Responding to Crisis: Understanding and Enhancing Soldiers' Cultural Sensitivity amid Bitter Multi-ethnic Conflict in Kosovo

US Army

Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Swan

Kosovo Force Rotation 19

Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo

Norwegian Soldiers Lip Sync to "Kosovo" - MUST SEE!

DuffelBlog:
Army Realizes It Left Troops in Kosovo

PRISTINA, KOSOVO — During a recent trip to visit U.S. troops in Iraq, Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey was suddenly reminded of the U.S. military's 15-year mission in Kosovo while glancing at a commercial on the American Forces Network, Duffel Blog has learned.

"All of a sudden, this commercial aired on AFN, saying that KFOR [Kosovo Force] was 'ready and relevant' in the 21st Century. And I'm like 'what the hell, we still have troops there?"

U.S. troops first arrived in Kosovo in 1999, when Bill Clinton was still president and the Spice Girls were still together. While it would be years before "Here Comes Honey Boo Boo" would air on television, the American public was, fortunately, not required to express any interest in military action, as a major sex scandal rocked the Clinton White House the previous year.

"Kosovo? Man, I haven't thought of that since, well, since Britney Spears still had her original t**s!" Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno remarked, when asked about the enduring mission of U.S. troops in KFOR.

Kosovo was in the throes of a major humanitarian crisis in the late 1990s, following massive "ethnic cleansing" by the Serbian government and a NATO-led bombing campaign which culminated in a cease-fire. But the nearly 14-year-long Operation Enduring Clusterf**k in Iraq and Afghanistan that kicked off in late 2001 overshadowed the Kosovo mission, however.

Left: A display of dresses and skirts representing women raped by Serbians during the war. Below: Ukshin Hoti was a political prisoner whom Serbians "disappeared" during the war.,

Serbian security forces could not hurt NATO planes so much, but they could forcibly relocate Kosovo Albanians to borders for deposit. Along the way, they raped thousands of woman and girls. And, for those they could not move, they simply "disappeared" them.

Kosovo cops and NATO Kosovo Force soldiers conduct riot training

At Camp Bondsteel, each rotation leaves its mark recognizing their service to the now 20 iterations of NATO's Kosovo Force. Rotations have been a mix of active and reserve component troops. The cultural awareness commander's staff ride began during KFOR 19.

KFOR Soldiers visited the site of the 1389 Battle of Kosovo.

Jashari Family Compound and Memorial Area

Adem Jashari's Hillside home for seven years

The Neolithic Goddess on the Throne. Ahead of NATO Troops' arrival in June 1999, fleeing Serbian security forces grabbed this small figure and assorted other objects of Kosovo's heritage from the National Museum. It was later repatriated.

The “Peace Park” on a bridge dividing Serbian and Albanian enclaves in Mitrovica

Early 1990s Albanian Fighter
Isa Boletini scouts the "Freedom Bridge" and its "Peace Park" from South of Iber River

A fighter against Turks and later Serbians, Boletini's bones were reburied in his hometown of Boletin in June 2015. Ironically, this is in now Serbian-populated Kosovo.

After the war, returning Albanians took revenge on those Serbians who remained. As usually happens, the perpetrators of crimes fled while Serbian bystanders who remained in Kosovo bore the brunt of the Albanian's rage.

The widow at right holds a poster of Serbian farmers whom many believe the KLA murdered in a field in Staro Gracko during harvest in July 1999, shortly after NATO troops arrived to keep the peace.

Serbian News Report: Crime Without Punishment: On July 23, 1999, farmers fearing the attack of the Albanian extremists sought the protection of the KFOR, which they had not received. For the murder of 14 harvesters, the perpetrators were never brought to justice, nor was it established how they were murdered. The extremists had many times so far desecrated and laid mines on the Staro Gacko cemetery.

In Gračanica, Serbians affix individual photos to gigantic concrete letters spelling the word "Missing." Kosovo Albanians do the same.

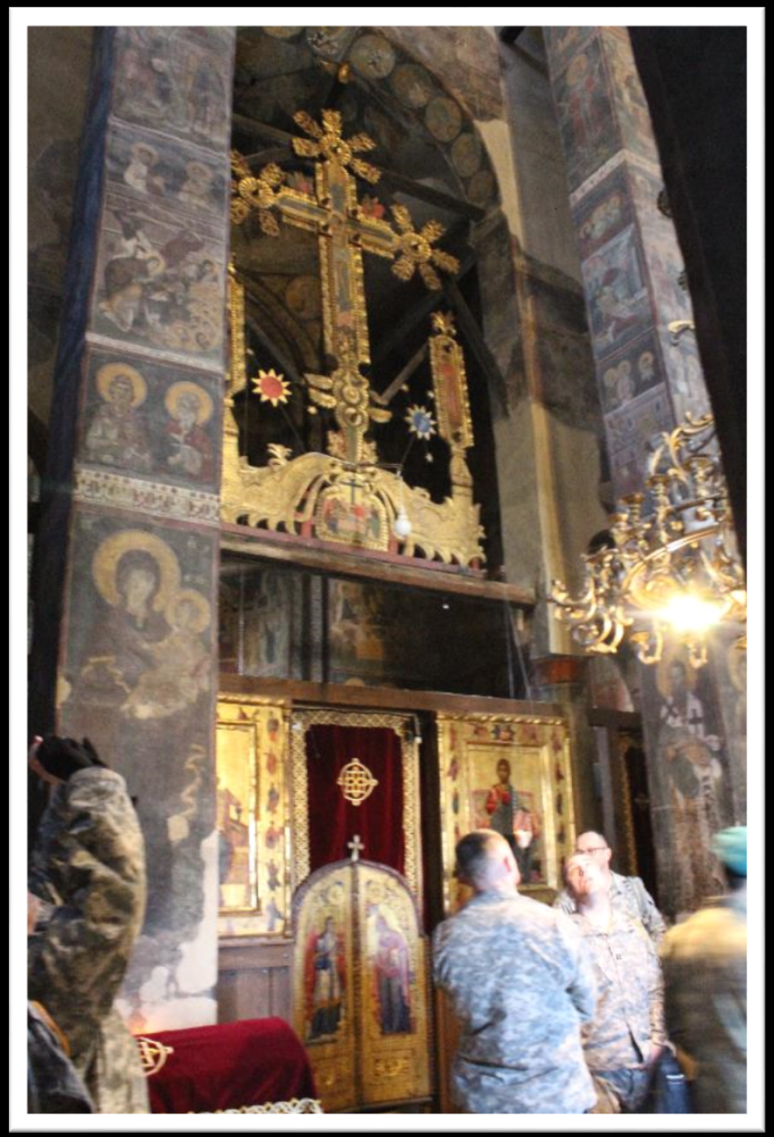
Gracanica Monastery & Church

Built in 1321 by King Milutin and dedicated to the Virgin. It is a five-domed building in Byzantine manner, of dressed stone and brick bonded with paintings and frescoes of exceptional value

Gracanica Church of Holy Virgin

- Some of compositions – the Descent into Hell, Dormition of the Virgin, Judgment Day, and the royal portraits rank among the masterpieces of Byzantine art
- 14-16 C Monastery was very important for spiritual and artistic life, later was abandoned due to the Ottoman invasion and after WWII was rebuilt and today serves as a nunnery
- Listed on UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites

Gracanica Church of Holy Virgin



Graffiti on Serbian Religious Sites

- The inter-religious dialog in Kosovo is very successful and religious leaders send regular messages of peace and tolerance
- In reality there is disparity between the central institutions in Kosovo and the local municipalities
- The number of incidents against Kosovo Serbs increased since September 2014, with KLA/ISIS graffiti on Dečani Monastery walls, and Djakovica church of the Holly Virgin and a series of attacks on Serbs and their properties after the interrupted Serbia-Albania football match in October
- Event on Orthodox Christmas in Djakovica made situation worse
- Serbs don't feel safe and secure due to the intense rhetoric in favor of Greater Albania and they feel intimidated by increase of attacks to civilians, returnees' farms and houses, churches and priests

Graffiti on Decani Monastery

Graffiti on church in Brod

Graffiti on Djakovica Church

Flag of Greater Albania in Decani House of Culture, near Municipality

Kosovo's heritage is the world's heritage

Novo Brdo Castle (left), Gjakova Bridge (bottom left). Prizren League House (below)

Kosovo “Newborn”? Yes, if ethnic hatreds don’t strangle this baby in the crib