

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS
DURING THE MACEDONIAN CONFLICT IN 2001

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14. ABSTRACT Despite international efforts to prevent conflict in the Republic of Macedonia after the downfall of SFR Yugoslavia, in 2001 the country faced its greatest challenge since its independence. An insurgency movement that started as a spillover from Kosovo declared war on Macedonia. The six-month conflict ended with a framework agreement approving all insurgents' demands. Ten years after, there is still an ongoing debate to explain what really happened in 2001, and why the government did not quell the insurgency. All attempts to define the conflict by the state officials are either general or too vague. The conflict is considered such a controversial subject that the Macedonian politicians, and the international advisers and ambassadors in the country discourage any debate as it is seen as a potential spark between the Macedonians and Albanians. However, the conflict in Macedonia in 2001 is a textbook example of insurgencies in the region. The stability of the Balkan Peninsula depends on the stability of each country and the reality is that such scenarios are still feasible in the Balkans. This thesis evaluates the efficiency of the Macedonian counterinsurgency efforts and, in order to improve them, gives answers why they were not adequate.					
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ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS DURING THE MACEDONIAN CONFLICT IN 2001, by Major Gjorgji Veljovski, 103 pages.

Despite international efforts to prevent conflict in the Republic of Macedonia after the downfall of SFR Yugoslavia, in 2001 the country faced its greatest challenge since its independence. An insurgency movement that started as a spillover from Kosovo declared war on Macedonia. The six-month conflict ended with a framework agreement approving all insurgents' demands. Ten years after, there is still an ongoing debate to explain what really happened in 2001, and why the government did not quell the insurgency. All attempts to define the conflict by the state officials are either general or too vague. The conflict is considered such a controversial subject that the Macedonian politicians, and the international advisers and ambassadors in the country discourage any debate as it is seen as a potential spark between the Macedonians and Albanians. However, the conflict in Macedonia in 2001 is a textbook example of insurgencies in the region. The stability of the Balkan Peninsula depends on the stability of each country and the reality is that such scenarios are still feasible in the Balkans. This thesis evaluates the efficiency of the Macedonian counterinsurgency efforts and, in order to improve them, gives answers why they were not adequate.

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ACRONYMS

COIN	Counterinsurgency
DPA	Democratic Party of Albanians
EU	European Union
KFOR	Kosovo Force
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
LAPMB	Liberation Army of Preshevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NLA	National Liberation Army
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PDP	Party for Democratic Prosperity
SFRY	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
UN	United Nations

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Macedonia became independent in 1991, after the bloody collapse of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). It was the only republic that avoided the civil war. Still, the future of the country was very uncertain as its recognition was disputed by neighboring Greece until 1993. In the same time, the phenomena of nationalism that spread in all post-socialist republics after the collapse of the Soviet Union and SFRY became daily politics in Macedonia.

Despite two serious incidents in 1994 and 1997, overall the ethnic disputes between the Macedonian majority and the Albanian minority were under control. The government successfully balanced between the idea of nation-state (viewed by Macedonians) and the idea of citizen-state (viewed by Albanians). The balance between the two groups was shattered when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervention in Kosovo in 1999 unexpectedly unleashed Albanian nationalism in the region.

The events in neighboring Kosovo directly influenced the conflict in Macedonia. The security environment in the Balkans drastically changed in 1999 after the Kosovo war. The Albanian insurgency in Kosovo that fought against Milosevic was not completely demilitarized and some rogue commanders went out of officials' control. They used the instability in the region to proceed with the already existing smuggling operations using routes in the Macedonian-Kosovo mountainous border area. The skirmishes on the border started to be more frequent, when the Macedonian security forces attempted to deny safe haven for the smugglers.

The role of the international community in the conflict in Macedonia has a special place in this thesis. In the attempt to pacify the region, the international representatives in Macedonia strongly recommended to the government to maintain minimal security forces. Since independence, the European Union (EU) and NATO ambassadors, advisors, and mediators guaranteed the security of the country. They vowed unconditional protection of the country from any security threat, and it seems that the Macedonian government never doubted their intentions. “The UN deployment represented a serious international commitment to the stability of Macedonia in the early 1990s. But by leading to neglect of Macedonia’s defense capacity in the end it probably contributed to the crisis and the Macedonia army’s inability to defeat the National Liberation Army (NLA).”¹

The Macedonian conflict started in February 2001 on the border with Kosovo, and spread to the northern part of the country. Macedonians perceive the conflict in 2001 as a spillover from Kosovo. Officially, the Macedonian parliament made a resolution that the insurgents were “violent extremists,” but just to please the Albanian political bloc. In the official statements and media coverage, they declared them as terrorists. That automatically meant rejection of any attempt of dialogue, negotiation and any form of communication with the insurgents from the beginning of the conflict. The government sought out to secure international support to delegitimize the insurgents as terrorist, based on the Security Council Resolution 1345: "The Security Council, Strongly condemns extremist violence, including terrorist activities, in certain parts of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia² . . . and notes that such violence has support from ethnic Albanian extremists outside these areas and constitutes a threat to the security and

stability of the wider region.”³ Nevertheless, as conflict spread, the western media started more often to define the insurgents as “rebels.”

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Counterinsurgency (COIN) operations conducted by the Macedonian security forces in 2001, it is necessary to explain the background of the conflict. The description of the key players, their interest, and short history of events that led to the emergence of the insurgency movement provides better understanding of the ethnic dispute in Republic of Macedonia. Ethnic relations had been strained since the independence of the country in 1991, but were not necessarily a reason for the conflict.

The conflict in Macedonia in 2001 ended with a framework agreement, mediated by the international community when it was obvious that the conflict had gotten out of control. In order to prevent further escalation to full-scale civil war and wider regional instability, international ambassadors, mediators, members of EU, United States, and NATO strongly suggested a peaceful resolution. After signing the agreement, NATO disarmed the insurgents and the Macedonian government made constitutional changes in favor of minority rights.

The Research Question

“For western observers, it confirmed that the Macedonian security forces lacked the military capacity to defeat the guerrillas, who were entrenched in the villages . . . the Macedonian army’s tactics were to blast the villages with heavy artillery and tank fire backed up with helicopters firing rockets.”⁴

The compromise to change the constitution is looked upon as clear defeat from the perspective of most Macedonians. The ethnic disputes between the groups were

purely administrative (official use of the language, financing higher education), no different for example, from the language dispute in Belgium. They were on a path to be resolved and were not even a close reason for an armed conflict. There was no reason for war.

However, the overall growth of nationalism in the region was cleverly used by the criminal and smuggling groups and unpaid former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) members that were not demilitarized by NATO. The insurgency used the “fighting for human rights” cliché and declared war on Macedonia that completely surprised the international community.

This thesis is a product of the public debate in Macedonia in the past 9 years. Even in the army community there is a broadly accepted view that Macedonian security forces did not perform as they should have.

The primary research question of this thesis is how did Republic of Macedonia perform in conducting COIN operations against the NLA insurgents in 2001? The subordinate questions to help explain the answer are: Did the Macedonian government manage to identify the enemy, understand the operational environment, and apply the proper policies to defeat the NLA insurgents in 2001?; Were the Macedonian security forces equipped, trained, prepared, and properly deployed to conduct effective COIN operations in the 2001 conflict?

As a professional officer, I found answering these questions to be crucial and necessary in order to prepare the Macedonian military for similar threats in the uncertain Balkan future. The answer should resolve the gaps in the national security policies and help develop a better understanding of the unconventional reality.

To evaluate the performance of the COIN operations, I will conduct research and in-depth analysis to explain how the conflict was managed on all levels. The performance of the government in using the instruments of national power to build legitimacy in the eyes of the international community directly influenced the performance of the security forces on the field.

In addition, it is necessary to describe the performance of the insurgency movement, their tactics and methods used and support they received internally and externally. The involvement of the Albanian political bloc as mediator also played a significant role in the behavior of the insurgents, security forces, government and international actors and reaching the reconciliation.

Background of the Research Question

The constitutional responsibility of the armed forces is to protect the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the country. There are many events that made me suspect if the government was dedicated enough to foresee the threats from the new operational environment on the Balkans. Their commitment to equip, prepare, and train the security forces on time to defend the constitution was questionable, and they paid the price in 2001.

During the six-month conflict in Macedonia, one Chief of Staff resigned,⁵ and shortly after that, his successor was released by the president.⁶ The first one stated that he felt moral responsibility for the death of soldiers under his command. The second one was replaced because of alleged incompetence. This is one of many indicators that question the performance of the army's response to the insurgency in 2001. There were doubts in the top leadership and that affected everybody in the chain of command.

The Macedonian army should prepare itself during peacetime to confront all future threats. Even when there were no signs of war and the government received guarantees on a daily basis from the international actors, the army's duty was to prepare itself for war. Knowing the possible and feasible threats at the time, and the indicators for belligerence (skirmishes on the border), the army should have expected what happened.

Assumptions

The effectiveness of COIN operations during the Macedonian conflict in 2001 can be analyzed, measured and evaluated. The results from this research should explain the reasons for the general outcome of the conflict. Effectiveness measures the quality of performance. The effectiveness of the COIN operations is an ability of the government to successfully employ the instruments of national power in order to protect the country from insurgency.

The capability for effective COIN operations begins from the top. The performance on all levels must be researched. This will be conducted without bias, describing and comparing all available knowledge about the policies and tactics employed from all key players.

I believe that this thesis can be a relevant source to suggest further research useful for the Macedonian armed forces management and their improvement in conducting COIN operations as well as any other military facing a complex, home grown insurgency. The conclusions and suggestions can be useful in policy making toward the threats of the non-state actors in a form of insurgencies.

Definitions

Civil war. Armed conflict between two opposite factions (political, religious, or ethnic groups) in the same country.

Counterinsurgency. “Those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency.”⁷

Insurgency. “An organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through use of subversion and armed conflict.”⁸

Macedonian conflict. The Macedonian conflict in 2001 emerged when the Albanian national extremists (NLA) attacked the Macedonian security forces on the Macedonian - Kosovo border. It seemed to be spillover from Kosovo, but NLA leadership claimed that it has not connections with the KLA and it was internal Macedonian issue. It ended with the framework agreement mediated by the international community.

Terrorism. “The calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.”⁹

Scope

The time covered: This thesis will cover the period between 1991 and 2001. It is necessary to briefly explain the overall conditions in Macedonia before the conflict, the interethnic relations in the country and the policies of the government and international community to prevent conflict.

Geographical context: The emergence of the Albanian insurgency movement in Kosovo, their struggle for independence from Serbia and eventually NATO intervention,

also had a strong influence and some authors claim direct cause for the conflict in Macedonia. To understand the Macedonian conflict in 2001, the connection between NLA and KLA must be researched. The conflict began as skirmishes on the border, which at the time appeared to be nothing more than an attempt by the criminal gangs to secure safe haven for smuggling and not a movement with political objectives.

Key players: The government (Macedonian and Albanian political bloc), international community (ambassadors, mediators and advisors in the country from EU, NATO, and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)), Macedonian security forces (army and police), and the insurgent movement (NLA and its connections with KLA).

Limitations

Many Macedonians and Albanians define the conflict in Macedonia to be purely an ethnic conflict. This topic is very sensitive. In the last 9 years, the army integrated significant numbers of enlisted, NCO and commissioned officers that were members of the NLA during the conflict. After the amnesty given by the President, they enrolled in the army and the police as part of the international reconciliation plan to improve interethnic relations. Participants are not willing to discuss their experiences, and the conflict is taboo to talk about.

The first limitation is the existing stereotypes and biases on both sides. Most probably, the conflict will be perceived differently from both ethnic groups perspectives for generations like many similar examples in the world. The second limitation is that there are more books and articles written by international authors on the issue and only a few by Macedonians authors. The third limitation is the fact that some international

actors held responsibilities for the conflict management in 2001. In some cases, whether the terrorists are recognized as rebels or vice versa depends on a third party's interests and perspective. Some intentions during the conflict lack facts and should not be speculated upon.

To avoid bias, I will limit the Macedonian sources and use more the sources from international authors that are most likely impartial. I will use the information from the Macedonian media only to confirm the chronology of the events and clearly cited political statements, never the opinions of the publishers, as I acknowledge the prejudice in their analysis of the events. I use some examples from the Macedonian perspective only as counterarguments that the lack of information and wrong interpretations of facts can be counterproductive in COIN operations.

Significance of the Study

Despite the fact that Macedonia seeks its stability and prosperity in the region through Euro-Atlantic integration, there are, and in the near future there will be other non-state actors that will challenge the security of the country. As we saw in 2001, these non-state actors can become violent overnight, and without warning. This surprised the international community in the country and NATO forces in Kosovo, but also the Macedonian government and the military leadership.

Insurgencies in the Balkans can become serious threats because they are willing to exploit the ethnic element, nationalism, and most dangerous, the religious element to mobilize their forces. Such attempts can easily spark the involvement of the other multiethnic Balkan states and initiate regional instability.

Thus, the significance of this thesis is the attempt to resolve the debate over the effectiveness of COIN operations during the conflict in order to give guidance for the military leadership to plan, train, equip and prepare the army for better performance in the future. Through evaluating the government response on all levels during the different phases of the conflict, I identify the gaps in COIN operations based on my research and usage of critical, non-biased thinking.

The result is a clear explanation of what happened, a summary of the events, an evaluation of the performance of the Macedonian military and lessons learned with suggestions to improve the Macedonian COIN capabilities.

¹John Phillips, *Macedonia Warlords and Rebels in the Balkans* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 172.

²Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) is a provisional reference used by the UN as a result of a dispute with neighboring Greece. Until September 2010, 129 countries recognized Republic of Macedonia under its constitutional name, four of five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

³United Nations, *Security Council Resolution 1345*, 21 March 2001.

⁴Phillips, 103.

⁵Carlotta Gall, "Macedonia Seeks Political Shelter From Winds of War," *New York Times*, 14 June 2001, <http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=FA0A11FA345A0C778DDDAF0894D9404482&scp=1&sq=jovan%20andrevski&st=cse> (accessed 8 September 2010).

⁶Ian Fisher, "Violence on Both Sides in Macedonia Mars Peace Accord," *New York Times*, 10 August 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/08/10/world/violence-on-both-sides-in-macedonia-mars-peace-accord.html?scp=1&sq=pande%20petrovski%202001&st=cse> (accessed 8 September 2010).

⁷GlobalSecurity.org, Glossary, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/fm/100-20/10020gl.htm> (accessed 12 September 2010).

⁸Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 12 April 2001 as amended through 31 July 2010, http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/dod_dictionary/ (accessed 27 October 2010).

⁹About.com, Definition of Terrorism, http://terrorism.about.com/od/whatisterroris1/ss/DefineTerrorism_4.htm (accessed 27 October 2010).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Developing COIN strategy begins with studying the idea of an insurgency. Out of many books written on this subject, *Counterinsurgency Warfare, Theory and Practice* by the French officer David Galula is a good start for understanding the enemy. While he describes the nature and characteristics of an insurgency, based on his military experience he summarizes the prerequisites for a successful insurgency.

Galula gives priority to the population as a main objective,¹ emphasizing the necessity of a cause to help an insurgency gain popular support.² It is a key for successful insurgency and leads to victory. He uses Mao's metaphor of the fish to describe the insurgent; despite that his examples are from the revolutionary wars from the era of the Cold War, the principles stay the same in the insurgencies that emerged after.

He identifies the police, not the military, to be a key player in the early stage of the insurgency as they are "the eye and the arm of the government in all matters pertaining to internal order" and closest to the population where the insurgents will seek shelter.³ Galula clearly states that the COIN forces, by definition are always superior at the beginning of the conflict because of the state machinery that supports them (organized security forces, control of the administration, legitimacy through diplomacy, medias, infrastructure, transportation and communication, control of the resources).⁴ On the other hand, time always works for insurgents, because it is easier and cheaper to destabilize the country than to provide security.⁵ If the insurgents grow their forces during time, the balance of power can shift and the COIN forces will lose their superiority.

Galula also describes the importance of politics in COIN warfare. While in a conventional war the politicians usually let the military do its job after giving directives, goals and end state, in an unconventional war, the government must be more active as the “politics becomes an active instrument of operation.”⁶ COIN is about providing legitimacy, internal and external support through political means and proactive diplomacy.⁷ Compared with a conventional war, every move has political magnitude and the military leaders must be aware of this.

One of Galula’s suggested COIN strategies is economy of force.⁸ COIN forces must be prepared for prolonged war, although it should not be set as an objective.⁹ COIN should be based on the coordination and effort of every institution in the country.

In the book *Insurgency and Terroris: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare*, Bard E. O’Neill gives many tools for identifying the enemy. He defines the types of insurgencies, types of external support, types of popular support and techniques for gaining it, insurgents’ strategies, and the importance of the physical and human environment for developing proper COIN strategy and tactics.

Knowing the enemy is the crucial element for victory in any kind of war. According to O’Neill, for creating proper COIN strategy, the most important aspects to understand are the nature of the insurgency, its goals, and the form of warfare.¹⁰ O’Neill stresses that it is difficult to identify the type of insurgency because of possible goal transformation by insurgents during the conflict, differences of goals between groups inside the movement, misleading rhetoric of the leadership and goals ambiguity of the insurgents.¹¹ Giving historical examples, he concludes: “Governments have misdirected policies because they misunderstood or falsely portrayed the goals, techniques, strategies,

and accomplishments of their opponents.”¹² This is applicable in the Macedonian case, as the analysis shows that not understanding the enemy caused incorrect COIN policies to be adopted.

The important factor that will shape the insurgency and maybe the outcome of the conflict is the way in which the government responds to the insurgent actions.¹³ “What the government does or neglects to do and how it performs has a direct bearing on the strategies and forms of warfare insurgents choose and the nature and extent of challenges insurgents must cope with as they seek to accomplish their aims.”¹⁴

In *Resisting Rebellion, the History and Politics of Counterinsurgency*, Anthony James Joes describes in detail the COIN experiences of United States, Great Britain, France, and USSR/Russia, which leads to his concluding that if fighting insurgents can be a nightmare for economically, politically and militarily powerful countries, what are the chances for small countries when dealing with insurgencies? While Galula and O’Neill connect insurgencies more with the revolutionary wars (waged more from the communist side) during the Cold War era, Joes adds ethnic, religious, cultural characteristics especially for the post-Cold War insurgencies.¹⁵ Besides historical examples, Joes also examines recent insurgencies.

The COIN strategy that Joes proposes is based on the observation that insurgency is a political problem, thus the best solution to confine it should be political in nature.¹⁶ Joes reminds us that it is almost impossible to defeat insurgents by giving many historical examples of successful insurgency and only few cases of successful COIN.

Joes proposes reconciliation as a main tool for successful COIN strategy, which is “achieved first by military actions involving minimum violence . . . and second, by a

political program focused on splitting the revolutionary elite from their followers . . . offering the possibility of reintegration into society and a peaceful method for the adjustment of disputes.”¹⁷

Isolation of the conflict area is another COIN strategy suggested by Joes, recognizing that the most complicated scenario is when insurgents operate in border areas, getting supplies and assistance from outside¹⁸ as was the case in Macedonia.

Joes’ suggestions are intriguing for this research because he defines insurgency as a political problem and offers political solutions, based on reconciliation and amnesty. “The aim of true COIN is to reestablish peace. Real peace means reintegrating into society its disaffected elements. The rate, even the possibility, of such reintegration depends in great part on how the COIN is conducted.”¹⁹

The book *Macedonia: Warlords and Rebels in the Balkans* from the journalist John Phillips is a helpful source for this research as he was an eyewitness on the both sides during the Macedonian conflict in 2001. He spent time with Macedonian security forces and with insurgents in the villages, trying to understand the political mess in the Balkans. Some of his observations unintentionally give a clear picture on the effectiveness of insurgent’s and counterinsurgent’s actions. He does not take sides, but describes the complexity of the internal war and the politics behind it.

As reliable and unbiased sources for tracking the events during the conflict, I used the news from the archives of *The Independent*, *The New York Times*, and *The Guardian*. These media covered the cases of insurgency on the Balkans with reporters present in Kosovo and Macedonia before, during, and after the conflict in 2001.

¹David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare, Theory and Practice* (St. Petersburg FL: Hailer Publishing, 2005), 7.

²*Ibid.*, 18.

³*Ibid.*, 31.

⁴*Ibid.*, 6.

⁵*Ibid.*, 11.

⁶*Ibid.*, 9.

⁷*Ibid.*, 95.

⁸*Ibid.*, 81.

⁹*Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁰Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism, Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare* (Dulles, VA: Brassey's Inc., 1990), 27.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 21-22.

¹²*Ibid.*, 126.

¹³*Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁵Anthony James Joes, *Resisting Rebellion, the History and Politics of Counterinsurgency* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 5.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 236.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 246.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

By describing the background of the conflict, and the circumstances that led to it, it will become obvious why Macedonia did not develop suitable forces for deterring an unconventional threat. Describing the roots of the conflict is a multifaceted endeavor. There is no doubt that both sides used the ethnic element to justify their means. The Republic of Macedonia was a victim of circumstances in the recent Balkans operational environment: criminal groups seeking safe haven, post Cold War transition, nationalists fighting for an “ancient cause,” ineffective governments, third party interests, the Kosovo war, and ill-prepared security forces. This includes the Macedonian - Albanian interethnic relations after break up from SFRY in 1991; emergence of insurgency movement on Kosovo that culminated with NATO campaign against Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; and the international effort to prevent conflict in the only SFRY republic that, until then, had avoided the bloodshed. It turns out that Macedonia was not immune to the Balkan quagmire.

The conflict started as a small skirmish on the borderline between Macedonia and Kosovo, without a particular threat to inflame serious conflict. There were no indicators of a wider insurgency movement or possible ethnic conflict. The insurgency leadership started to come up with announcements after the Macedonian government rejected negotiations with terrorists.

To depict the effectiveness of the COIN operations it is necessary to explain the causality between the four key players: insurgents, security forces, government, and international community. The six months conflict was very dynamic, and for the purpose

of this thesis, the cause and effect relation between the key players, is divided into three phases. The first phase covers the operation near and around two border posts in February-March 2001, and the operation to retake the hill above the second largest city in northwest Macedonia. The second phase covers April 2001, when there was an unofficial ceasefire. The insurgents retreated in the mountains chased by security forces and fought the battle for political legitimacy. The third phase covers the period May to August 2001, when the conflict became almost full-scale war, with a significant part of the territory in the north under the insurgents' control. It ended with a framework agreement mediated by the EU.

In further analysis, after portraying the reaction of the security forces and the government, follows the evaluation of the COIN strategy using already existing and generally accepted models. To answer the question if the instruments of the Macedonian national power effectively supported the COIN strategy in 2001, it is necessary to analyze the basic considerations: understanding the enemy, his strategic approach and tactics, the physical and human environment, and the effects of the media and propaganda. This approach explains the effectiveness of the COIN operations in 2001, thus leading to conclusions and recommendations in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Background of the Conflict

The Republic of Macedonia was the only republic from the SFRY that managed to avoid the Yugoslav civil war in 1991. Many called it the “oasis of peace.”¹ The international community assessed that the peace was fragile and they were actively involved in preserving it. A decade after the Yugoslav civil war, the analytical data showed that Macedonia had made significant progress since independence. Many scholars were surprised when conflict erupted in Macedonia in 2001.² Many had high expectations for democracy in Macedonia, as foreign investments came, and progress was made in the area of minority rights. There was a feeling that the situation was stable and improving. Unfortunately, the country did not escape the Balkan reality and in 2001, an insurgency movement almost brought the country to the brink of civil war.

The ethnic dispute in Macedonia between the Macedonian majority and Albanian minority was connected to the events in neighboring Kosovo. Macedonia was one of the six republics in the SFRY. Albanian dissatisfaction in SFRY began in the 1960s in the form of demanding recognition of Kosovo as the seventh republic. The first signs of Albanian unrest in Macedonia can be traced back to 1968, when the first protests by Albanians in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo, erupted and captured the minds of many Albanians in Macedonia.³ The last SFRY constitution in 1974 gave semi-autonomy to Kosovo inside Serbia (autonomous region inside the Socialist Republic of Serbia). However, the Albanians were never satisfied with semi-autonomy and the movement for

Kosovo to become the seventh republic proceeded.⁴ Documented evidence shows that a union with Albania was the ultimate objective of the Albanian minority in Kosovo.⁵

In SFRY, Kosovar Albanian demands for a seventh republic were portrayed as a separatist and irredentist action that undermined the federation and threatened the sovereignty of the country. It grew into a radical movement after the death of President Tito in 1980. The death of SFRY began in Pristina in 1980, when Albanian protesters raised the slogans “we are not Yugoslavs” and “we want to unite with Albania.”⁶

At the core of the Albanian separatist movement were the former Marxist-Leninist emigrants, from Switzerland and Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, inspired by the Albanian communist leader Enver Hodga. The egalitarian movement transformed into a pure nationalist movement⁷ based on a self-determination phenomenon triggered after the collapse of the Soviet Union. By 1985, it was clear that the Albanian nationalist movement in Kosovo was organized, supported, and connected with the movement that also started in Macedonia. These ties were undivided and in a way united the Albanian cause. The University of Pristina, where the students studied the Albanian language, was open to the Macedonian Albanians and it was the center of Yugoslav Albanian culture in SFRY.⁸ Because there was no restrictive border between Kosovo and Macedonia, Macedonian Albanians sought educational opportunities in Pristina.

Macedonian Albanians started to ask for language equality in Macedonia because of the breaking of ties between Kosovo and Macedonia when SFRY fell apart. Simply put, the University of Pristina was no longer available for the Macedonian Albanians.⁹ From the onset of Macedonian independence, Macedonian Albanians looked upon this

issue with major dissatisfaction, asking for increased educational opportunities within Macedonia, especially on the Albanian language.¹⁰

The sudden fall of communism and rise of pluralism fueled ongoing nationalism in the region that fostered the sudden need for self-determination for almost every group. After the collapse of SFRY, the economy of Macedonia also collapsed. Several conditions facilitated the crisis in Macedonia. It was a period characterized by “high unemployment, unfinished process of privatization and a number of bankrupt businesses from the private sector. Political life was overwhelmed with scandals to the abuse of duty, government set of both sides had nationalist orientation, the government was centralized, the legal system still in the process of defining and auditing, and judicial slowly and inefficiently.”¹¹

Since the fall of socialism, pluralism caused divisions in Macedonian politics on an ethnic (Macedonian and Albanian political bloc) and ideological (national conservative and post socialist) basis. Macedonians considered themselves a constitutional nation of Macedonia, while Albanians were the minority. Despite the ethnic division, no matter who is in power from the Macedonian bloc, there has always been a coalition with one of the Albanian parties, to gain the necessary seats in the parliament to form a ruling coalition and to gain legitimacy with the Albanian population. In some instances, the coalition consisted of left wing parties from both sides, was mixed, or in the extreme case from 1998 to 2001 with the right wing parties consisting of both Macedonians and Albanians. Some analysts argue this was endemic of the as inability to achieve consensus to stop the conflict.

The urban areas with predominantly Macedonian populations suffered from the collapse of the economy more than the rural areas where most Albanians lived. Although there was economic crisis, this was not the real reason for armed conflict. The Albanian politicians never claimed that the economic situation of Albanians was a problem. Sometimes they used the unemployment formula as an argument, but their priority was to expand cultural and political rights. The economical status was never a problem for Albanians because they lived in the border region, and they found ways to improve their local economy. While the Macedonians who stayed without jobs after the collapse of industry in 1990s waited for the government to solve their problems, the Albanian minority that lived close to the borders took initiative to solve their existential condition with illegal business, smuggling, and trafficking across the border with Kosovo.

The census in 1991 was the first major dispute in the interethnic relations. The Albanians deliberately boycotted the census to hide their limited numbers in the country. The Albanian political bloc claimed that 35 to 40 percent of the population was Albanian and demanded that Macedonia be constituted as a bi-national country¹² similar to Belgium, while the Macedonians estimated the Albanian portion of the population at 22 percent and by majority of votes in the parliament voted for the concept of a unified nation-state. The Macedonian perspective on the Albanian demands was clear: Albanians have their own country; they are the minority in all other Balkan countries. For the Macedonians, there is no other place to go; Macedonia is their country, and if they accept the Albanian concept of the constitution, they will not have their own coherent nation-state.

The Albanians, on the other hand, showed clearly their attachment toward their country (Albania) and their support for Kosovo's independence indicates their aspiration for uniting all territories where they live (Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, and Greece) into "Great Albania."¹³ The idea of "Great Albania" is a 100-year-old scenario that was first recorded on paper in 1878. The Macedonian fear of the creation of "Great Albania" comes from the statistical analysis of demographic data that predicts that in the near future the high Albanian birth rate (Albanians have highest birth rate in Europe) and deliberate politics of Albanians will create a "Great Albania" by overwhelming the population of Macedonia.¹⁴

The behavior of Macedonians is driven from the perception that the Albanians want to form a "Great Albania" and every attempt to broaden minority rights is seen as an attempt of secession and irredentism. Albanian politicians claimed that the language issue is proof of discrimination. Macedonians claimed, "If we give them an inch, they will ask for a mile." Macedonia has always been distrustful toward Albanians intentions for greater citizen rights, which can lead to secession like Kosovo and unification with Albania. Ultimately, the fear from Albanian radicalism in Macedonia culminated because of Kosovo. International recognition of Kosovo became proof that borders are malleable and they will continue to change in the future.

After the dissolution of SFRY, the international community was involved in conflict prevention in Macedonia. It is widely accepted that war in Macedonia can seriously affect regional and European stability by involving several Balkan states, with some of them being NATO countries (Greece and Turkey). The international community recognized that there are serious ethnic tensions in Macedonia and the unrest in Kosovo

could worsen the relationship among Macedonians and Albanians.¹⁵ United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) was the first preventive UN mission (1995 to 1999) to Macedonia to counter these tensions. They deployed on the Macedonian border with Albania and Serbia to observe and control any illegal border crossing. Some believe that one of the reasons that facilitated the armed conflict in 2001 was the absence of UN forces after China's veto in the UN Security Council which terminated the mission.

The ethnic dispute in Macedonia between the two groups mainly centered on the legal and political status of Albanians and how the country should be constituted. If Macedonian Albanians manage to constitute themselves as a constitutional nation separate from Macedonia, that could lead to the division of the country and possible secession.¹⁶ After the 1998 election, the right wing parties from both sides formed the government. The Macedonian side agreed that Macedonia should be a citizen state, but never as a bipolar state that could undermine the Macedonian identity. Many Macedonians believed that the Albanian minority had sufficient citizen rights and in some cases even better minority rights compared with some other European countries.¹⁷

From the beginning of independence, Macedonian politicians knew that any instability in Kosovo would affect Albanian behavior in Macedonia. That is one of the reasons for the Macedonian politics to distance itself from Serbia after independence,¹⁸ besides the fear of Serbian aggression. The international community advised the Kosovo Albanians to be patient because premature war in Kosovo would have destabilized not just Macedonia, but undermined the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹⁹ Only After the Dayton Agreement and end of the Bosnian war did the Kosovo Albanians start

to plan an insurgency against Serbia. The struggle of the Kosovo Albanians was peaceful and passive at first, until international actors started to finance the KLA²⁰ in an attempt to undermine the Milosevic regime.

The problem with this plan was that Kosovo Albanians did not have any weapons to fight the Serbs. However, when the Albanian state descended into chaos in 1997, many weapons looted from Albanian army storages were transported to Kosovo and Macedonia. These weapons were easy to recognize and trace as they were all of Chinese origin and China was the only ally of Albania during the Cold War. Suddenly ethnic Albanian minority dissidents gained huge amounts of weapons from the Albanian army stockpiles which had been built up over nearly 50 years. Beginning in 1997, the KLA began claiming attacks against Serbian security forces in Kosovo.

The KLA insurgency on Kosovo started to affect Macedonia as well. There were several border incidents beginning in 1997 between KLA auxiliaries that provided logistics from the villages in Macedonia and Macedonia's army border units. However, the biggest security challenge that Macedonia had since independence was the Kosovo refugee crisis in 1999 during the NATO bombing campaign. Macedonia accepted 200,000 refugees from Kosovo. There was a widely anticipated fear that if it turned out to be a prolonged war in Kosovo, the demographics of Macedonia would change and conflict would erupt. Refugees were affecting the fragile economy of the country as well and also added to growing Albanian nationalism.

Serbian politicians were also aware that Kosovo and Macedonia were connected through Albanian nationalism. Everything that happened with the Kosovo situation would affect Macedonia. Milosevic's policy was to hold Macedonia as a hostage of the

internal problem with the Albanian minority. The international community was supposed to be careful in taking the Albanian side on Kosovo, because that would affect Macedonia's stability also. He therefore did not recognize Macedonian independence until 1996 and he did not recognize the Macedonian-Kosovo border at all, leaving this as a big problem as the border was never truly secured. After the fall of Milosevic, in January 2001, the Serbian government signed the demarcation line, but it was too late. Belgrade did not have de facto sovereignty over Kosovo anymore and some can argue that this was the trigger effect for the insurgents to take action on the Macedonian army on the Macedonian-Kosovo border. The agreement of 23 February 2001 defined the border between Kosovo, Serbia, and Macedonia, but without representatives from Albanians in Pristina,²¹ which delegitimized Kosovo's determination for independence.

After the NATO campaign, moderate leaders in Kosovo announced that they had achieved their objective and the KLA should disarm. A radical wing emerged that pursued further struggle in southwest Serbia and Northwest Macedonia, forming two new guerrilla movements, the Liberation Army of Preshevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac (LAPMB) and the NLA in Macedonia. After the Serbian retreat from Kosovo, the internationally composed Kosovo Force (KFOR) did not demilitarize the KLA successfully.²² It seemed that NATO unleashed the KLA as a beast for the sole purpose of bringing down the Milosevic regime and then was not able to put it back in a cage in the post conflict phase.²³ There is sufficient evidence that the insurgency in Macedonia was supported from Kosovo to alarm the international community and hasten solving the Kosovo case.²⁴ Bunkers with hidden weapons found in Macedonia in 2000 showed that the Albanian villages in Macedonia were used as logistics bases for the war in Kosovo.

The conflict in Macedonia started on the Macedonia-Kosovo border in February 2001. After signing the demarcation document with Serbia, the Macedonian border units enhanced patrolling in order to cut the smuggling net from Kosovo. As criminal groups lost the profits generated from their safe havens, they started to attack the patrols. To build legitimacy, they announced that their goal was greater rights for the Albanians in Macedonia.

The Albanian political bloc in Macedonia and the Albanian population accepted this cause. However, the fact that even after signing the peace agreement six months later there were still belligerent elements of the insurgents that re-named their insurgency an “Army” and proceeded with actions was intriguing enough for the Macedonians to be suspicious that there were other interests in the game. The Macedonian side was (and still is) convinced that the insurgents fought for secession and the idea of creating a “Great Albania.” The government rejected any form of negotiation and declared them terrorists. One can argue that this too was a big mistake.

One of the possible reasons for the six months insurgency in Macedonia in 2001 was Kosovo’s struggle for independence and the Serbian attempt to delegitimize it. Serbia’s interest was to portray the Albanians as aggressive, belligerent and the main reason for the wider Balkan instability because at the same time, there was an ongoing insurgency movement creeping into Southeast Serbia. Signing the agreement for the demarcation of the border between Macedonia and Serbia led towards greater control on the border and skirmishes between Macedonian border units and the Albanian smugglers. With the spillover of violence into Macedonia, the international community should have restrained the Albanians.

On the other hand, Kosovo's leaders were sending a message that as soon as the international community recognized their independence, the Albanian question will be closed and independent Kosovo will guarantee peace. The insurgency started from Kosovo, supported and organized by former KLA insurgents. Because of the sudden Serbian good mood to solve the border problem an internal Macedonian problem arose as the Kosovo politicians distanced themselves from the insurgents and officially rejected any connections.

Key Players in the Conflict

Insurgents

The insurgency movement in Macedonia in 2001 was the NLA. Their core fighters were former KLA insurgents that fought the Serbian security forces from 1997 to 1999.²⁵ During the six-month conflict in Macedonia, the precise number of the NLA insurgents remained unknown. It varied greatly during different phases of the conflict as the NLA structure differed among platoon level groups operating in different regions. Macedonian and NATO estimates varied between 300 to 1,200 insurgents.

Some insurgents were Kosovar Albanians but most of them were Macedonian Albanians. Their initial excuse for waging war on the Macedonian government was for better citizen rights for the Albanians in Macedonia. However, in different phases of the conflict, there were ambiguous and contradicted requests. Sometimes the NLA argued for "Great Kosovo."²⁶ They argued politically that they just want equality, while their websites showed the irredentist map of "Great Albania."

This shift in political demands may have looked like there was no coordination between different commanders and their leaders, but the fact was that the NLA was

playing hot and cold provoking the Macedonian government to lose control and set better conditions for the imminent negotiations. The NLA leadership was well educated, experienced, and trained and advised how to win the game of irregular warfare. Even if their recruited fighters were initially from a small group of smugglers and criminals,²⁷ they used the cliché of a freedom fighter to build an efficient movement.

The auxiliaries that supported the insurgency were the local Albanians from the villages where the NLA took shelter and had freedom of movement, often encompassing the whole population of those villages. Some Macedonian analysts believe that the insurgents forced the locals to provide goods for them. Allegedly, there were several cases when local Albanians were paying fees to the NLA insurgents not to come to their village to avoid being collateral damage while they were providing intelligence on Macedonian security forces movements. It would be unrealistic to believe that they did not have support from the (Albanian) population.²⁸

Security Forces

Macedonian security forces in 2001 were ill prepared for COIN operations. At the beginning of the conflict, the Macedonian army was not fully transformed to cope with the challenges of the new operational environment. Although guerrilla warfare is not new to the Balkan nations, the conventional mindset inherited from the Yugoslav Peoples' Army school of thought did not envision the possibility of irregular warfare. Having NATO forces across the border in Kosovo additionally made the general impression that the probability of armed violence in the near future was minimal.

Macedonian security forces consisted of the Macedonian armed forces and the Macedonian police force. Just before the emergence of the insurgency, the army had

around a 10,000 man active force and an estimated 76,000 in reserve forces. “Western diplomats put the number of combat-capable soldiers at no more than 1,200,”²⁹ which was the approximate number of the professional soldiers. The other units were mostly conscripts. The army was in the middle of a transformation from a conscript to a professional system and did not have enough experience in dealing with the challenge of mixing the professional soldiers with the conscripts.

The price for Macedonian independence in 1991 was a deal with the Yugoslav People’s Army. Macedonia was left in peace and the Yugoslav People’s Army took all the military equipment and armament previously based in Macedonia. From 1991 until 1995, Macedonia, together with the rest of the former Yugoslav republics, was under an arms embargo. Even after the embargo was lifted in 1995, the economy of the country was so weak that the army languished. Some communication equipment and vehicles were purchased, but the majority of Macedonian weapons, armored vehicles, non-combat vehicles, tanks, artillery, and other equipment were received as military aid from the United States, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Italy, Germany, and other partners concerned for Balkan regional stability.

Generally, the units with professional soldiers were significantly better trained than conscript - based units. The gap in the training process was that the army maintained the former Yugoslav doctrine of conventional warfare despite the serious lack of capabilities to sustain such employment in real conflict. The country became among the first members of the NATO Partnership for Peace program, which was a first step to joining NATO. Until the emergence of the insurgency in 2001, the government restrained spending money on armaments in the middle of the economic crisis convinced that the

international community would not allow aggression against Macedonia (the UN Protective and Preventive Force (UNPROFOR) was present in the country from 1993 to 1999).

After the end of the SFRY, as corruption and organized crime came with the wave of pluralism and democracy in Macedonia, investment in the reliable and loyal police force was more reasonable. The police forces consisted of active duty police officers, reserve, and a special police force. They were experienced and proficient in law enforcement and riot control. However, while the police could operate very efficiently in the urban areas, they were not adequate for COIN type of operations which would occur in the mountains where the insurgents claimed free territories.

Government

The Republic of Macedonia is a pluralist democracy. Since independence in 1991, Macedonia had coalition governments, “pursuing policy of accommodation and power sharing”³⁰ between the major Macedonian and Albanian parties. These multiethnic coalitions were always a guarantee for the balance in the interethnic relations between Macedonians and Albanians.

The country was in a transitional phase with a high rate of unemployment. The government pursued its politics toward Euro-Atlantic integration. Although there was some social and interethnic unrest in the country, it seemed that the situation was improving. After NATO came to Kosovo, no one doubted that war was impossible. Thus, the government focused on the country’s economy and the security in the region was seen as a concern of the EU and NATO. The government was constantly advised by the

foreign ambassadors that the international community would not allow another Balkan war.

The insurgency emerged unexpectedly, surprising the government that was convinced that NATO would never allow spillover from Kosovo. Alice Ackermann stated, “Because the NLA used violence from the very beginning, the Macedonian government automatically reacted with counter violence as it saw the territorial integrity of the state threatened and thus attempted to defend it.”³¹ The government rejected all potential means of peaceful resolution because they defined NLA as terrorists and chose to solve the crisis by force,³² following the Western formula not to negotiate with terrorism.

After pressure from the international community, a national unity government formed in May 2001, which included the opposition Macedonian and Albanian parties. This was meant to bring more legitimacy in the decision-making process. What frustrated the government (and the Macedonians) was the perception that EU and NATO did not understand that the requests of the insurgents were not a threat just for “the sovereignty and territorial integrity but rather a threat to Macedonian identity and nationality.”³³

The government was caught unprepared for war. It was stretched among the pressure from the international community and the Macedonian people who initially supported the military solution. Once it became obvious that the new operational environment made a military solution counterproductive, the government sought to negotiate via EU mediators for an acceptable political reconciliation. Although the framework peace agreement was signed by the Macedonian and Albanian parties, it met the demands of the NLA, including amnesty for the insurgents.

International Community

NATO and EU had the biggest role of projecting security in the Balkan region. NATO has been present in the Balkans since the peace in Bosnia. In 1999, after the bombing campaign of FRY finished, land components of different NATO members deployed in Kosovo. Their mission was to deter the Serbs, return the refugees, protect the Serb population in Kosovo, and generally stabilize the region. As the border with Macedonia was not marked, NATO troops had the task to patrol the Kosovo-Macedonia border.

At the end of 2000, former KLA members (LAPMB) initiated an insurgency in Preshevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac - cities with predominantly Albanian populations in southeast Serbia. Their objective was to incorporate that territory into Kosovo. This time NATO made a clear statement that those LAPMB aspirations for Serbian territory went too far and NATO put a lot of pressure on the Kosovo leaders. The LAPMB did not find international support, and they surrendered their weapons in 2001, at the same time the NLA emerged in Macedonia. It looked like the short-lived LAPMB was a deception to distract NATO and facilitate the creation of an insurgency movement in Macedonia.

From the beginning of the insurgency, the Macedonian government asked NATO to intervene and help block the lines of communications for the NLA. In the first month of the conflict, NATO was not very effective but later they made several arrests, seizures of arms and they pressured Kosovar leaders to condemn the extremists. NATO also provided intelligence and assistance to Macedonian security forces.

Sudden violence in Macedonia also surprised the EU. They strongly condemned the insurgents, but never fulfilled the Macedonian government's request to declare the

NLA as a terrorist organization; there was huge duality in their advising and assistance. While they urged the Macedonian government to take actions and defeat the extremists, they constrained them by asking Macedonians not to use force. The Macedonian government unsuccessfully tried to convince the international community that the NLA was a terrorist organization.

For the EU and NATO, the NLA was an extremist, rebel, guerrilla, nationalist, or insurgency movement but officially was never declared a terrorist organization. Despite this, they condemned their actions frequently. Nevertheless, they considered that the NLA were fit for dialogue. Additionally, the NATO leaders knew it was their monster from the War on Kosovo and they could not get it back easily into the cage.³⁴

Another important international actor was the OSCE whose reports influence the politics of NATO and the EU as “a primary instrument for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation in its area.”³⁵ Their reports in April 2001 about police mistreatment of civilians during the raids put additional fuel on the fire. The Macedonian media used this to show that the international community supported the insurgents and claimed there was some kind of conspiracy against Macedonians. These reports were taken under consideration in the EU and from that point, the Council of the EU started to strongly suggest changing the political system in Macedonia to accommodate the insurgents’ requests.

UN Security Council Resolution 1345 of 21 March 2001, was the only document that accused the insurgents of terrorism. It stated, “The Security Council this evening strongly condemned extremist violence, including terrorist activities, in certain parts of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia³⁶ and certain municipalities in southern

Serbia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, noting that such violence had support from ethnic Albanian extremists outside those areas and constituted a threat to the security and stability of the wider region.”³⁷ Still, this document did not have any serious effect in NATO and the EU compared to OSCE reports of police brutality when arresting insurgents in Albanian villages. The UN is a massive and slow organization that has proven that it needs time to make and implement decisions.

First Phase of the War (February to March 2001)

Insurgency

On 24 February 2001, NLA insurgents detained Macedonian TV journalists in an Albanian village on the Macedonian-Kosovo border near a border post north of the capital Skopje. Through the kidnapped journalists, they declared war on the Macedonian government. They announced to several foreign media outlets that their struggle was against the oppression of the Macedonians.

The insurgent’s tactic was to provoke a full-scale military response from the Macedonian army by using small arms fire. They made the army use heavy artillery, which initiated a reaction from the international community. It was a well-tested tactics to set up the security forces to retaliate with disproportionate force causing damage to civilian property. After each attack, the insurgents used evidence of collateral damage to highlight the disregard of the law of war by the Macedonian government.

The insurgents in the border village of Tanusevci, estimated to be a group of around 30 fighters,³⁸ dug in positions around civilian houses and used one as command post, knowing that if they were fired upon the surrounding houses would certainly be damaged. It was here that a sniper, from a distance of 200 meters, killed the first

Macedonian soldier of the conflict. The insurgents could approach the border post from a concealed position on the other side of the border because the terrain was favorable for such attacks. That same day, two other soldiers died while escorting OSCE observers when their vehicle set off a land mine five kilometers from the border post. This meant that the insurgents entered more deeply into Macedonia than expected to lay the mines. With this action, they showed that the unpaved roads near the border were not safe for movement as the Chinese anti-tank land mines they used could completely destroy the light non-combat jeep used by the border units.

After Macedonian security forces retook Tanusevci, the army evaluated the insurgents' fighting positions as well organized and prepared from a tactical and engineering point of view. The insurgents dug deep into the ground with overhead protection from mortar shells and organized their positions in two to four man teams. They had well camouflaged positions with an option for easy retreat if suppressed.

Large amounts of weapons found were displayed for the NATO ambassadors and journalists. They were of Chinese origin, consisting of mortar rounds, rockets for RPGs, and anti-tank mines. *The Guardian* wrote that the "West struggles to contain a monster of its own making. . . . The guerrillas who attack Macedonian troops slip back into Kosovo to change from black uniforms into civilian clothes."³⁹ The insurgents rejected the accusation that they sought a "Great Albania," and had a connection with the KLA from Kosovo announcing that their struggle was for improvement of the status of Albanians in Macedonia. "But the guerrillas' first funeral took place in Kosovo, not Macedonia."⁴⁰

A couple of days after the skirmishes on the border ended, the retreating insurgents opened a second front in the northwest part of the country near the city of

Tetovo where half of the population and most of the surrounding villages are Albanian. The police had not visited some of the villages in the mountains for years because it was considered as unnecessary or unsecured.

A NLA force of 20 to 30 insurgents seized the medieval fortress on the hill above the city. Although it surprised the government and the international community, this action did not happen overnight. There was intelligence that the insurgents had training camps in the mountainous region above the city and the locals reported to the police that bulldozers dug trenches above the city. The insurgents used the confusion and took positions above the city, claiming the high ground. They opened fire with RPGs, small arms and machine guns on the police forces that attempted to retake the hill, and forced the police to retreat to the city.

Between Tetovo and the Macedonian-Kosovo border, there are several villages and very harsh mountainous terrain. The border in that part of the country did not have any border posts, they were considered unnecessary because of the terrain. The insurgents had freedom of movement through the border and they were using the paths in the mountains to bring weapons and troops from Kosovo. KFOR considered that part of the border a natural obstacle and did not pay much attention until the NLA emerged.

The insurgents holding the high ground had several Albanian villages behind them from where they received their logistics. They fired on police checkpoints from a distance, provoking disproportionate retaliation. After one week of skirmishing, on 21 March 2001, the insurgent leadership announced a cease-fire and declared that they were ready for negotiations. The insurgent cease-fire announcement came at the same time as a

government ultimatum, and despite of clear government statements that they would not negotiate with terrorists.⁴¹

The insurgents were well trained in understanding politics. By analyzing their announcements, it is clear that they had set their objectives and had planned their diplomatic tactics. They had their kinsmen in the government, police, army and many other institutions. Knowing that the most vulnerable part of the Macedonian defense system is the Macedonian government, their objective was to compromise and delegitimize the Macedonian part of the government which would lose their mandate if their Albanian coalition partners split.

Security Forces

The first army units to make contact with the insurgents were from a border post near the village of Tanusevci. Professional units immediately reinforced those building defensive lines that stretched several kilometers. The units from the border posts received small arms fire for several days. After the first casualties of the Macedonian armed forces occurred, the army was ordered to retaliate.

They initially used heavy machine guns and mortars on the insurgents' positions and command post in the village, and then rocket launchers and howitzers were brought in. At the same time, the insurgents ambushed one police column and killed a police officer in an attempt to regain several villages near the border east of Tanushevci.⁴²

When the decision was made to enter the village, the insurgents had already left chased away by NATO (a US army company).⁴³ The army units advanced cautiously, clearing the unpaved road of anti-tank mines. After a link up with a NATO forces was

made in Tanusevci, the army units secured the border while a follow on police force searched the village for insurgents and weapons.

When the insurgents took the high ground above the city of Tetovo, the first force that intervened was the city police. Special police forces came to support the lightly armed local police forces and established several checkpoints in the city to prevent the insurgents from bringing the conflict into the town. The army sent an armor unit, artillery, and reserve infantry units to prepare for an offensive against the insurgents. Although the foreign media described the army actions as a “desperate campaign against the guerrillas,”⁴⁴ NATO ambassadors supported the Macedonian government and gave a green light for action.

Initially, because of lack of clear guidance, the army did not respond with COIN tactics. The army fired in the direction where they assumed there where insurgents, making the situation appear worse than it actually was (which was the insurgents’ goal). A western diplomat described the Macedonian army as it “panicked”⁴⁵ and desperately in need of NATO help in equipment, finance, and intelligence. During the ten-day skirmishes and shelling in Tetovo, the army purchased Mi-24 and Mi-8 combat helicopters in pursuit of a combined arms capability.

In a similar fashion as the village of Tanusevci, the security forces successfully retook the hill above Tetovo as the NLA insurgents retreated into the mountains. However, the NLA insurgency tactics to provoke the army to overreact by using unnecessary force, heavy equipment, and to spend resources to retake relatively insignificant key terrain, was more than successful.

Government

The reason that the engagement of the security forces was very loud and from a distance was because the government played it safe, attempting to minimize army and police casualties. The government made an urgent purchase of combat helicopters from Ukraine and only after a classic artillery barrage, they ordered the army to retake the hill above Tetovo. The government was truly adverse to military casualties.

The government estimated that a large number of casualties would wake up the “Balkan demons from the past” and could lead to a bloody war similar to that in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For ten years, the international community guaranteed peace to the Macedonians. In 1999, it would be challenging for NATO to deal with Serbia without the agreement that NATO could use Macedonian territory to build up ground forces as well as the airspace for the bombing campaign. In return, in 2001, the Macedonians expected that NATO would punish the “terrorists” for disturbing the peace.

The Macedonian government’s strategy was to use all diplomatic means to convince NATO to put more troops on the border and prevent Albanians from Kosovo from joining NLA. The Macedonian President put great personal effort into explaining this to the international community, NATO, and ambassadors that Macedonia has a right to defend itself from Kosovar aggressors. He took the position that the insurgents were terrorists, criminals, and smugglers and not the freedom fighters that they claimed to be. In the first months of the unrest, he secured the support from the presidents in the region, the NATO secretary of defense, and the US ambassador. Nevertheless, after the major offensive in Tetovo, he was pressured by EU leaders to promise “that he would use no

more than appropriate force against the insurgents and would take action on Albanian grievances.”⁴⁶

At the same time while there was diplomatic pressure from the international community, the government also had to cope with the Albanian politicians in the country as well as the Macedonian politicians from the opposition. They openly criticized that the government was not capable of solving the unrest.

The insurgents knew that the Albanian politicians in Macedonia were the key players in mediating negotiations. Afraid that they were losing credibility in the eyes of the Albanians, their loyalty shifted to the insurgent leadership. The Albanian politicians had to defend the Albanian interest to secure their credibility and establish themselves as legitimate defenders of the cause. The Albanian parties in Macedonia pressured the coalition government to stop the offensive and try to talk to the insurgents. They threatened to leave the coalition “if the military offensive went too far.”⁴⁷

International Community

The international community was surprised when the NLA emerged. The crucial player was the KFOR, NATO forces in Kosovo. It was their mandate to secure the border and not to allow insurgent groups to go back and forth: “The international security force will provide appropriate control of the borders . . . until the arrival of the civilian mission of the UN.”⁴⁸ Destabilization in Macedonia could have undermined the KFOR effort to stabilize Kosovo and the NATO effort to stabilize the Balkans. First reactions were favorable to Macedonian government. Lord Robertson, the Secretary General of NATO, clearly condemned the insurgents by calling them “extremists,”⁴⁹ and in some instances “terrorists.”⁵⁰

The initial messages suggested that the Macedonian army had the right to defend its country's sovereignty and protect the border. The *Guardian* newspaper accused Albanians in the Balkans as "once victims, as aggressors."⁵¹ The *Independent* reported, "The Macedonian army could easily crush the rebels . . . but the West has been urging the Macedonian authorities to be restrained, just as it has reined in the Serbs in the Presevo valley."⁵² American Ambassador Michael Einik condemned the insurgents in Macedonia as "aggression . . . that is coming into Macedonia and threatens stability."⁵³

NATO leadership in Kosovo condemned the insurgents, calling the NLA armed extremists, and verbally supporting the Macedonian government but were reluctant to become directly involved on the border. They were aware that if the conflict escalated, it would affect the reconciliation in Kosovo, but at the same time it seemed that NATO did not have a contingency plan for another Albanian insurgency movement. They were distracted in convincing another rebel group, LAPMB, to lay down their weapons in Southeast Serbia.

KFOR acknowledged that there was an obvious connection between the NLA, the LAPMB, and the former KLA because the insurgencies were supported logistically from within Kosovo.⁵⁴ When NLA seized the hill above city of Tetovo, Carl Bildt, UN special envoy to the Balkans, warned that NLA fighters were experienced, prepared, and competent fighters and the Macedonian forces will have difficulty containing the guerrillas in the mountainous region.⁵⁵

The Macedonian government requested that KFOR enter the Macedonian territory near the border to search and arrest the "terrorists." However, "George Robertson, the NATO secretary general, Donald Rumsfeld, the US defense secretary, and Geoffrey

Hoon, the British defense secretary, have all repeatedly stressed that no NATO troops will be sent to assist the Macedonians.”⁵⁶

Instead, more NATO troops deployed to Kosovo and cooperation with the Macedonian government was increased. As the skirmishes intensified, KFOR ordered patrolling near the Macedonian Kosovo border. The KFOR started to support the Macedonian army with intelligence and aerial photos where the insurgents operated. A US army unit entered the village to arrest the insurgents.

Neighboring Greece and Bulgaria sent the first military aid for the ill-equipped Macedonian army. It included vehicles, communication equipment, ammo, and medical supplies.⁵⁷ Both countries strongly supported Macedonia’s right to defend its border with Kosovo. Just two years ago, Greece and Bulgaria improved the Macedonian army’s armor capability by providing armor vehicles and tanks.

The EU diplomats put pressure on the Kosovo leadership to condemn violence in Macedonia and threaten Kosovo that it might lose financial aid from the EU needed for post conflict reconstruction.⁵⁸ “The leaders of Kosovo’s three main political parties, including two former guerrilla chiefs, have signed a declaration urging ethnic Albanian gunmen in Macedonia to lay down arms and go home peacefully.”⁵⁹ At the same time, all Western diplomats and ambassadors urged the Macedonian government to constrain the use of disproportionate force against the insurgents. Western observers did not trust the government’s ability to deal with the insurgents saying, “By responding with a show of firepower, the government appears only to have made the risk of civil war greater.”⁶⁰

Second Phase of the War (April 2001)

Insurgency

After major offensives conducted by the Macedonian security forces, the NLA retreated into the mountains. Some NLA members crossed the border into Kosovo and some stayed on Macedonian territory near the border in several villages deep in the mountains. The villages were connected by unpaved roads, which were mined with anti-tank mines to deny access to the security. The terrain in this region drastically changed when spring bloomed, as the vegetation made fine cover for guerrilla warfare, excellent for ambush and hit and run tactics.

The NLA declared that they had not been defeated and they would give a chance to the Macedonian government to reconsider their requests. Throughout all of April 2001, they were concealed as civilians and began political fight for legitimacy. Their camps were abandoned and most of their armaments were buried at different locations as they expected police raids in the area. Some of them were arrested and accused of terrorism, but released because of a lack of evidence. Despite the fact that by using lab methods police identified that they were handling weapons prior to arrest, the Albanian political parties pressured to give amnesty in the name of improving ethnic relations.

The insurgents leaders' major objective was to gain support from the Albanian parties in the Macedonian government. The NLA was aware that the international community and Macedonian government would not talk directly, so they established diplomatic links with the legitimate representatives of the Albanians in Macedonia. They agreed on a joint platform that the stability and consolidation of Macedonia was only possible through a political agreement between Macedonians and Albanians around the

joint management of the state and that this would only be possible with radical changes in the Constitution.

From this point it was clear that the Albanian parties in the Macedonian government would speak for the insurgents. First, they have been under pressure by NLA, or else they would be marked as traitors of the Albanian nation (unofficially Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) and Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP) leaders received threats from NLA). Second, they had to preserve their legitimacy over their electorate among Albanians who logically were giving moral support to the insurgents. Third, EU pressured them to participate in the negotiations as they were still part of the Macedonian government and had responsibility as legitimate representatives of the Albanians.

Besides making the legitimate Albanian parties from the government negotiate for them, the insurgents fought for credibility in the eyes of the international community. While at first they claimed a connection with KLA and LAPMB, suddenly they declared that they were an independent movement fighting for their own cause. This was done to protect the credibility of Kosovo leaders, who at the same time distanced themselves from the NLA. They protected the integrity of Kosovo by avoiding the accusations of a pan-Albanian conspiracy to create a “Great Albania.”

When the Macedonian government officially rejected the suggestions from the Council of the EU that Macedonia should be re-constituted as a multinational state and not a state of Macedonians, the insurgents proceeded with their plans. While there were ongoing negotiations for a united government and everyday meetings with the EU representatives, the NLA prepared and organized even better than before. They prepared

for one month, moved units, equipment, and spread their presence in the northeast part of the border with Kosovo. On 28 April 2001, the NLA ambushed a Macedonian security forces patrol, killing eight.⁶¹ Two days later, the NLA opened a third front northeast of the capital.

Security Forces

After the March offensive, the security forces conducted searches for NLA members and weapons in the villages near the border. The police forces were predominantly conducting searches while the armed forces were securing the roads and key terrain. Reserve police forces secured the checkpoints on the roads. In this phase of the conflict, significant numbers of reserves were called. Around 10,000 reservists were securing less vulnerable lines of communication and gave support to the active units.

Police forces conducted the search operations in the villages near the urban areas, while army special forces operated in the villages in the mountainous rural areas. The villages were mostly empty, because the locals moved either to Kosovo or to their relatives in the villages where there were not any ongoing operations. The security forces cleared only the villages suspected to NLA presence. Other army units were clearing the unpaved roads of anti-tank mines. Despite their effort, there were several casualties from land mines. After a battalion commander was killed, it was clear that it would take a lot of time to clean all the roads. Basically every unpaved road was considered to be a mined road.

Houses in some mountain villages were wrecked before the army came. The suspicion was that war profiteers or NLA members did the damage. However, after the security forces did a search, OSCE units came and accused the Macedonians of

deliberately destroying private property. Because of the lack of understanding and training in COIN, the army leadership did not see that coming. Instead of inviting OSCE members to observe the search operations and monitor the legitimacy of the operations, they left the villages unsecured and provided the insurgents with material for propaganda.

The army and police units built up defensive positions on the key terrain, hills, and roads but neglected the border region northeast of the Capital with a predominantly Albanian population. The army and police units did not receive orders to check and search that region, until media reported and took pictures of men in black uniforms above the city of Kumanovo. It seemed that the media had more information about the insurgents than the policy makers did.

Government

Macedonian political parties emphasized that the root of the crisis was in Kosovo. They asked the international community to support them in fighting terrorism, continuously stressing that the NLA was a criminal group fighting for safe haven in order to traffic drugs, arms and white slavery, using the Albanian cause to build legitimacy. Not only did the government underestimate the effects of the insurgents on Albanian parties, but it was also misled to believe that NLA was defeated.

Immediately after the successful offensive of the Macedonian security forces, the leader of the Albanian party DPA in the coalition government officially announced that the Macedonian side had one month to talk and increase the rights of the Albanian minority in the country. Otherwise, he “predicted” that the guerillas were not gone, they just changed into civilian clothes, and if they did not see progress in the negotiations, they would continue to fight. In an interview given for a French news agency he

supported the NLA by saying it was entitled to continue its military actions and to demand their rights with weapons.⁶² His predictions were very precise, so to believe that there was no coordination in the political agenda between NLA and the Albanian part of the coalition government would be a fallacy.

The Albanian parties began to insist that the EU should engage in pressuring the Macedonian side to dialogue and negotiate for a change to the constitution, including proportional representation of Albanians in the institutions of government and the release of political prisoners from 1981 to date.⁶³ Opening the so-called questions on “political prisoners” from 1981 was an attempt to point out that the struggle of the Albanians in Macedonia had continued since the Yugoslav era. At the same time a new Albanian party emerged, the National Democratic Party, acting as an extreme right wing party. While the leader of DPA pointed to 1981 as the beginning of Albanian struggle, the National Democratic Party went further by asking for rehabilitation and a public apology for all “political prisoners” from the Yugoslav era since 1945 and amnesty for all members of NLA.

Both Albanian parties, government coalitions’ and opposition, united under the same agenda had the same position in the impending negotiations with the Macedonian side, while the Macedonian opposition party had only one goal, to get in power again. The Macedonian side had difficulties establishing a joint strategy to end the crisis.

It was obvious that the leaders of the Albanian bloc had a good knowledge of negotiation tactics. They aggressively set extreme limits in the process of negotiation, which were already in progress from the beginning of the conflict. Although the Macedonian bloc was convinced that they achieved military victory, the morale in the

Albanian bloc was very high. They were more successful in convincing the international actors to cause political pressure on the Macedonian government, knowing that the conflict was not over and the insurgents were still around and ready to put the uniforms on again.

The Macedonian government rejected the Council of the EU resolution to change their constitution and declare Macedonia as a multiethnic state. They considered it as an ultimatum, not a supporting resolution, and such a concession could lead to the federalization of Macedonia and further division to fulfill the idea of “Great Albania.” After one month, as the leader of DPA predicted, the insurgents continued with combat.

International Community

The British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, visited the Macedonian government several times to give them support to preserve stability. He was one of the rare European politicians that referred to the NLA as terrorists⁶⁴ stating that “any further armed activity will be treated as terrorist.”⁶⁵ To show its support to the Macedonian government, the EU joined Macedonia in signing a stabilization and association agreement, which gave Macedonia better trade terms with EU.⁶⁶ However, other EU representatives at the same time started to pressure the Macedonian side to reconsider changes in the constitution. They also strongly suggested that the government should give seats to the Albanian and Macedonian opposition parties to bring legitimacy to all future decisions.

OSCE monitors in Macedonia reported that the Macedonian army and police forces used unnecessary brutality against Albanian civilians during operations to clean up villages while searching for NLA. They reported that the security forces vandalized dozens of houses after the major offensive. The report said, “Cupboard drawers and

clothes were strewn over the floor, suggesting that there had been a search for jewelry and valuables.”⁶⁷ This report was the main news story in *The Guardian* that shaped the EU diplomacy toward the Macedonian government. The Macedonian government rejected the accusation as a fraud, because usually the employees of OSCE used locals as translators.

Macedonian security forces found documents in one of the NLA headquarters, with names of its members and their auxiliaries that provided logistical support. The EU reaction was that the government should reconsider amnesty not just for the auxiliaries, but also for the insurgency, as a starting strategy for reconciliation.⁶⁸ The Albanian parties, vowing for re-socialization of the insurgents, propagated this.

At the same time as they congratulated the government for swiftly managing the crisis, the EU and other international actors started to pressure the government to back off in the name of normalization of ethnic relations in the country.⁶⁹ The EU strongly suggested that the government should start planning decentralization on a municipal level, open a university using Albanian language, make the Albanian language an official and employ Albanians in government institutions.

The leaders in Kosovo distanced themselves from the insurgency movement in Macedonia. The Commander of the Kosovo protection forces replaced one of the high representatives because of his involvement and cooperation with the insurgents in Macedonia. He condemned the activities of some of his men and promised NATO that they would be removed from their positions if they had any connection with the NLA.

Third Phase of the War (May to August 2001)

Insurgency

By mid-May 2001, the insurgency movement in Macedonia had spread northeast of the capital, covering almost the entire Macedonian-Kosovo border, around 10 to 15 kilometers in depth. The NLA showed better organization and coordination between its forces. The political messages given through the media, western diplomats, and Albanian parties showed that the NLA had well-organized leadership with clear objectives. The NLA portrayed itself like an independent movement from the former KLA, with its own agenda and a clearly domestic origin. They were pursuing for negotiations with the Macedonian government with clearly defined requests.

Estimates were that NLA had around 600 insurgents. Their auxiliary element grew larger as they occupied all Albanian villages near the border. The auxiliaries were providing logistics, information, and moral support to NLA. The Macedonian government claimed that the Albanian population was forced to help the NLA and alleged that sometimes they were held as “human shields.”⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the insurgents enjoyed sympathies from their population and more and more support from the Albanian political parties. In May 2001, the leader of the NLA met with the leaders of the DPA and PDP and signed an agreement for joint effort on the diplomatic scene. They “guaranteed” the integrity of Macedonia, portraying their desire to the government for a peaceful resolution. The requests for concessions were unacceptable by Macedonians and viewed as an ultimatum from the NLA.

During the ceasefire in April the insurgents managed to acquire more weapons from Kosovo. In the third phase, they used 82mm mortar fire as their primary distraction

weapon. They increased their use of snipers and anti-tank land mines. These attacks became prevalent and created casualties in the security forces. During the entire third phase, the NLA conducted at least three major ambushes where they inflicted significant losses on the security forces. They were successful in each type of ambush (linear, L-shape and V-shaped), which showed that they were well trained and using the terrain as best they could for guerilla tactics.

As the political pressure on Macedonian government was increasing, NLA leadership increased the pressure on the field. Compared with their tactics before April, the NLA started to conduct conventional attacks on barracks, checkpoints, and border posts. There were cases when they waged company level attacks against the security forces, which looked like they were trying to move beyond their guerrilla tactics and conduct themselves as a real army. These kinds of attacks provoked the army more to rely on heavy fire from artillery, helicopters, and tanks, which might have been the reason for such NLA tactics.⁷¹ By raising the level of use of force by the army, the NLA increased its legitimacy as a side in the conflict.

Some other elements of the NLA started to violate the Geneva conventions which threatened to delegitimize their position as a side in conflict. The water supply for the city of Kumanovo, east of the Capital was shut down when NLA seized the dam and reservoirs.⁷² The government used this as an additional argument that the NLA was a terrorist organization. Because of this, the government made a decision to secure the key terrain around the capital.

The culmination of the war happened at the end of June 2001, when 400 insurgents seized and fortified the village of Arachinovo, near Skopje. They built up

defensive positions and prepared for a prolonged battle, threatening to attack the international airport and oil refinery that was within their mortar range.⁷³ After three days of army offensive, the army retreated under pressure from the international community. NATO evacuated 300 insurgents⁷⁴ from the village and displaced them in the mountains.⁷⁵ In August, the NLA ambushed two army convoys and killed 18 security forces. These casualties were the final pressure that forced the government to sign an agreement for reconciliation.

Security Forces

As the armed forces started to build up units with their organic equipment and heavy armament, the EU High Representative Javier Solana made a diplomatic visit to Ukraine to convince the Ukraine government to stop selling weapons to Macedonia.⁷⁶ The EU was concerned about the recent purchased T-72 tanks, multiple rocket launchers GRAD, Mi-24 helicopters, and four SU-25 attack airplanes by the Macedonian government. These weapons significantly changed the balance of forces and made the Macedonian army stronger, but not necessarily adequate for COIN operations. The EU interpreted this arsenal as a danger because they could cause huge collateral damage and the current low intensity conflict could grow into a full-scale civil war like Bosnia.

The Macedonian security forces contained both Macedonian nationals and Albanians. Throughout the six-month conflict, a minor number of officers and soldiers deserted the army; some of them joined the NLA.⁷⁷ Officers of Albanian nationality frequently received phone calls from the NLA to desert, but most of them stayed. The highest-ranking officer of Albanian nationality that deserted was a captain; No senior Albanian officer deflected to NLA.

In mid June, the government realized that the NLA could easily seize key terrain around the capital. The hill above the capital Skopje (city of 500,000), the city's water supply, and the dam that held the artificial lake upstream were key terrain and if taken by the NLA could threaten the capital. Reserve units were used to cover the defense of the capital. Other strategic objects included the oil refinery and the airport that were within mortar range from several Albanian villages occupied by the NLA.

While the capital was under threat, the NLA conducted a major conventional attack on Tetovo's army barracks.⁷⁸ The attack was conducted in daylight, supported by mortars and in a surprisingly old fashioned way, with insurgents charging over the fence. The attack was repelled and caused a significant number of NLA casualties.

In June, the army launched the biggest offensive against the NLA in the village of Arachinovo near the capital.⁷⁹ The EU gave the Macedonian government three days to establish control over the village. The army used artillery, helicopters and tanks as preparation for the forces to make a classic infantry assault on the village. However, only special forces were actually used, because the government was expecting casualties, and considered that the people would not respond the same to dead professionals as compared with dead conscripts. The president personally stopped the operation, first because the three days were done and the EU General Secretary literally ordered him to back off. Second, it was obvious that the village could not be taken without significant casualties, which would fuel the interethnic tensions that were already high.

Government

The new government coalition in May was established due to the pressure from the EU. It consisted of both Macedonian (ruling VMRO-DPMNE and opposition SDSM)

and Albanian parties (ruling DPA and opposition PDP). Instead of finding solutions to prevent a civil war, their first debate was for a new census of the population. The Albanian parties accused Macedonians of a fraudulent 1994 census, claiming that percentage of Albanians (22,5 percent) was deliberately reduced, while the Macedonian political bloc insisted that the new census should not count those emigrants from Kosovo and Albania, which already increased the number of Albanians in Macedonia. The Albanians demanded that a new census be carried out and monitored by the international community.⁸⁰

The Albanian political bloc in Macedonia frequently contacted the leader of the NLA which resulted in the signing of a joint agreement on the objectives of the insurgents. They were heavily criticized by EU ambassadors, who were aware that such an agreement with the insurgents (which the Macedonian bloc considered as terrorists) was counterproductive. The EU ambassadors pressured the Albanian leaders to disregard the agreement, but they never officially did that. The announcements of the Albanian politicians in Macedonia were always shaped to be uncertain, unclear, and ambiguous sending different messages to different groups. Eventually that agreement became a starting point for the negotiations, as it framed the joint NLA and Albanian requests.

The EU drastically changed its policy towards Macedonia after acknowledging that the Macedonian government was not capable to solve the crisis with military means. The political dialogue was enforced upon the Macedonian politicians with the mediation of the international community representatives. The EU threatened to withhold financial support if the money was spent on armaments.⁸¹ The EU ambassadors concluded that the Macedonian security forces were not using adequate strategy to defeat NLA. More and

more the EU suggested dialog and negotiations with the relevant Albanian political parties. In July, the Macedonian president officially asked for NATO forces to be deployed in Macedonia to disarm the insurgents in exchange for amnesty.

International Community

The NATO Secretary General repeatedly announced that the international community would cooperate only with legitimate political representatives, and not with armed extremists. Because the NLA had no democratic legitimacy, they could not have a place at the negotiation table. NATO leadership demanded from the Albanians diasporas stop supporting the insurgents by collecting funds. The Secretary General of NATO, George Robertson, clearly supported the Macedonian government in fighting the extremists.

Nevertheless, after the security forces showed an inability to establish control of the territory, Robertson, with the high representative for foreign EU policy, Javier Solana, pressured Macedonians that only a formation of large coalitions and much dialogue could resolve the crisis. They stated, “There can be no military solution to the conflict - only a political solution.”⁸² The Ministers of the EU and NATO started to constrain the government to use proportionate force in response to violence and, for the first time, officially presented a proposal for amnesty.

After the army’s unsuccessful offensive in Arachinovo, the EU announced that the Macedonian government was not capable of solving the problem with military means and that their military actions were a mistake.⁸³ From 26 June 2001, the EU posture was to pressure the Macedonian government by any means necessary to negotiate, including cutting off financial aid.⁸⁴ Shortly thereafter the decision was made that NATO troops

should help disarm the insurgents after negotiations are over. In August, NATO estimated the number of NLA to be around 2000 insurgents.⁸⁵

In August, after two bloody ambushes, the EU finally convinced the Macedonian government to sign the agreement. On 13 August, the framework agreement put an end to the six-month conflict. The EU considered this a big victory for their institution as many scholars saw this as a diplomatic test for the EU. Compared with the Bosnia and Kosovo wars, the EU solved the problem in Macedonia almost without US help. The Albanians considered the agreement a victory, but some elements pursued further actions against Macedonian forces without support from the NLA leadership.

Evaluation of the COIN Strategy

All instruments of national power must support a COIN strategy. To evaluate whether the COIN strategy was effective or not, there are several aspects that need to be considered. Proper COIN strategy starts with understanding the enemy, understanding his strategic approach and tactics, consideration of the physical and human environment, and the effects of the media and propaganda. These basic criteria shaped the government politics and the actions of the Macedonian security forces against the insurgency in 2001.

Understanding the Enemy

Counterinsurgency strategy begins with identifying the enemy. “Before making a systematic appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of an insurgency, it is important to have as clear a picture as possible of the goals, forms of warfare, and strategy of the insurgents.”⁸⁶ Did the Macedonian government clearly identify why the NLA waged war?

O'Neill defines seven types of insurgencies.⁸⁷ Failure to recognize the type of threat is common mistake to establish proper COIN strategy. From the beginning of the conflict, because of the misleading rhetoric of different NLA commanders and some goal ambiguity, the Macedonian government, influenced by the Macedonian media and recent experience with the war for secession of Kosovo, the government and military defined NLA as a secessionist type of insurgency.

However, the real type of the insurgency was reformist, seeking “more political, social, and economic benefits for their constituencies without rejecting the political community, system, or authorities.”⁸⁸ Not recognizing the reformist type is also due to the further definition that insurgents should not be considered as secessionist if they only ask for larger autonomy.⁸⁹ However, in the Macedonian mindset the autonomy automatically means secession and they had the recent Kosovo insurgency experience nearby to reinforce this view.

In addition, the Macedonian government identified the NLA actions or form of warfare as terrorism. In fact, according to the requests posed by the NLA leadership in January 2001, their objectives suggested a reformist type of insurgency. Not accepting the real objectives of the insurgents led to labeling them as terrorists without any option for negotiation. “Guerrilla warfare differs from terrorism because its primary targets are the government’s armed forces, police, or their support units and, in some cases, key economic targets, rather than unarmed civilians.”⁹⁰

The government found wide support from the Macedonian people in their assessment that the NLA was an aggressor from Kosovo with secessionist intentions. In the first weeks of the conflict, this was understandable, because Albanians in Macedonia

had their political representatives in the government and the ethnic balance in the system was constant topic of discussion in the parliament and the government. However, after the first phase of the conflict, the Albanian parties clearly supported reformist intentions of the NLA.

In the third phase, the EU representatives openly pressured the Macedonian government to reconcile with the NLA, guaranteeing the territorial integrity of Macedonia and supporting the necessity for reforms in ethnic relations. If the Macedonian government defined the insurgency as reformist and not secessionist, and considered the NLA as rebels and not terrorists, that would have changed the COIN strategy and put more emphasis on a political solution.

To support their cause, the insurgent needs to find a problem, and according to Galula in every country problems can be found, either social, economic, religious, or cultural, “but what makes one country more vulnerable than another to insurgency is the depth and the acuity of its existing problems.”⁹¹ Moreover, Macedonia until 2001 had several obviously and easily detectible problems that provided causes for the NLA. It was inevitable that the NLA would find support among the Albanian population in the mountains border region.

The NLA Strategic Approach and Tactics

The Macedonian government generally was considered the Albanian problem as a conspiratorial strategy that had roots from the Yugoslav era. The idea of “Great Albania” seemed to become true with the secession of Kosovo from Serbia. Thus, the NLA strategy was considered as a conspiratorial which became militarily focused. The strategy of the NLA was a cliché from insurgency manuals: to harass security forces, hold pieces

of land, dominate the areas populated with kin Albanians, seek safe passage across the border with Kosovo, convince the international community that they were fighting for human rights, get funds from the diaspora and play on time until the government decides to negotiate.

This seemed to be obvious insurgency strategy, but the government did not do much to counter with an opposing strategy: control the area, hold the villages, secure the roads and most importantly the border. Because of misunderstanding of COIN theory, not enough forces were mobilized, there was no plan for retaking the insurgent - held areas, and the casualties from ambushes on the roads lasted until the last days of the conflict. Despite the NLA's use of antitank mines, light vehicles were used persistently on the dirt roads. Another textbook example of misunderstanding NLA strategy and tactics was not securing the key terrain. The ambush at Karpalak occurred on the only possible spot on the road that represented a key terrain and a perfect site for an ambush.

A very interesting point that Galula gives, applicable in the Macedonian case, is that the difference between the responsibilities that insurgents have compared with the counterinsurgents, especially in terms of the use of propaganda. He says it is "a one sided weapon," because while insurgents are not responsible for their actions and "are free to use every trick and if necessary they can lie, cheat and exaggerate," while the counterinsurgent is "judged on what he does, not on what he says."⁹² The insurgents used traditional guerrilla methods to build legitimacy, willing to accept any foreign journalist willing to visit them, trying to portray themselves as freedom fighters.⁹³

This is excellent explanation of why the legitimate actions of the security forces were undermined by OSCE's reports in the second phase of the conflict, while they

never truly acknowledge the violations of the laws of war by the NLA. On the hill above the city of Tetovo, the NLA took shelter in the medieval fortress and the church on the hill. According to the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions, use of historical monuments and religious buildings is a violation of international laws of war.⁹⁴

The NLA was armed mainly with weapons of Chinese origin, provided from the Albanian army storages after the country descended into anarchy in 1997 following the collapse of the Albanian government, as well as weapons from the former Yugoslav army. They had automatic weapons (Yugoslav and Chinese version of AK-47), heavy machine guns (DSK 12,7mm), RPGs, M80 rocket launchers, sniper rifles, 82mm mortars, recoilless antitank weapons and large amounts of anti-personnel and anti-tank mines.

The most favorable tactic for the insurgent was to keep their distance far from the small arms fire and provoke the Macedonian security forces from a distance. They frequently put anti-tank land mines in the roads to disrupt the movement of the army vehicles. The area around the mountain villages was ideal for landmines as the roads were unpaved. The landmines killed several Macedonian soldiers and police officers in different locations, but also two EU monitors when they were visiting an Albanian village near the border.⁹⁵ After it became unsafe to use Land Rovers, HMMWVs and other light jeeps, the security forces used only armored vehicles for transport. The insurgents adapted and started to fix three or four anti-tank land mines one above the other, producing heavy damage even on an armored vehicle.

The insurgents wore distinctive black uniforms⁹⁶ with the same insignia as the former KLA.⁹⁷ Technically black uniforms were bad camouflage, especially in the snow, but its purpose was a deliberate show of presence in and around the occupied Albanian

villages. These uniforms were supposed to have the psychological effect that they are controlling the territory.

The Physical Environment

During the process of finding the best COIN strategy, gaining understanding of the terrain as a factor of the physical environment is very important.⁹⁸ Galula emphasized that specific geographical conditions can favor either insurgents or counterinsurgents and that they are never convenient for both.⁹⁹

The biggest problem was the fact that NLA operated across the border, which was not entirely secured on the Kosovo side. Galula defines the border doctrine to be extremely favorable for insurgents when they need to retreat, maneuver, or get supplies.¹⁰⁰ Securing the border to prevent insurgents maneuvering from Macedonia to Kosovo and back was identified from the beginning as a main challenge, but the government never addressed it properly. It required more forces that were never dedicated. The border with Kosovo is 159 kilometers long. If a system of observation posts with a significant number of light units positioned and patrolling were deployed, it could have denied the NLA freedom of movement.

This was not impossible, but required another variable from the physical environment, a good road system. It takes a road network that is safe and fast to support and sustain a large number of troops on the border in the mountains' region, and generally, to control the territory. Joes suggests improving the road system as proper COIN strategy. Mobility is a key for control of the territory and provide rapid deployment of the COIN forces, and at the same time sending an important message to

the population in the areas inflicted with insurgents that "roads are evidence that the government is there, and to stay."¹⁰¹

The Macedonian mountains on the border certainly favored guerrilla warfare. The harsh terrain on the border with Kosovo with the NLA having kin on the other side was clearly a huge advantage that the insurgents exploited. In this terrain, the use of the conventional forces was extremely canalized. Heavy equipment was difficult to move through the mountains and sustainment of the troops in and around the border posts became a nightmare after several casualties were taken from the anti-tank mines on the unpaved roads.

The mountains and areas where the insurgents operated were covered with thick vegetation that facilitated ambushes and hit and run attacks on the convoys supporting the troops. In the third phase of the conflict, the security forces abandoned many positions in the rural areas because of an inability to protect them due to the terrain. This was exploited by the NLA, which occupied many Albanian villages and the key terrain around them to protect lines of communications that became "theirs." Control of the territory is one of the most important COIN objectives suggested by Joes, as the guerrillas often claim the areas which are not under control of the security forces as "liberated" territories.¹⁰²

The security forces understood that the physical environment favored the insurgents. The protection of the border, securing the roads and border posts were identified as decisive points to start a successful COIN campaign. However, because of poor road infrastructure in the mountains and a lack of trained and equipped reserves to secure the border, the security forces retreated to the low ground losing territories and

giving the initiative to the insurgents. Another explanation why the border was not secured is the government's belief that NATO would do that on the other side.

The Human Environment

O'Neill says that, "a careful analysis of the physical and human dimension of the environment is a good starting point for an analysis of an insurgency."¹⁰³ The human environment includes the influence of demographics, social structure, economics, political structure, and political system on the dynamics of the insurgency and the COIN.

From the four models of political systems developed by Charles F. Andrain where insurgency can emerge (traditional autocracy, modernizing autocracies, totalitarian and pluralistic),¹⁰⁴ the pluralistic, which is the Macedonian case, is characterized by many actors that exist outside of the political system, some of them acting independently.¹⁰⁵ "Pluralist democracies find it quite difficult and stressful to cope with terrorism (insurgency) because their inherent commitment to due process restricts their actions and thus places a premium on patience, determination, and discipline."¹⁰⁶ This makes the COIN effort more complicated compared with strategies applied in the other three political systems which are authoritarian in nature.

Joes agrees with Che Guevara's perception on the level of democracy as a precondition for success of the insurgency when he states that, "it is not possible to wage a successful insurgency against a democratic regime or even against one that merely tries to appear as such."¹⁰⁷ However, according to this, the NLA was certainly an exception, because Macedonia in 2001 was clearly a democratic society with a freely elected and legitimate government. In addition, if we question the ethnic element of the insurgents, the Albanians were equally and fairly represented by their political parties in the

government and parliament, so who did NLA represent? That was a main reason, which influenced parts of the Macedonian government (the Macedonian bloc) to consider NLA as an illegitimate and a terrorist organization.

O'Neill emphasizes the importance of popular support for the success of the insurgencies.¹⁰⁸ In the Macedonian case while active support to the insurgents was provided in the occupying villages, passive support was present among all other Albanians in the country.¹⁰⁹ The morale support from the intellectuals among the Albanians had a big role in the way they presented their view of the legitimacy of the insurgency.¹¹⁰ This additional factor sparked the Macedonian side to be even more convinced that the type of insurgency was secessionist.

From O'Neill's seven techniques for gaining popular support,¹¹¹ the NLA used provocation of government repression and coercion. The coercion technique was used by the NLA towards the passive Albanian population in the occupied areas to give the insurgents more active support. There were several reports of atrocities toward the Albanian civilians marked as not loyal to the Albanian cause. Nevertheless the main technique was to portray the security forces as an enemy to the Albanian people.

By provoking disproportional use of force against the insurgents hiding in the villages, the insurgents were gaining not just support from the rest of the Albanians in the country, but also moral support from Albania, Kosovo and the wider international community.¹¹² Provocation was in a form of harassing and ambushing security forces near the villages, after which retaliation would result in collateral damage to civilian property. After sweep operations, the insurgents used propaganda to portray the Albanian civilians as victims: "Whenever the government undertakes security measures directed at

individuals or groups, it can expect the insurgents to make use of legalistic appeals to try to protect their personnel and to portray the regime as a violator of civilian and human rights.”¹¹³

It was clear to the Macedonian government that the NLA would pursue the support of the Albanians in the occupying villages. In the overall COIN effort, the battle for the “hearts and minds” of the Albanians in the occupied areas was lost primarily because government troops did not provide security and retreated, leaving the NLA to portray themselves as liberators. However, that only affected a small portion of the Albanian population. Most were never involved in the conflict, but quietly sympathized with the NLA because the government did not consider explaining to them that their enemies are the rebels, not all Albanians.

Experiences from Kosovo and ambiguity in the goals of the NLA forced the Macedonians to fear the idea of “Great Albania” and disregard the real problem - earning the loyalty of the Albanians. Not having control of the nationalistic rhetoric started to build ethnic tensions that threatened to ignite an ethnic war. There was never any real attempt from the government (Macedonian bloc) to gain popular support among Albanians.

According to Galula, violent actions against the insurgents in the organizational phase when they rely only on their leadership is the most efficient way to defeat an insurgency and prevent it from growing, but this is feasible only by the totalitarian regimes, and not by democracies.¹¹⁴ Macedonia could not take any actions against the radical Albanian leaders because in the new democratic - post socialistic environment,

there were not (and still there are not) laws and mechanisms on how to react on subversive ideas that clearly vow for war.

Media and Propaganda

The government failed to protect itself and the security forces from the insurgents' propaganda. Macedonian security forces were conducting standard searches looking for weapons, ammo and documents, but the Albanian locals, who just might have been insurgents in civilian clothes, used the wrecked homes to complain about brutality.¹¹⁵

Nevertheless, OSCE reports were taken seriously and from that point the government started to receive different messages from the EU. This was proof that the government was starting to lose the battle for legitimacy, crucial in COIN, especially when ethnic feelings are at stake. If the insurgents managed to deceive OSCE and distort the truth, it was because of government ineffectiveness to stop it. OSCE reported the drawing of crosses on the mosques in the Albanian villages, saying that the Macedonian security forces, which were predominantly Christian, drew the crosses.¹¹⁶

That was a simple textbook guerrilla tactic to win the "hearts and minds" of the (Albanian) people and secure legitimacy from the international community. The EU did not want another religious war similar to Bosnian war. However, the army leadership should have predicted the effects of drawn crosses on the mosque. If the villages were searched with the monitors from OSCE, it would to prevent the NLA from portraying Macedonians as the aggressors in their own country.

At the same time as the insurgents used propaganda as a tool for gaining legitimacy, the media in the country were doing even bigger damage. The pluralist,

democratic wave that caught the Macedonian media turned them into war profiteers. Hiding behind the right to report and inform the people, accidentally or deliberately, they compromised government credibility, legitimacy, violated ethics and influenced public opinion by sending inadequate messages.

Best example is that the media were showing on television and newspaper funerals of the killed soldiers or police officers in detail, undermining the morale of the troops and worst, fueling the interethnic relations that would erupt in a full-scale ethnic conflict. The journalists frequently blamed the government for incompetence, blaming them for the losses. Messages like this shaped the public opinion (among Macedonians) which asked for decisive military action against the “terrorists.”

The Macedonian media also blamed NATO and EU for the unwillingness to intervene against NLA, suggesting conspiracy theories that influenced and fueled anti-western sentiments. Their interpretation of the foreign newspapers was often wrong, undermining the EU effort to stop civil war. Their presence on the battlefield (accidentally or deliberately), compromised the operational security of the army and police forces several times.

The government did not attempt to influence the media to support the national cause. The freedom of expression, “since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties . . . necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety.”¹¹⁷ The government did not exercise the right to protect the national interest by making restrictions on the media, which openly fueled the interethnic distrust against Albanians, indirectly helping NLA to prove their point.

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²¹Grillot et al., 7.

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²³Hudson, 150.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General Conclusions

The Macedonian conflict ended on 13 August 2001. In city of Ohrid, Macedonian and Albanian parties with EU mediators signed a framework agreement for resolving ethnic disputes through constitutional changes (known as the Ohrid agreement). The Macedonian Parliament was obliged to pass new amendments and start with reforms within 45 days.¹ The NLA was not included in the peace talks directly, but *de facto* they were negotiating their personal demands through international community representatives. In exchange for the surrender of the weapons under NATO supervision, the President of Macedonia guaranteed their amnesty.²

Since the beginning of the conflict, the NLA announced that “their armed struggle was aimed at constitutional rights and equality for Macedonia's ethnic Albanian population . . . constitutional nation status for ethnic Albanians, Albanian as a second official language and equal employment opportunities for ethnic Albanians.”³ All of these demands were signed by the Macedonian side in the framework agreement, which concludes that the NLA and Albanian parties as their legitimate representatives fulfilled their political objectives through violent means. It was obvious that the NLA insurgency was successful, as in the end they got what they demanded.

The Albanian population in Macedonia celebrated the NLA insurgency as their big win. On the other hand, for Macedonians, such forced compromise that was about to be achieved peacefully as it was an ongoing process since independence was unnecessary and the violence caused from the Albanians was an abomination. The international

community tried (and still tries) to convince Macedonians that there were no winners and losers, and keeping the territorial integrity of the country and guarantees from the international community is, in fact, a big win for Macedonians.

The fact is that by international law, the use of armed violence by the NLA was illegitimate. The Albanian minority in Macedonia was never oppressed and they had more minority rights than proscribed by EU standards. In general, the rights of minorities in Macedonia were (and today are) much better than the rights the minorities have in most of the EU countries. The “struggle for rights” was just a technique to gain public support among the Albanians. Nevertheless, the NLA’s illegitimate rebellion and the lack of loyalty on behalf of the Albanian parties should not exclude the responsibilities of the Macedonian government to prevent the NLA insurgency.

The reality is that the Macedonian government was not able to cope with the emergent influence of the NLA. The constitutional changes were not just forced, but necessary, because if the government did not make a compromise, there would be a civil war similar to that in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The overall understanding of COIN environment failed and that affected insufficient performance in predicting, preventing and suppressing the NLA insurgents. The Macedonian government was not effective in defending the democratically established constitution from the insurgency that started as an unorganized smuggler gang of 30-armed rebels and grew into a movement with a political establishment behind it.

Specific Conclusions

On a strategic level, the Macedonian government failed to properly identify the enemy. Seeking international support by targeting them as terrorists was unwise for

several reasons. Despite the fact that terrorism is not clearly defined, and the NLA did not appear to have the typical characteristics of a terrorist organization, the Republic of Macedonia did not have sufficient diplomatic, information, military and economic power to label anyone as terrorist. The government did not even attempt to persuade the international community that the insurgents were terrorists; they just merely called them that. That triggered the media that inflamed the ethnic relations between Macedonians and Albanians more. Subconsciously, the mindset of the security forces focused on treating all Albanians as terrorists, an image shaped from the years of Albanian irredentism and secessionism since the Yugoslavian era. It brought division in the coalition government because Albanian parties did not accept the term “terrorists” to describe their kin. But most important, it never gave a chance for negotiation and finding a peaceful resolution, as it should be always tried in reality, but directly applied to an armed solution. The cliché maxim “We do not negotiate with terrorists” further misled policies and decisions on a strategic level.

In addition, the inadequate policies to support the COIN effort were made due to a misconception of the new operational environment. The Balkan scenario considering the Albanian question changed after NATO intervention in 1999, favoring the movement that for years was considered as irredentism. The Albanian attempt to create a new country in the Balkans (Kosovo) was widely supported among the international community, regardless of the emotions among the others in the Balkans. Kosovo and its leaders should have been taken into consideration as a key player, not ignored. After signing the military technical agreement with KFOR, Serbia *de facto* lost its sovereignty in deciding the border between Macedonia and Kosovo. One may argue that ignoring Pristina in

signing the demarcation of the border between Serbia and Macedonia in January 2001 was not just undiplomatic, but also provocative.

On a strategic level, there was never a clearly established position of the government towards the crisis. The Albanian parties (both ruling and opposition) refused to discredit the insurgents in public, urging the Macedonian governing party to accept negotiations with the rebels in the mountains. They pursued their national agenda, which is logical and even acceptable, because they were expected to defend Albanian interest by their electorate. The real problem was the lack of unity and consensual attitude among the Macedonian political parties. The Macedonian opposition blamed the Macedonian governing party from the beginning of the conflict and openly undermined its legitimacy. In the middle of a war, they insisted on either pre-elections or establishing a new government, which happened in May 2001.

The “unity government” or “wide coalition” initiated by the EU included the Albanian and Macedonian opposition parties. The concept of a joined government to salvage the country from civil war made the decision-making process impossible. It turned out as less efficient to make strategy on how to deal with the insurgency. It did not improve the coordination between police forces and army units. While the minister of interior was a VMRO-DPMNE politician, the minister of defence was a SDSM politician.

In addition, there was an open divergence between the Prime Minister and the President in the strategy regarding how to approach to the international community in building legitimacy. While the President was reserved in securing legitimacy to use force, the Prime Minister went so far as to openly blaming KFOR as accountable for NLA. This trend of accusing NATO and EU of being responsible for emergence of NLA grew

among many high officials in the government, publicly announcing comments against the international community, especially after there were casualties.

On the operational and tactical levels, the senior leadership of army and police failed to apply lessons learned from the previous wars on the Balkans. The harsh terrain and bad road network proved to favor the insurgents. But the key terrain should have been seized before NLA claimed it. Especially during the second phase of the conflict, after the security forces offensive, key terrain should have been seized not letting NLA to take advantage later. However, decisive points were never clearly defined and the operations followed insurgents' movement instead of getting ahead of them. All of the decisions were counteractions to insurgent actions. There was no attempt at generating predictability through war-gaming. Although security forces top leadership blamed the government and expected guidance that is not an excuse not to be proactive and take initiative.

The senior officer corps was from the former Yugoslav People's Army, educated and trained in conducting Cold War era conventional warfare. Their mentality and military culture did not change a decade after the Republic of Macedonia declared its independence from SFR Yugoslavia. The profile of the Macedonian officer corps in 2001 was rigid and conventionally minded, traditional behavior of blind subordination, characterized by a lack of critical and creative thinking, never questioning the authority and centralization in the decision making process. The army was officer-centred, far away from the NCO-based military culture common for the majority of NATO armies. This proved to be a reason for inefficiency in employing small unit tactics, crucial in

irregular warfare and COIN. The leadership at the small unit level (squad and platoon) was not trained, encouraged, or allowed to make decisions and take initiative.

There was not a clearly established system of command and control between the police and the army. Both operated together from the beginning of the conflict, but both were under different ministries, often with different guidance, directives and orders. The coordination between the police and army units did not improve during the conflict, it deteriorated even more after the “unified government” was presented and opposite political parties took responsibility for each of the ministries. The government leadership counted the police and army units as the “security forces,” despite significant differences in tactics, techniques and procedures due to different training, tasks and purposes. The police found itself conducting offensive army operations, while the army had to deal with police tasks. Both lacked night vision capabilities, which restricted their operations to only during daylight.

Even when the army acted alone, it turned out there was insufficient training and readiness for combined arms operations. The operations were not always coordinated, often with indiscriminate use of artillery, tanks and gunships, sometimes causing fratricide that should not have occurred at that level of combat. “Firing indiscriminately like this would not be acceptable for a NATO army,”⁴ commented a German commander watching Macedonian army actions from a base in Kosovo during the conflict. New equipment and armament was purchased, without sufficient time for training, for example, Mi-24 pilots’ gunnery proficiency. The improper employment of the Special Forces (both army and police) drained the only COIN capability the security forces had.

It was an example of disregarding the principle of economy of force, as they were often used for nonessential tasks that could have been conducted by other units.

On all levels, the media in the country was not identified as a crucial factor that directly undermined COIN efforts. It was proven from the past Yugoslav wars that the media was accountable and responsible in inflaming the ethnic conflicts in the Balkans. During the conflict in Macedonia, the Macedonian media deliberately or coincidentally shaped public opinion, many times by using false biases and prejudice. Unqualified journalist often misinterpreted foreign news or provided false translations of the announcements given by the international community's high officials. There was an attempt to portray that the EU and NATO were not supporting the Macedonian government, which was opposite of the truth.

Many times the media compromised operations by publicly announcing the movements of the security forces, and pinpointed their positions on terrain by showing images of concealed positions. They demoralized the public by repeatedly stressing the incompetence of the government and later the security forces, at the same time, for some reason, dramatically magnifying the insurgents' successes. Not restraining the media in sending wrong messages, especially blaming the international community, was a huge blunder. It helped the insurgents to build legitimacy as a constructive and negotiable side. A question for further research is whether it was just accidental incompetence of the media or deliberate policy influenced by third-party actors.

Recommendations

Today, the national policy of Macedonia is active participation in NATO led missions. That should not exclude the primary mission of the armed forces of defending

the country. The temporary deployments overseas must not overshadow the ability of the army to protect the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the country. It is a fact that the constitution was forcibly changed in 2001 because all instruments of national power failed to protect it. Despite the fact that the framework agreement is a temporal guarantee for peace, and the international community, primarily the EU, is promising the Macedonian government a bright future, sufficient defensive capabilities must be built with an emphasis on COIN capabilities as a priority. The most likely security threat for Macedonia in the near future is destabilization caused by insurgent groups. In order to build proper COIN capability there must be genuine understanding of the enemy and operational environment on all levels.

First, the strategic leadership must identify, analyze, and accept what happened in 2001. There must be a generally acknowledged definition and understanding of the six-month war in 2001. Ignoring what happened (as it could never happen again) means not identifying the problem. What happened in Macedonia in 2001 was not an act of terrorism, but well organized, textbook insurgency.

Second, the strategic leadership must recognize that there is still a threat of the re-emergence of insurgency in the near future. There must be positive awareness for the policies in the Region. Everything that happens on the Balkans is connected. Small, third party and non-state groups, whether they are terrorists, extremist or rebels, are still a threat to Balkan security. Kosovo secession from Serbia shows that the borders in the Balkans yet can be changed and it is a continuous process.

Third, Coordination with neighboring countries in the field of security will help early warning and conflict prevention. Sharing intelligence on a regional level with

partners should be part of the COIN strategy. Macedonian integration in the NATO structure will certainly contribute to overall security of the country and region. However, the country neglected the defensive capabilities in the first decade of independence, because the international community guaranteed stability. Joining NATO does not mean Macedonia should neglect building strong defensive capabilities.

Forth, more flexible crisis management procedures must be developed, which will allow armed forces to support the police if needed. It should not be a mere document but should include joint training and periodical exercises in order to synchronize certain tactics, techniques, and procedures. Both public affairs offices must develop strategy to win the information war for legitimacy, crucial in COIN. The Armed forces must work together with the Police to develop contingency plans to counter the insurgency strategies and tactics.

Fifth, there are gaps in the mountains region on the border with Kosovo that could be exploited by insurgents. A good road network system is essential to allow border police 100 percent control of the border. Building a paved road network to literally every village in the mountains will not only help to move troops if necessary, but will also integrate the population during peacetime, and improve access for government services. The border with Kosovo is key terrain and a decisive point.

Sixth, Security Forces must be trained and equipped for COIN operations; the priority of the police forces should be combat in urban terrain while the armed forces should cover the rural terrain. COIN should rely on small unit tactics with creative and flexible commanders. Special Operation Forces of both must have defined specific

missions and not be used as a conventional force. The Security Forces must train for COIN operations, but at the same time to stay consistent with combined arms warfare.

Seventh, legitimacy is a key issue in COIN. Developing mechanisms to predict, assess and shape public opinion is essential in a time when mass media often unintentionally causes butterfly effects. Having control over information is important to prevent misleading messages to influence wrong decisions on all levels that undermine COIN efforts. The Security Forces must train to communicate with media, and understand the possible consequences that messages sent could have upon national strategic objectives.

The greatest challenge of this thesis is to accept the reality of an ineffective COIN strategy in 2001 and proceed, learning from mistakes. In a rapidly changing environment, the security forces must have mentality to be adaptable and resilient. This thesis does not give all answers of the insurgency in 2001, but should trigger many new questions and provoke further research. Its criticism has only one purpose, to improve the defensive capabilities of Macedonia in the future.

¹Kim, 10.

²Ibid.

³Ackermann, 120.

⁴Justin Huggler, "Macedonian Tanks Shell Tetovo Guerrillas," *Independent*, 21 March 2001 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/macedonian-tanks-shell-tetovo-guerrillas-688263.html> (accessed 22 August 2010).

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