

## **KFOR in Kosovo**

*Kosovo (1999-present)*

KFOR was deployed immediately after NATO's Operation Allied Force. It is a NATO-led force that initially comprised some 36,000 troops, including 2,000 Russians. This was scaled back to 21,500 in 2005 and 15,900 in 2008. Its mandate was based on a military-technical agreement agreed between NATO and the Yugoslav government and on Security Council Resolution 1244. Like the IFOR/SFOR that went before, KFOR is also one part of a much broader peace implementation mission encompassing UN (UNMIK), OSCE, and EU missions as well (see chapter 12).

Unlike IFOR, however, KFOR's first commander, General Mike Jackson, interpreted his role broadly from the outset (see Jackson 2007). Under Resolution 1244, KFOR was given eight primary functions, all related to the establishment of a secure environment that would enable implementation of the civilian elements of the transitional administration (see box 1). In line with American thinking about peace support operations, KFOR was mandated to perform certain 'civilian' tasks (such as the provision of public order and the clearance of mines) for a temporary period until the establishment of the necessary civilian capacity. As such, its initial objective was to prevent a security vacuum occurring after the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces. This meant that it needed to be deployed quickly and robustly (Jackson 1999).

### **Box 1: KFOR's military tasks (Security Council Resolution 1244)**

- Deter renewed hostilities, maintain and where necessary enforce the ceasefire, ensure the withdrawal of Yugoslav military, police and paramilitary forces.
- Demilitarise the KLA and other armed Kosovo Albanian groups.

- Establish a secure environment to enable the return of refugees and displaced persons, the operation of the transitional administration, and the delivery of humanitarian aid.
- Ensure public safety and order until the establishment of an international police presence.
- Supervise de-mining until the establishment of a civilian demining programme.
- Support and coordinate with the international civilian presence.
- Monitor Kosovo's borders.
- Protect and ensure the freedom of movement of international military and civilian personnel.

Source: paraphrased from UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

In what must be a record for peace operations, within five days of its initial deployment, KFOR had some 20,000 soldiers on the ground in Kosovo (Dziedzic 2006: 342). The peacekeepers were confronted with an immediate problem as Kosovar Albanians sought revenge against local Serbs for the wave of ethnic cleansing that they had endured in the 18 months prior to KFOR's deployment. Thousands of Serbs were forced from their homes and many more chose to flee to Serbia (ICG 1999: 2; Mitchell 2001). As a result, KFOR had to be much more proactive, much earlier, than IFOR was. Directly confronting the KLA and other extremist elements might have resulted in a rapid loss of local consent, so KFOR took a diplomatic approach to the crisis and moved to provide security to Serb enclaves rather than challenge the KLA militarily (Dziedzic 2006: 351). Serbian villages and urban areas such as northern Mitrovica became virtual ghettos guarded by

permanently stationed KFOR forces. KFOR also assumed primary responsibility for providing public security throughout the province prior to the deployment of the police contingent. This meant apprehending and deterring criminals as well as providing physical protection for Serbs. Although UNMIK is constitutionally responsible for providing public security and establishing the rule of law, the UN police force was markedly slower to deploy than KFOR. Thus, the military retained primary effective responsibility for public security in its first 12 months. Nevertheless, commentators argue that lessons were learned from the IFOR experience and that rather than fearing that every added civilian task contributed to the dreaded 'mission creep,' KFOR understood that 'it was in place to help to underpin all the civil reconstruction efforts' (Eide and Holm 2000: 216).

KFOR has been called upon to use force on several occasions, for instance against rogue former elements of the KLA – many of them connected to the KPC – involved in the ethnic cleansing of Serbs, illegal smuggling and supporting rebel Albanian groups in southern Serbia and Macedonia. For example, in 2000, KFOR troops seized almost 100 radicals who were using eastern Kosovo as a base from which to launch mortar attacks into the Presevo valley in southern Serbia. However, both KFOR and UNMIK opted not to develop a systematic programme of challenging the Albanian extremists despite repeated attacks on the Serb minority and their association with organized crime, preferring a longer-term and incremental strategy aimed at preserving consent (O'Neill 2002: 62).

One particular flashpoint was the city of Mitrovica which is divided into Serbian and Kosovar Albanian halves by the Ibar River. In 1999, the Serbs created a paramilitary organization (the 'Bridge Watchers') to prevent Kosovar Albanians from crossing the city's bridge into Serbian northern Mitrovica and Serb Ministry of

Interior forces also established a presence in the region (Bull 2008: 164-5). The paramilitaries also spied on, attacked and intimidated Mitrovica's Albanian community, sparking sporadic violent riots by Kosovar Albanians. Concerned about the migration of Serbs from Kosovo, KFOR's French regional command opted against confronting the paramilitaries directly, choosing to monitor their activities instead. It was not until 2002 that KFOR persuaded the Serbs to permit the opening of the bridge under international supervision and in 2003, Kosovo's prime minister, Bajram Rexhepi, and a group of World Bank officials were attacked in northern Mitrovica, demonstrating the paramilitary's persistence (Dziedzic 2006: 352).

Matters came to a head in March 2004 when rumours that a group of Serbs had caused the deaths of three Kosovar Albanian boys led to three days of rioting and armed fighting across the province's Serb enclaves that left nineteen civilians dead and UN property destroyed (Søbjerg 2006: 67). KFOR and the UN police were initially slow to react to the violence and outnumbered. Moreover, where peacekeepers confronted rioters they were often unsure about how to respond, allowing public order to break down almost entirely at times. Although order was restored after a few days, the rioting represented a significant setback to the peace process. In its analysis of NATO's 'failure to protect' Kosovo's civilian population during the March 2004 riots, Human Rights Watch identified six principal problems. They are worth recounting in full because they highlight some significant problems faced by peacekeepers in even well-equipped and supported peace support operations with broad public security mandates:

1. The violence took Kosovo's security institutions by surprise and they were unprepared to deal with such large-scale and generalised violence. Although the specific crisis could not have been predicted in advance, KFOR should

have been aware of the potential flashpoints around Mitrovica and French peacekeepers in the area should have had both the plans and capability to deploy rapidly to the Mitrovica bridge in order to stem inter-communal violence.

2. KFOR and the UN police had insufficient capacity to respond effectively to the violence. As we noted earlier, by 2004 KFOR had downsized significantly and peacekeepers reported that they simply lacked the capacity to respond to violent riots erupting across the province.
3. KFOR peacekeepers were inadequately trained and equipped (shields, water cannons, protective clothing, tear gas etc.) to deal with riot situations. Most KFOR troops were trained for combat had little or no riot control experience. Many thought that riot control was a matter for the UN police, but the UN police clearly lacked the capacity to maintain order (see chapter 18). Where specialised riot control units were deployed, however, they had a dramatic and positive impact.
4. There was no coordinated response from KFOR, UN police, and the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) primarily due to significant degrees of distrust between the three organizations.
5. UNMIK and KFOR themselves came under attack and were forced to divert resources to protect themselves. Among those wounded were 65 UN police officers, 58 KPS officer and 61 KFOR soldiers. More than 100 UNMIK vehicles were destroyed in the violence.
6. The Kosovo Police Service was not sufficiently trained and equipped to respond to the riots. Many officers participated in the violence and others

remained passive in the face of attacks on national minorities (Human Rights Watch 2004: ch. 3).

In the wake of the March 2004 riots, KFOR and the UN police took steps to improve their capacity to respond to spontaneous outbursts of violence and to improve their standing in the eyes of local communities. These activities paid dividends, with surveys showing that in June 2007 most Kosovar Albanians had positive perceptions of both KFOR and the UN police. More importantly, perhaps the survey also showed a dramatic improvement in Serbian attitudes towards the two institutions when compared to 2004. KFOR's trust rating among Kosovo's Serbs jumped from 10% in 2004 to over 50% in 2007, whilst the UN police's rating had jumped from 5% to 40% (CIC 2008: 55). Partly as a result, KFOR and the UN police were better placed to deal with the eruption of violence in Mitrovica that accompanied Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008.

Given the various tensions in Kosovo, 'consent management' was of paramount importance. KFOR set up a substantial public information network which explained that criminal activities conducted by ex-KLA members and the persecution of Serbs jeopardised the peace process and threatened the province's long-term economic and political stability. Moreover, KFOR repeatedly insisted that intransigence on the part of Kosovar Albanian rebels would damage their campaign for Kosovan independence by de-legitimising the community in the eyes of international society (Cerone 2001). The KFOR public information centres were also used to explain why particular uses of force were necessary, to demonstrate that when force was used it was targeted against specific perpetrators of illegal activities, and to insist that the force remained impartial. In line with doctrinal thinking about peace

support operations, impartiality in this sense meant treating all parties equally in relation to their adherence to the mandate.

As with IFOR/SFOR and EUFOR, KFOR formed part of a much wider international peace mission. However, not only did KFOR take a more proactive role in civil affairs it also tried to coordinate its activities with other organizations to a much greater extent than had been the case in earlier complex missions. To facilitate information sharing between KFOR and NGOs, the military force set up 'drop in centres' throughout the province. These centres were used to distribute information about what KFOR was doing and what services it could provide to other organizations. Similarly, NGOs were encouraged to use the centres to inform KFOR of their activities. This provided the military component of the mission with a better understanding of precisely who else was operating in a particular place and helped to identify possible areas of cooperation.

From 1999 until 2008, the key problem confronted by KFOR was the lack of overall political direction prompted by continuing international doubt about what Kosovo's final status should be. This doubt discouraged both sides from making political concessions in the search for national reconciliation and made it very difficult to ease ethnic tensions, particularly around the divided city of Mitrovica. However, despite this problem, KFOR has succeeded, by and large, in creating a secure environment for the transitional administration. There were three main reasons for this. First, it enjoyed relatively high levels of consent from the people of Kosovo, largely due to the widespread perception of NATO as a liberating army. But the fact that consent did not disappear despite the lack of progress towards independence, KFOR's use of force and other measures against some former KLA fighters, and the temporary breakdown of public order in 2004 can be attributed to the 'consent

management' techniques it has deployed. Second, learning from Brahimi, KFOR was a robustly mandated and capable military force that, with the exception of the violence that erupted immediately after its deployment and the 2004 riots, was able to deal relatively effectively with breaches of the peace. Unlike IFOR, KFOR generally made a point of responding proactively to public security challenges from the outset. For instance, only weeks into its deployment, it fired upon and killed Kosovar Albanians and Serbs who carried guns openly, in breach of UNMIK regulations, and refused to lay them down when challenged. Finally, as with IFOR/SFOR, the mission enjoyed a relatively high level of operational coherence and unity not shared by most peacekeeping operations, though this coherence was put to the test in 2004. This allowed interim goals to be set, such as the maintenance of order, combating organized crime and maintaining regional stability in lieu of international agreement about Kosovo's future status.

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