy will be. The Gender Advisor gave KFOR a new perspective which was an advantage over previous operation plans. KFOR appointed the first Gender Focal Points which provided a vital link throughout KFOR and helped in training soldiers, such as the Liaison Monitoring Teams. This was a start. It will be some time before all soldiers understand the concepts and a Gender perspective becomes normal. Gender is an asset to improve operational effectiveness and a force multiplier. Gender awareness is of vital importance to KFOR military operations.





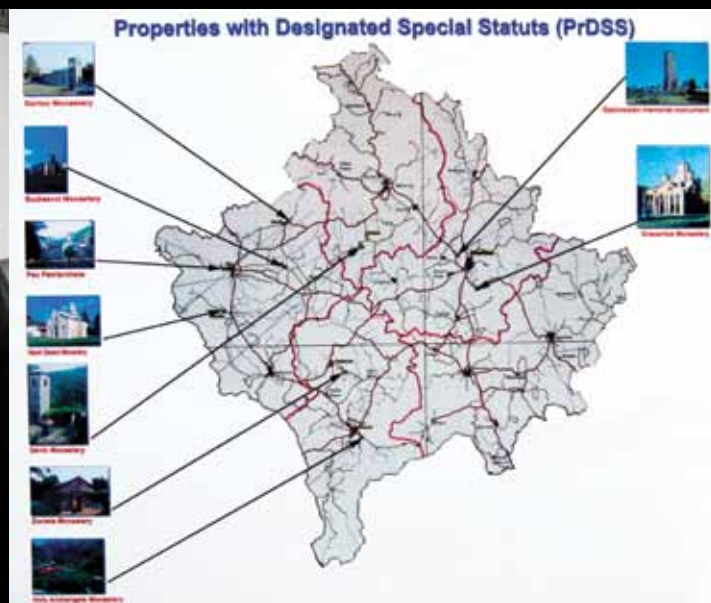


Liaison Monitoring Teams (LMTs) are the eyes and ears of KFOR. Their activities add a considerable amount to the forces situational awareness and subsequent decisions are informed in no small way by their inputs. The work involves everything from spontaneous meetings with local people in rural areas to scheduled appointments with persons in higher positions in society. Being a member of a LMT team requires commitment, social skills and that you are ready to give of yourself to get something back from the people you meet. It's an interactive social role dealing with real people and then presenting their perspective.



One of KFOR's line of operations is "to strengthen Kosovo Security Force (KSF) capabilities". This is mainly the task of HQ KFOR's Military Civil Advisory Division (MCAD) through monitoring, mentoring and advising this civil protection force. The results have been encouraging and KSF have improved their capabilities related to their core missions such as fire fighting, demining, handling of hazardous material and search and rescue. Applications amongst young people from all ethnicities to various recruitment campaigns was very strong. After reaching their Initial Operational Capability (IOC) in 2009, all KSF efforts have since converged towards reaching Full Operational Capability (FOC). Through a joint KFOR/KSF assessment cycle, FOC criteria have been developed. KSF performance is continually being evaluated to ensure progress.

After the guarding responsibilities for Gazimestan Monument (28 March 2010) the Gracania Monastery (23 August 2010), the Monasteries in Zociste (03 November 2010), Budisavci (22 November 2010), Goric (15 December 2010) and Archangel Monastery (10 May 2011) had been successfully handed over to the Kosovo Police, on 01 June 2012 this was followed by the completed handing over guarding responsibility of Devic Monastery. Thus, the transfer of guarding tasks of seven out of nine Religious and Cultural Heritage Sites have been successfully completed by June 2012. The Kosovo Police has been a reliable and very successful partner throughout the handing over guarding responsibility process. KFOR soldiers were praised by Mother Anastasia on their departure for their professionalism. It was a proud occasion tinged with sadness at the ending of this very happy association. Visoki Decani Monastery and the Peja/Pec Patriarchate are the two remaining properties with Designated Special Status (Pr DSS) remaining to be unfixed.



Going direct with concrete help is how the KFOR generosity is best dispensed. KFOR soldiers have maintained a reputation for taking matters into their own hands giving generously where the need is greatest. Be it to the "Mother and Child Home" in Pristina, Klina school or necessary equipment for hospitals. Events are organised, monies raised and assistance offered. KFOR soldiers are always aware to address the sometimes difficult living conditions experienced by others here in Kosovo. There always seems to be new ideas for ways of raising money and in late February the First Charity Concert for Kosovo was initiated. It took place under the patronage of the President of Kosovo, Ms Atifete Jahjaga with the support of COMKFOR Major General Erhard Drews. The Charity Concert was held in the Red Hall of Youth Culture and Sports Centre with a special performance by the chamber music ensemble "Trio Celebre", a group of classical musicians from Pristina. Enough funds were raised to give support to three different projects throughout Kosovo.





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