

Dialogue is the best solution for the security in the North

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Prishtina, December - Reduction of NATO forces in Kosovo depends on the factors in the field, especially the security situation in the country, therefore the success of the security dialogue is also important. Says so Rear Admiral Mark C. Montgomery, Deputy Director for Planning, Policy and Strategy in the United States European Command, stationed in Stuttgart, Germany. In an interview given to "Koha Ditore", the Rear Admiral Montgomery said the United States European Command is satisfied with the development and progress of the Kosovo Security Force, whereas he personally expresses himself to be impressed with the positive feelings that Kosovo people have for the United States.

Koha Ditore: What would be your assessment of the KFOR and Peacekeeping Force Mission up to date as they continue their mission?

Montgomery: I have been observing this for two and a half years and I think that KFOR has successfully moved from what they call Gate 2, and now works on meeting the conditions for moving to Gate 3. In general, many national security elements are not only issues of the defense, but also issues of the economy, military, information; therefore all the elements of life are conducted for the security environment with the purpose of allowing for a change in the mission and mandate of KFOR. As a security force, I think that KFOR is performing well its military mission.

Koha Ditore: What does Gate 3 imply in practical terms?

Montgomery: Gate 3 implies a more emphasized reduction in the troops that we had from Gate I and Gate II.

Koha Ditore: The northern part of Kosovo is the area where there are still problems and threats. How do you assess the development out there and what do you expect for the political dialogue to bring in a security aspect of the situation?

Montgomery: As far as current tactical operations are concerned, what needs to take place in the North is part of COMKFOR's authority. He is the most competent individual to answer this question. We support him. We do not give him advice for tactical operations.

As far as the question on how is the situation out there, I think that the dialogue contributes to a long-term plan, dialogue is the best solution. There cannot be an easy solution imposed by abroad, by some military or security force, or law enforcement authority. Therefore the dialogue is the appropriate framework for long-term solution. I think it is of the interest to everyone for the dialogue to be successful due to the

overall Euro-Atlantic integration, irrespective whether the question is about Serbia or Kosovo. It is to the interest of both countries.

Koha Ditore: You have been very involved in the development of the Kosovo Security Force. KSF is the force that has gone through many transformations, how do you see it today? Is it capable of performing the mandate given to it by the Constitution?

Montgomery: I have been monitoring the Kosovo Security Force for two and a half years and I was very impressed with its leadership, both with Minister Agim Çeku, the Generals Sylejman Selimi and Kadri Kastrati; the three of them have done a tremendous job in reaching the set goals in the four field of its mission. Development of its officers, its overall professional leadership, are all impressive to me and reflect an overall professionalism in the Force, which is in line with the constitutional mandate and speaks a lot about its senior leadership and officials.

Koha Ditore: There are expectations that the Force should undergo further transformation, maybe not immediately, but in a near future or in a mid-term future in a proper army. What are your expectations and what will be the position of your institution towards it?

Montgomery: We are dedicated to the currently held constitutional mandate of KSF. We are not in a position to judge how will the future KSF mission look like, this will depend on the decisions of Kosovo institutions, NATO, EU and others. The duty of the United States European Command is to work through the NATO Advisory Team and KFOR Advisory Team, through these NATO institutional structures, to assist KSF in the necessary improvement. So I cannot say what the future of KSF will be. I can only say that the up-to-date leadership and professionalism are very good for whatever mission it will have in the future.

Koha Ditore: What are the future plans of NATO and International Military Presence in Kosovo? Do you foresee the need for a long-term engagement of KFOR mission or a modified piece support force? Or do you expect to have a reduction on the way down to the minimum of foreign military force?

Montgomery: This will surely depend on the facts from the field. So, you can judge as well as I can with regards to the success of the security dialogue. But successful partnership and successful solution to the challenges of the security in the North will urge those decisions. And I believe it lies in the hands of NATO headquarters to decide on this issue.

Koha Ditore: Irrespective of this, we have an American military presence here, of course it is a part of NATO but it is an American Military. There is a positive mood towards the United States in general, particularly towards the United States military, among people as well as institutions. So the wish would be so to say for the American involvement to continue even beyond the NATO mandate in the field. How possible is it to have long-term engagement of American forces in Kosovo? Will there be an American military presence beyond the mandate of KFOR?

Montgomery: I shall answer this in two ways. Initially I would like to say that the United States are committed to assist and provide necessary development for KSF. And so we are doing it through NATO, and NATO and KFOR Advisory Teams. We will continue doing this through our cooperation. Secondly, I would put the specific emphasis on our Special Partnership Program with Iowa, and the role to be played in the long run by the National Guard of Iowa in the development of this country. And I shall give you an example here: we have 21 other agreements for state partnership in Europe. Their average is 20 years in all cases. So all these are 20 years commitments, and all of them are very successful, whether the one with the National Guard of Ohio in Belgrade or with the National Guard of Minnesota in Croatia. They have played an emphasized role in the military development of these countries.

I expect that the Iowa National Guard should have completely the same role within the Kosovo constitutional framework and within wider bilateral cooperation between United States and Kosovo, which goes through NATO processes. I would say that Iowa promotes more than just a military help. There is a range of opportunities for the government access, whether for cooperation between the cities of Iowa and those of Kosovo, such as the city of Iowa, Johnstone and the city of Kosovo, Peja. Or such as the cooperation between universities or agricultural cooperation. There are realistic opportunities in the State Partnership Agreement, and I know that Iowa is dedicated to it and knows that Kosovo is also dedicated to it.

Koha Ditore: Since you are speaking about this type of relationship and cooperation with Kosovo, how do you view the environment in which the U.S. Army is situated, I mean the ordinary life and the environment in general.

Montgomery: This is my tenth visit in two years, and I am continuously being impressed with a positive feeling dominating here towards the United States, regarding the positive approach for the Euro-Atlantic future of Kosovo to be fully integrated in European social, economic and security fields. And I am continuously being impressed with the amount of work being done on infrastructure. Every time I come here I see better roads. You know, when I went for the first time with the car to Tirana, it took me five hours, but now I go for two and a half hours. But you know you should see the road system, look at the electrical system, everything is being improved, but sometime will be required. We hope to attract investments with a good environment that we are constantly striving to achieve together, the United States, European countries and Kosovo people. Transparency and legal framework will lead towards the investments by foreign enterprises.

Koha Ditore: There has been reporting news lately that discussions have commenced, that were initiated by France with the purpose of closing down the NATO component here, or that KFOR mandate gets transformed under the EU Command. What does this imply? Many people have confusions, because they do not want to see NATO leaving, not at least unless they have finished some works.

Montgomery: I do not know that there have been such discussions. I follow NATO discussions only and that they are very specific on the dedication regarding the status of Gate 2 and what must we do to get to Gate 3. I am not aware that there have been these type of talks.

Koha Ditore: So you wouldn't expect for such things to happen, let's say within less than a year?

Montgomery: I think the United States stay loyal to the vision and strategy currently held by NATO regarding the success in Kosovo.

Koha Ditore: Do you see any specific role that the Kosovo Security Force could assume, even beyond Kosovo borders, especially in some specific overseas mission? It seems to me that they requested several times a possibility to provide their contribution?

Montgomery: I think that the Kosovo Security Force is focused on four missions: demining, humanitarian assistance, search and rescue and firefighting.

As far as I know, they have already been twice to search and rescue operations during flooding in Albania. I think that in general the United States supports joint regional approach in crisis response management. This would mean for example, as in our countries, the Iowa National Guard, if there is a tornado in Oklahoma they go and provide help to the National Guard and they go and avail themselves with tools that other search and rescue and emergency teams cannot have.

I expect to see, and I think that Minister Çeku during these three days have spoken to the Minister Imami from Albania, and Macedonian Defense Minister, for a regional approach. And so we support this perhaps in a wider context to include all member and monitoring countries of the Adriatic Charter, for the development of regional approaches for the crisis response and similar national emergencies. This approach is beneficial to all regional security forces, police forces and medical forces, to move freely and unnoticeably beyond borders in order to provide the necessary emergency assistance during crisis. In order to do this, the thing that we call unnoticeably and without too much fuss, you have to have a preliminary planning, all the training, the agreements and an early thinking. And this is what the minister Çeku is doing, and we think this is very smart thing to do and we think it is reasonable for all types of forces to have a maximum regional capability for a regional response. With severe snowstorms of last year's February, the KSF demonstrated an emphasized ability to rescue human lives stuck and wounded, and pregnant women with the purpose of having better health care. It demonstrated that it has a sufficient capability that can be used in other countries as well. The United States have similarly supported Bosnia and Montenegro, therefore we support a wider regional approach.

Koha Ditore: Can this be seen as a closer, probable step for NATO membership, or at least involving KSF in these programs? Would it be possible for us to see the KSF closer to NATO?

Montgomery: The KSF is now through the cooperation with NATO commonly working towards NATO standards, which is consistent to every security force regionally. We continue to support it by working towards NATO standards, because only this way it can be more prepared such as other forces for a response to natural disasters. Therefore, on this specific issue I would say that we stand well. For the time being other questions related to the future KSF, are mostly related to the Constitution and the future decision to be taken here in Prishtina as well as in Brussels.