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NATO Photo



NATO OPERATIONS IN THE BALKANS

Misha Glenny, the well-known BBC Journalist, once described the collapse of the Soviet Union as “the rebirth of history”. In a sense, of course, he was right. The early 1990s saw the resurgence of old battles, old scores and old passions that had been frozen by the Cold War.

Nowhere was this clearer than in the Balkans. The slow disintegration of Yugoslavia throughout the past decade embodied so many of the darkest elements of Europe’s past: ethnic nationalism, often based on paranoid national mythologies; a sense of historical grievance; irredentism; and an almost casual willingness to use force to accomplish political aims. In Yugoslavia, it would seem, time had truly stood still.

But this is only part of the story — because to focus exclusively on Yugoslavia and its troubles would be to ignore the seismic changes that have taken place over the past ten years in other parts of the Balkans, across Europe, and throughout the Euro-Atlantic area. Indeed, what is striking about the Balkan conflicts today is that they are not part of the norm, nor an example of a wider trend. At the dawn of the 21st century, they are the exception to the rule.

While strongmen in Bosnia and Yugoslavia promoted ethnic hatred and xenophobia, newly independent states across Central and Eastern Europe have embraced the common values of peace, liberty, tolerance and human rights. While Bosnia and Yugoslavia suffered from ethnic cleansing and warfare, their neighbours have been signing friendship agreements and solving problems through diplomacy. While Milosovic has chosen isolation and pariah status for himself and his country, the rest of the region has elected to pursue integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

NATO’s missions in the Balkans must be understood in this context. Of course, the Alliance took on these missions — first in Bosnia, now in Kosovo, too — to bring an end to the horrors taking place there. But these conflicts also had to be stopped because they represented a challenge to the progress being made right across the Euro-Atlantic area in building a true community of shared values, shared responsibility and shared prosperity. By stopping the violence in Bosnia and Kosovo, and by helping rebuild those societies, NATO is working with the rest of the international community to see the Balkans become a full part of the Euro-Atlantic community, rather than a threat to it.

BOSNIA

The war in Bosnia represented the first major security challenge to the positive evolution of Euro-Atlantic security after the end of the Cold War. The humanitarian toll — hundreds of thousands killed, millions made homeless — was horrendous. The violations of human rights — ethnic cleansing, mass executions, rape as a weapon of war — were intolerable. For our values alone, we had to act, to demonstrate clearly that in the Europe of today, this kind of action was no longer acceptable.

Our interests, too, were challenged directly by this conflict. As it deepened, the crisis put enormous pressure on relations between European nations as they struggled to find an effective response. It put pressure on the vital transatlantic relationship, during the days of UNPROFOR. And it put pressure on the project of trying to build a relationship between the West and Russia, a country just finding its place in Europe. For all these reasons too, a response was necessary. Bosnia simply could not be allowed to derail the burgeoning process of European integration.

NATO's Allies clearly understood these requirements. The measured military pressure applied by Allied air forces gave diplomacy the backing it needed to work, and led directly to the Dayton Peace Accords that brought the conflict to an end.

The Dayton Accords laid out some fundamental requirements for postwar Bosnia. The signatories to the document — including the Bosnian Federation and the Republica Srpska — agreed to create a secure environment for all residents of Bosnia - Herzegovina, to allow refugees to return to their homes, to turn over indicted war criminals to the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, and, in general, to uphold the values shared by the rest of Europe. And after the Agreement was signed, the Alliance took on a major responsibility to enforce it.

Through these measures — the Dayton Agreement, and the decision by NATO to provide a secure environment — Bosnia took

a first step away from its dark past, towards a brighter future within Europe.

Today, four years after the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) deployed into Bosnia, that bright future is much closer to becoming reality. First and foremost, the security environment has improved dramatically over what it was just a few years ago. Ethnic divisions remain, but there is no longer a sense that getting on with daily life poses risks to personal safety. As an illustration, major security incidents in Bosnia have gone down from 14 per month last April, to just one in October.

The palpable sense of increased security throughout much of Bosnia has led to an acceleration in the rate of refugee returns. Over 80,000 people returned to their homes in 1999, and three out of four returned to areas in which they are the minority without international assistance or sponsorship. Minorities are even returning to formerly notorious sites of "ethnic cleansing".

The arrest of indicted war criminals by NATO troops has contributed significantly to this increased sense of security. The NATO-led mission has assisted in the transfer to The Hague of 23 of the 32 war crimes suspects currently in the custody of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, including one already this year.

Another area in which we can see clear progress is that the different Bosnian entities are working together more effectively, and in a more cooperative spirit. The Standing Committee on Military Matters Secretariat has been established, to act as an important common security institution, and the possible nucleus for a future joint staff or defence ministry. And there is now a common currency, a single license plate and a single telephone area code for Bosnia.

Even the shared Bosnian presidency, once a cauldron for ethnic tension, is showing signs of moderation, with the three presidents meeting regularly and adopting a common rhetoric to address mutual problems. The Tri-Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in a



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declaration issued in New York on 15 November 1999, agreed on measures for the full implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement, including the creation of a multi-ethnic State Border Service, provision of adequate resources to Central State Institutions, establishment of a Joint Commission to speed up returns of displaced people, the creation of a single national passport and an intensified fight against corruption.

All of this is real progress. Although we are still a long way from a truly self-sustaining peace in Bosnia, we have created the conditions for the people there to work towards reconstruction and reconciliation, if they have the will. As a reflection of the improvement in the security environment in Bosnia, SFOR is being reduced from the present 30,000 troops to about 20,000, and restructured to carry out its many missions with even more flexibility. And the international community is slowly but surely continuing the process of giving “ownership” of Bosnia back to the Bosnians.

Canadians should take great pride in this progress — because Canada has played a major role in making it happen. Canada’s 1300 troops in Bosnia make it the ninth largest contributor out of the approximately 35 countries, and one of the largest contributors of armoured combat units. Canada has also provided over \$2 million for de-mining in Bosnia, materially improving the security situation for all its citizens.

It is safe to say that the NATO-led operations have been a success, and that alone is noteworthy. But the Bosnian operation represented more than just the success of a military mission — it set the standard for a new way of doing business in Euro-Atlantic security.

When the Implementation Force deployed into Bosnia in January 1996, it was a model for a new, broader approach to security. First, in rallying all major powers, including Russia, behind a common strategy and even a common military operation, NATO broke the fateful cycle of great powers siding with their traditional client states. Second, by inviting over 20 non-NATO countries — including former Warsaw Pact members and neutrals — to participate in the operation, the Alliance demonstrated concretely that there are no more dividing lines in Europe, and that all states can contribute, in their own way, to building our common security. Third, by working in close partnership with the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and many Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the Bosnia experience has helped break down traditional, and outdated, barriers between military and civilian structures.

It is also worth noting one final positive effect of the Bosnia operation. By making a strong commitment to

the reconstruction of Bosnia as a viable, multi-ethnic state, NATO demonstrated convincingly that crisis management can indeed influence Euro-Atlantic security dynamics for the better, and that the vision of a cooperative and peaceful Europe could be realised.

KOSOVO

Just a few years after IFOR first deployed, the Kosovo crisis grew to be a major challenge to this vision. And as the international community took measures to manage this situation, the lessons of Bosnia proved very valuable indeed.

We realised early on that Kosovo, like Bosnia, was more than just a small, local conflict in an area of Europe of little geostrategic interest. On the contrary. The international community understood that there can be no lasting peace in Europe if dictators are allowed to kill thousands of their own citizens with impunity. There can be no stability in Europe when armies drive hundreds of thousands of people from their homes into neighbouring countries. There can be no security in Europe when the human rights of entire peoples are trampled under foot — when ethnic cleansing, mass killings and terror are the tools of oppressive governments.



The Kosovo crisis, like Bosnia before it, challenged us to uphold our values. Thousands of innocent people were being killed in Kosovo, and hundreds of thousands made homeless, by the armed and paramilitary forces of the Yugoslav Government. And in the days before NATO decided to act, Serb security forces had moved closer to “ethnic cleansing”, with new deaths and new floods of refugees according to a long existing plan, as recorded in the OSCE report published in December 1999.



Canadian Forces Photo by: DGP/A

Kosovo also posed a direct threat to our interests in maintaining stability and consolidating democracy in South-Eastern Europe. By the time NATO got directly involved in managing the crisis, the ongoing repression was increasingly destabilizing the entire region. Albanian and Yugoslav forces were already firing at each other across the border, and the countries bordering Kosovo — all new and fragile democracies — were having increasing difficulty coping with the flood of refugees. Further destabilization could have made this a much larger and even more intractable regional conflict, and could easily have upset the still-fragile progress being made in Bosnia. Simply put — we took action because it had to be done. We chose costly engagement over even more costly indifference. As was the case in Bosnia, in Kosovo our values and our security interests converged.

And once we chose to become involved, the experience of Bosnia proved its value very clearly. First, we understood much more quickly that diplomacy sometimes needs military backing if it is to be effective. It took the Alliance too long to come to that decision in the case of Bosnia. What took years then took only months during this crisis, thereby clearly helping to avoid years of further terror in Kosovo.

Second, the importance of international consensus was highlighted once again. As in Bosnia, a diplomatic solution for Kosovo was only found when the North American and European powers lined up behind a common position rather than siding with traditional client states. In other words, diplomacy worked when Russia made it very clear to Serbia that Russia, too, wanted peace and autonomy for Kosovo on the terms of the international community. Once that happened, Milosevic accepted those terms.

Third, the Alliance was able to work even more effectively with our Partners. In the early days of the crisis, the countries surrounding Kosovo quickly called on NATO to provide support for their efforts to manage the huge influx of refugees. They then, in turn, provided support for NATO’s efforts to manage the conflict, including in the difficult days of the air campaign.

These were difficult and courageous decisions for countries in a historically turbulent region. Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹ were filled with hundreds of thousands of refugees. Bulgaria and Romania had transportation and commercial routes along the Danube destroyed. Sofia was even hit by two NATO missiles that accidentally went astray! Yet none of these countries wavered in their support for NATO’s operation. The experience of working with NATO in the Partnership for Peace Programme, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, and on the ground in Bosnia, helped ensure mutual trust and smooth cooperation throughout the crisis.

But the most important reason the air campaign succeeded was, quite simply, the professionalism of NATO’s armed forces. Here too, Canada should be very proud of its role. Canadian pilots flew a high proportion of the non-US strike missions with just eighteen CF-18s, punching well above its weight.

For all these reasons, the air campaign succeeded, and on 3 June 1999, “Allied Force” was ended. On the same day, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 set the stage for the NATO-led Kosovo Implementation Force (KFOR), designed to create a secure environment for the citizens of Kosovo, and for other organizations such as the UN and the OSCE to help rebuild that shattered area. And once again, Canada demonstrated its determination to play an active role in building peace and security by contributing over 1300 troops to the operation.

It is clear that in Kosovo proper, the challenge of reconstruction is even more difficult than in Bosnia. Dr. Bernard Kouchner, the head of the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) with whom KFOR is working closely,

has quite accurately described Kosovo as an area which had suffered forty years of Communism, ten years of apartheid, and then a year of ethnic cleansing. Given this history, no one should harbour any illusions that reconciliation between ethnic groups could be achieved within a few years. Similarly, the job of rebuilding Kosovo's economy will also be long and hard.

Despite these massive challenges, however, there has been amazing progress since KFOR deployed into Kosovo. First and foremost, the violence which affected the entire population, not just a few individuals or groups, has ended. Serb forces have withdrawn. The Kosovo Liberation Army has been disbanded and demilitarized by KFOR, and it has handed over more than 10,000 weapons. A civilian organization called the Kosovo Protection Corps has been established, which operates under the control of KFOR and provides assistance in such areas as civil emergency.

The security situation is still not nearly as good as we would wish. Serbs and other minorities within Kosovo now find themselves the victims of random attacks on almost a daily basis. This is unacceptable, and nearly half of KFOR's troops are now expressly devoted to protecting minorities, particularly in Serb dominated areas such as Mitrovica and Kemanica.

It is worth noting, however, that here too there has been progress. The overall murder rate in Kosovo has dropped off significantly — from 90 per 100,000 of the population in June of last year, to five in the beginning of this year, which is fewer than the monthly average in many of the world's big cities. And like in those big cities, the real answer to these crimes lies not with armies, but with the police.

There are still too few international police in Kosovo — about 1800 have been deployed so far — but already 60 percent of the province now has a civilian police presence. The United Nations' civilian police force has taken over responsibility for law and order in the Pristina and Prizren areas, and the first multi-ethnic class of the Kosovo Police Academy graduated last

December. These officers will form the core of the local, multi-ethnic Kosovo police service, and thousands of local men and women, including many Serbs and people from other minorities, have applied to join.

Judges and judicial officers, from many ethnic backgrounds, are being appointed to the UNMIK courts in Pristina, Prizren and other districts. As these judges take up their functions and sentence convicted criminals, deterrence of crime will increase and law and order will improve.

By any measure, today's situation is a far cry from the anarchy and lawlessness that many doomsayers predicted when KFOR deployed. It is also a far cry from President Milosevic's apartheid decade, under the ruthless rule of the Serb minority. But building a multi-ethnic society will take time.

On the humanitarian front, too, the situation has improved. More than 850,000 refugees have returned to Kosovo from abroad thanks to the action of the international community, and over 50,000 homes have been rebuilt at a furious pace. The World Food Program is giving aid to 650,000

Kosovars and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other agencies have provided shelter kits to some 400,000 people. About 550 schools have been cleared of mines and unexploded ammunition, and 300,000 children went back to school last fall, to be taught in their own language for the first time in ten years. The UN mission is now present in all 29 municipalities of Kosovo, and is paying salaries to local civil servants, and the essential funds to continue have been found. Pledges of more than US\$1 billion in aid by the end of this year were made at the Second Kosovo Donors' Conference on 17 November of last year. And Canada's recent decision to devote \$100 million dollars for assistance to Kosovo is a huge and generous contribution.

War crimes investigations are also well in hand. The International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague has received reports of more than 11,000 bodies at 529 grave sites. So far, more than 2000 bodies have been exhumed. We will likely never know, however, the full scope of the crimes committed by Serb security forces in Kosovo.



As in Bosnia, the NATO-led force in Kosovo has supported the work of civilian organizations: UNMIK, the International Tribunal, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and many others. The logic for KFOR is clear: our long-term mission success depends on them. NATO and Partner forces cannot fully re-deploy home until there is self-sustaining security in Kosovo, and that will depend on the success of civilian organizations.

Naturally, all of the above will take much time and effort. The long-term political future of Kosovo is yet to be determined in line with UNSCR 1244. In the meantime, however, the international community is doing its best to assure the future of a multi-ethnic society. But let there be no doubt: the ultimate responsibility rests with the local population — ethnic Albanians, Serbs and others alike. They must put aside their mentality of hatred and do their part to achieve a lasting peace. The international community can assist, but will not allow a culture of dependency to develop.

As with SFOR in Bosnia, KFOR will have to stay in Kosovo for as long as it takes to get the job done. Such a long-term military presence will have its costs. Yet these costs pale in comparison to Cold War spending levels. Security in Europe still comes with a price tag, but it is affordable. As we have learned, the price of indifference can be far higher than that of engagement!

BEYOND KFOR: NATO'S STRATEGY FOR LONG-TERM STABILITY

That logic — that indifference can cost more than engagement — drives NATO's strategy for long-term stability in the entire Balkan region. Simply put, we can no longer afford to ignore the Balkans until a problem explodes, deal with it, and then ignore the region again. The costs for everyone involved are simply too high. That is why NATO and the European Union are working together to build long-term, self-sustaining peace and prosperity in the Balkans. Security and economics are linked; one cannot flourish without the other. The European Union's initiative to establish a Stability Pact focuses on three areas: democratisation and human rights; economic recon-

struction, development and cooperation; and security issues. These are the areas in which nations and relevant organisations should concentrate and coordinate to achieve long-term stability and security in the region.

NATO will play an important role in support of this Pact, most actively in the security field. That is why NATO launched its Southeastern European Initiative at the Washington Summit. It will support the Stability Pact in a variety of ways:

- We will use our new Consultative Forum on Security Issues on Southeast Europe, which brings together Allies and seven countries in the region, to develop practical cooperative initiatives;
- We will also work closely with our Partners in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council to develop additional practical ideas for regional cooperation in South-East Europe;
- We will use the Alliance's new Membership Action Plan to help aspirant countries from Southeastern Europe to prepare their candidacies for NATO membership;
- We will maintain the long-term goal of membership in EAPC and PfP for Bosnia - Herzegovina, Croatia and, ultimately, for a democratic Yugoslavia.

CONCLUSION

These measures will not do the trick alone. They are simply steps in the right direction. It will take many years and persistent engagement to help the people of the Balkans put the past firmly behind them, and embrace the future. This is eminently possible. Even in the Balkans, history is not fate. The future is not the prisoner of the past. The entire international community, including NATO, is working to help "the Balkans" become "Southeastern Europe", enjoying the same peace, security and prosperity that so many Europeans and North Americans now take for granted. This is truly a goal worth fighting for.



NOTES

1. Turkey recognizes the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name.