



*Transcript
Press Club
August 9, 2002*



Brig. Gen. Lute - Ladies and Gentleman, thank you all for coming. As usual I will read a statement of the translation. To begin I have several announcements to make here today:

Opening Statement, Press Club
8/09/02

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for coming today. I want to announce that in a spirit of cooperation, here on Camp Bondsteel last week we created a formal partnership with UNMIK-Police and the Kosovo Police Service. This regional partnership is the first of its kind in Kosovo. We all signed a document that is a simple statement that we are partners in bringing law and order to Kosovo. We feel that the KPS has become an increasingly valuable institution for the people of Kosovo. As you can see, I have my two regional partners here with us today: Donnie Hensley, the regional CIVPOL commander, and Lieutenant Colonel Rashad Maliqi of KPS. Colonel Maliqi is an example of the leaders who are emerging within the KPS as it evolves into a first-class police force ably serving all the people of Kosovo. This partnership is our first announcement today.

As you can imagine, the Klokot explosions have been a priority for all of us this past week. In order to promote full coordination during this investigation, I want to make a second announcement today: we have opened a new office -- the Joint Investigative Task Force. This Task Force, another first for Kosovo, brings together the experts of UNMIK-Police, KPS, and KFOR dedicated to two goals: finding and bringing those who perpetrated this criminal act to justice, and deterring any further acts of violence. We are putting our new partnership to work to solve the Klokot case. Whether we succeed or fail, however, depends on the citizens of this area.

I want to place the Klokot incident in perspective. When our Division entered Kosovo in June 1999, such violent crimes were not unusual. I suggest that if we were still in 1999, the Klokot bombings would not have received much attention; they would have been a part of every-day violence. In sharp contrast, however, this is 2002 and we haven't seen an attack on this scale in several years. In 2002, last week's attack in Klokot dominated local and international news and brought Mr. Steiner, political leaders, and KFOR commanders to the scene. What explains this difference? The difference is that the Kosovo of 2002 is not the Kosovo of 1999. Significant progress has been made in the past three years, so significant that crimes like this now stand out and are universally condemned as acts of cowardice and hatred. This is a good thing.

But no one here should be satisfied. No one should be satisfied until the individuals who committed this violent crime are held accountable. This is why we have formed the special task force to investigate fully every lead, every clue. Like all the challenges here in Kosovo, however, the answer lies not with the international community, but with the



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people of Kosovo. If Kosovo of 2002 and beyond is to be really different from Kosovo of 1999, then all the people of Kosovo must reject such violent acts and join together to bring the criminals to justice. I can assure you that the international community will do its part. The answer to Klokot lies in the communities, the citizens and the leaders of Kosovo. The question is: will they step up, reject the violence of the past, and move forward together?

Although Klokot adds a new dimension, our mission of maintaining a safe and secure environment in our sector has not changed. We will continue to provide all the people of this area a chance to move forward. Our commitment today is as strong and vibrant as it was three years ago when we entered this province. We know the next group of U.S. soldiers to take responsibility for this mission, and we also know the U.S. unit that will follow them. America remains committed to the people of Kosovo and to this mission.

As always, we have other challenges that demand our attention. Returns, freedom of movement and the upcoming elections are good topics for your questions.

Thank you.

(Translators read statement)

BG Lute: Well thank you for your patience and now we are ready for your questions. We'll start over here today.

(Questions begin)

1) Shyqeri Halabaku, Radio Pozheran: The General - we feel sorry for the explosions in Klokot. We know that one of the soldiers is released and feels great. What is the health of the other soldier?

BG Lute: I thank you for your concern of the soldiers. And I'm happy to report that they have been released from the hospital. And they are back with their units preparing for further duty. And just as America remains committed to Kosovo, these soldiers remained committed to their duty. Thank you.

2) Driton Ramadani, Radio Ferizaj: Have you done a joint investigation between KFOR, KPS, and UNMIK in Klokot case and any new results?

BG Lute: Well, as well announced today we started the joint task force to investigate. Such investigations take time and require our patience. I want to emphasize the important of the citizens of this region in helping us solve this crime. And perhaps the most important of paper you will receive today is the one with this hotline. Let me emphasize



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that these phone calls are anonymous and before coming here I checked that phone is operational and that it can take calls from concerned citizens. Thank you.

3) Nazim Haliti, Koha Ditore: 18 arrested yesterday, and then another arrested as a leader in Mitrovica. They challenge the work of KFOR. Of course, American KFOR arrests more people who threaten peace. In one unusual case, where KFOR went to Mitrovica because of French negligence. Can we expect American KFOR to go there to arrest those who have threatened the peace?

BG Lute: Well you are correct for several years now we have detained people who threaten the security of this sector. And of course U.S. is not responsible for Mitrovica but our French partners. I can tell you as part of a normal rotation of forces we will send a company, about a 100 soldiers, to Mitrovica later this month. This deployment of 100 soldiers has been planned for months and is a long-standing plan for KFOR in troops in support of our French colleagues. Thank you.

4) Elida, AP: General BG Lute, can I have your opinion when yesterday Macedonians went public with a new armed group called Eladerda? Can you see any link between the 13 suspects you arrested yesterday and their (*Macedonian*) statements?

BG Lute: I read the press reports from FYROM as well. The operation we conducted yesterday and those who were detained has been planned for some time. We know of no link of the operation yesterday and this new group in FYROM. The people we detained yesterday because they were a threat to the safe and secure environment in my area. Thank you.

5) Tina Kraja, AP: Again with the border. Can you be more specific on the border. Are these armed extremists disputing the border? Are they trying to destabilize Macedonia?

BG Lute: The people we detained yesterday were detained for activity here in Kosovo. Clearly activities here in Kosovo along the border may or may not be linked to things in FYROM. But my mandate is restricted to here in Kosovo and that's why the people are now in the detention facility.

6) Besim Abazi, Voice of America: General, just to follow-up the question. To whom they belong? Armed Ethnic Extremist Group, could you know their identity?

BG Lute: Our policy since arriving here in Kosovo is to hold individuals accountable for their actions. So the people we detained yesterday were detained as individuals, not as a group.

Abazi: May I follow, all of them are Albanians?



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BG BG Lute: That's Correct.

7) Fatmir Matoshi, Radio Premiera: Mr. General you told you are going to reduce soldiers by 1000. How long will Russian soldiers stay here and are they going to be reduced too?

BG Lute: Each of the 38 nations that contributes to KFOR, routinely assesses their forces in KFOR and make decisions. The total of the number of KFOR goes up and down over time. And I know of no future plans to draw down Russian forces, but this of course remains a Russian decision. Thank you.

8) Mumahet Halili, Radio Gnjilan: Mr. General I want to ask you if the incident in Klokot was to threaten the progress here in Kosovo, trying to give negative dimension to the returnees. This was the opinion of some Klokot citizens. And how do you comment on this before the elections, as we had similar situations to this in previous elections?

BG Lute: I don't know what the motive was for the attack at Klokot. We are hopeful that the investigation supported by the people in the region will provide us that answer. Whatever the motive however we can be sure that the attack on Klokot was an attack on the progress of all of Kosovo. And the fundamental question is – Are we in 1999 or are we in 2002? And the answer to that question lies with the international community but mainly with the people of Kosovo. Thank you.

9) Xheladin Rexhepi, Zeri Daily Magazine: The situation in Strpce and last year and this year was very tense. Lately we have information we have very progressive processes there. On the way to Prosovitz we can see there are no more KFOR posts. How to you evaluate the situation in this municipality. When can KPS Albanians patrol?

BG Lute: I will turn to the two experts here regarding KPS, but let me first say – that I share your view that there has been progress in Strpce in the last few months. As you have mentioned we have taken down our fixed checkpoint along the road. And different members of the community cooperated as KFOR and the TMK constructed a road bypass so that the main road can be repaired. We also have the best example of a multi-ethnic ambulanta which is a clinic which is working everyday to the satisfaction of all the people. And finally the summer we've seen the return of IDP's to various areas in Strpce. I conclude that that people in and around Strpce have decided to live in 2002, not 1999. But let me turn to my police partners and ask them about the joint patrolling.

Donnie Hensley, UNMIK CIVPOL Commander Gnjilane: Good Morning, As you ask we are since Sept. 1 of last year after I took over as regional commander. My goal has been to have mixed patrols in the Strpce region. We have a working project know for the Strpce area and I hope before the end of the year we have mixed patrols in the Strpce and Kacanik areas. For this work, I have to call upon the people of Strpce and Kacanik to



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work with the KPS. As General BG Lute as stressed throughout this conference, is not up to me to mix patrols in Strpce and Kacanik ... I could do this tomorrow. I have to have the people who live in this area want it bad enough to make it work. We are the police of the people and that means all the people. So it's up to you. Thank you very much.

10) Flora Isemi, RTV Festina: Still I want to know some more about the border dispute because I was not happy with the previous answer. You mentioned that you arrested 14 people and those were individuals not a group, You told us that had been involved in illegal activities could you tell us what kind of activities were those? After the border changed there were reports that were conflicts between the people and Macedonia. And that American KFOR promised that the landowners could use the land until the boundary was decided.

BG Lute: The individuals who were detained yesterday were detained because we believe they may have a role in creating instability along the FYROM Border. We're not sure what their motives are. As for the issue of the border change – the decision has been made and stands. KFOR stands in support of UNMIK in trying to find a way to provide the landowners access to their land. This political process to permit land access is ongoing. And we stand ready to support UNMIK in any way we can. Thank you.

11) Bekim Kupina, Koha Ditore: Local elections are approaching. You think that those elections can stabilize the situation in Kosovo?

BG Lute: Elections are always important milestones in the democratic process. And for each of the last three years, Kosovo has had elections that prove part of the solution in Kosovo. As KFOR supports the efforts of OSCE, we have firm confidence that these elections as well will be a milestone for the future of Kosovo. The point I would ask you to all make with your readers and listeners, is that individual responsibility to vote and only when only do individuals vote are elections meaningful. Thank you.

12) Kujtim Shaiqi, Radio Victoria: So these days, is being implemented the agreement between Macedonia, UNMIK, KFOR. While the parliament of Kosovo came up with a resolution against this decision, and the Macedonian Prime Minister said that when the final decision will be made for Kosovo, this is going to be a reason for a new conflict for Kosovo. What is your opinion of this? What is the agreement between UNMIK and KFOR? Do you support the Prime Minister's border decision?

BG Lute: Well first, outside of my opinion, that the border decision is a confirmed decision. And throughout history, borders have been a matter of contention between different areas. And these contests have often involved soldiers. I believe that's the way of the past. I believe that border matters are now political issues. And just as appropriate political authorities have ruled on this decision, any decisions of the border in the future are in the political realm not the military. Thank you.



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13) Jovan Semic, TV Zoom: A question for the General – how come your army behaved in such a way in Klokot instead of trying to find the perpetrators? They ill-treated the victims of violence and the same time and arrested Mr. Sekovic. And this manner in cooperation with KPS and UNMIK it should only help the means to the KPS to the resolve the cases of the kidnapped and the missing. As you know there are 150 cases in the Porvero and 150 cases that have not been resolved yet.

BG Lute: This is a complex question. Let me take it one piece at a time. First of all, to the day of the 31st of July... in the hours immediately following the explosions in Klokot, my soldiers and our partners of the KPS worked to secure the area. We knew there were five explosions, we did know if there were more. So on behave of the safety of my soldiers our international partners and equally important the people of the area, we placed restrictions not only on Klokot and nearby towns and your correct we detained temporarily in the area. These detentions had to do with possession of illegal items, but did not have to do with the explosions themselves. And these people have since been released. As for future investigations...I absoBG Lutely agree that the partnership between KPS, CIVPOL, UNMIK and KFOR is the wave of the future. The sort of joint of task force that we established to investigate Klokot is not only efficient but gives us the best chance for success. And KPS plays a central part in this effort. And that's why I welcome Colonel Maliqi (*KPS*) in this partnership. Thank you.

14) Xhevat Sopi, RTV 21: Do you thing that cooperation with KPS not established before? Do you think we have to support more KPS? They can become libel to us to restore the balance sometimes KPS doesn't have the real support they need to have. Let's say that the regional spokesperson doesn't have a computer in his office.

Do you know how many pieces were found in Klokot? What was the potential danger of them?

BG Lute: Let me take your 1st question because that's the most important. Every democratic society has a police force that is respected by its people. And due to this simple fact, there's only one way to consider KPS - KPS must be considered a cornerstone for the future of KPS. I'll refer to Mr. Hensley.

Hensley: The first thing I'd like to address, I'd like to know where you get your logistics information that KPS does not have a computer?

Sopi: The spokesperson, he doesn't have a computer.

Hensley: I'll tell you what, let's cut to the chase, get with my spokesperson. And I will give him tour of the KPS station. (pause) The point we are missing here, the KPS is less approaching the 3rd year of even being police. Instead of looking at the negative look at



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how far how they have come in three years. I had a KPS officer slain Sept. 11th and one grievous injured in the line of duty. KPS worked the crime scene and did the forensics on the crime since and in less than six hours had four people in jail. In the U.S., as a supervisor of chief of police, I would not expect this from a two-year police veteran. Don't by mistakes, but just by progress. I'm very proud of their progress.

BG Lute: We all agree on that. The first time ever in Kosovo and we're doing it in this region. We should challenge the other regions to follow our example.

Hensley: What this (*task force*) did is it formalized the cooperation it had in the past. It made it formal and challenges the other regions to do the same.

15) Aleksandra Aleksivic, DTV: On the 5th of August, KFOR found a cache of weapons. The report states that I got, the exact number of weapons and everything else that was fit to be released. Whose houses belong to the owners where the weapons were found. Is there an attempt to hide the result, or is it being resolved? Can you give me this information?

BG Lute: It is our convention that we don't reveal the details of these sorts of cases. What I can tell you about this particular case is that the weapons were found in abandoned structure. It's also a good case of community assistance because someone told us what we would find there. This person will remain anonymous, but he or she stands as an example for all of us, because that person stood up for the future of Kosovo. And with his actions, I've hand enough of those weapons. I want a different future. That's the kind of citizen involvement that will solve Klokot. Thank you.

16) Sami Durmishi, Kosova Live and Radio Energi: No one asked any question about TMK and I have a question about it. I want to know if the relations are advanced between TMK and KFOR and is TMK going to get more responsibilities to the future of Kosovo.

BG Lute: As you may know we have close relationships with all the TMK detachments in this area. And this part by way, we assist TMK in their mission of civil support. A good example of TMK is that they helped us build the bypass in Strpce. TMK was also the every first to respond to the earthquake in Gnjali early this year. I believe that TMK is fulfilling it's responsibilities in civil support and that's important role for the people in Kosovo.

I want to thank you for coming to I have two fundamental statements to make. First we have formalized our three-way partnership in this region and secondly we are putting this partnership to work today to investigate the Klokot tragedy. I hope to see you soon.

-conference ends-