

Account of Lieutenant General Yves de KERMABON, Commander, French Rapid Reaction Corps (RRC-FR) and Former Commander of the NATO Force in Kosovo (KFOR)

“Think about Withdrawal before Entry”

One year after my departure from Kosovo where I commanded the **KFOR** (NATO force in Kosovo), I am both happy and honored to be with you this afternoon as a witness to tackle with you the subject of stabilization and what is today called the “exit of a crisis” and I would like to thank Brigadier General Desportes, commander of the Forces Employment Doctrine Center, for his invitation.

I am convinced that this point will give room for interesting debates that we shall have later on and, in this perspective, I will intentionally limit my initial presentation to **an account dealing with Kosovo and the manner in which we deal with the final phase of the military intervention in this province and what has been my personal experience.**



As you understood, and Brigadier General Desportes recalled this point in his opening address, the strategic upheaval which occurred in the early 90's put into jeopardy an equilibrium that was indeed threatening but all the same intellectually comfortable.

These evolutions led both to the appearance and the development of numerous crises situations, and the transformation, if not of the role, but at least of the employment and the engagement conditions of our armed forces, called to intervene in a more and more complex physical, legal and human environment, involving numerous players with sometimes very different interests and motivations.

These **actions**, taking a long time and **composed of several phases ranging from the military intervention *per se* to the stabilization phase and to the return to the normal situation**, have as an objective to recall the terms of general Bachelet during the last meeting dealing with ethics held last year at Saint-Cyr, to **"win peace"**, i.e. to put an end to violence situations by taking the ascendancy over violent people thanks to the employment of armed forces in order to build up the conditions for a return to normal life and, *ipso facto*, to the handing over of responsibilities to the civilian power (**desired end state**).

In other words and in a somewhat trivial manner, I would say that one must think about **withdrawal before entry**.

Let us then bring back those actions to KOSOVO

Without going back to the origin of the crisis in this area, and to the development of the intervention of NATO in 1999 ensuing from the failure of the RAMBOUILLET talks and the evolutions that occurred since then, I would just like to remind you that different players are sharing the responsibilities on the ground: the UN¹ (civilian administration, police, justice), the OSCE (rebuilding of institutions), the EU (reconstruction) and of course NATO with the **KFOR**, which still has slightly over 15,000 men coming from 34 different nations.

At the end of the land campaign and of the military operations as such that were carried out in June 1999, the **KFOR**, (which encompassed 50,000 men at that time) was **faced with a disorganized region and a great lack in terms of civilian power**.

In fact, most of the persons responsible for the administration and the State representatives, imposed at that time by the Serbian power, have left the province following the actions taken by the international community (IC) and the offensive of the KFOR.

This power vacuum, together with the situation on the ground, **compelled the force to take over a large part of the responsibilities normally dealt with by the civilian administration**. This situation, although always tricky, is however not exceptional; it is always the case in a first entry situation.

However, taking into account on the one hand the desired end state, i.e. a return to a normal situation, and on the other hand the fact that the administration of the province does not fall under the responsibility (or under the competences) of the military force, it was the case of **looking for an as fast as possible handover of civilian powers** in a first step to the **UNMIK** (transition phase taking place just after the intervention phase) in view of a subsequent handover to the local authorities (stabilization phase).

On this theater, which is now in a stabilization phase, threats from the outside no longer exist and one can observe a voluntary pull back ("**low profile**") of the force, coupled with

steps taken by the international community aiming at giving responsibilities to local players in order to favor a return to a normal situation (normalization phase).

Thus, seven years after the beginning of the IC intervention, the core of the **KFOR mission** today consists in **preserving a security atmosphere and supporting the MINUK to promote the transfer of responsibilities to the civilian authorities**.

Therefore, it is the case of contributing to the building up of a favorable environment in order to reconstruct and build the future.

In this perspective, I would like to stress on the one hand, the **importance of the economic dimension**, which is essential to restart the province and give it an acceptable future, and on the other hand, as far as the political normalization is concerned, hand the requirement of relying on local elites, and of undertaking education steps, which needs time, due to the former communist and local traditions (*kanun*) background of the area.

In this line of thought, it appears to me that the reopening ASAP of the school and university system, by nature aiming at the youth looking ahead rather than backwards, is a priority action.

Last, it is also necessary to promote the **actions of the political leaders** as well as their image to give them legitimacy vis-à-vis the population as well as vis-à-vis the international instances.

Indeed, after having succeeded to impose peace by force and managed with difficulty to reach an agreement between the parties in presence, the biggest mistake would be to leave alone an anemic province that has a very high unemployment rate and that lacks viable institutions and a real political representation.

The sad example of the situation in Iraq and the difficulties that are met by the coalition demonstrate, should it be needed, the magnitude of this challenge.

A privileged tool to prepare the crisis exit: the civilian-military actions

As far as the economical aspect is concerned, the civilian-military cooperation or civilian-military actions have been developed within the armies; they are nowadays conceptualized and are an integral part of all our operations and they are **first of all an essential support element of the force (1st phase), and then of preparation for the crisis exit.**

Concretely, it is the case of:

- Reinforcing the action of the force by contributing to its insertion within the civilian environment and by favoring its action especially by dealing with hindrances jeopardizing its action (flows of refugees and displaced persons, lacks in the civilian infrastructure, etc.).
- Contributing to reach the political objectives by ensuring liaisons and coordination between the military commanders and the civilian authorities and players that are responsible for the management of the crisis.
- Accelerating the crisis exit by identifying the possible fields of action, by facilitating contacts for the civilian players and of

course by continuing to ensure security.

In this way, the actions that are carried out contribute to the reestablishment of the vital functions of the country and to its stabilization, the in fine objective still remaining the force disengagement.

- But also supporting and promoting national interests in the sense that the civilian-military actions prepare and accompany the action of the French civilian players.

Achievements in Kosovo:

- Road repairs (Engineers).
- Setting up of a hospital (Moroccans).
- Waste evacuation.
- Intervention of NBC teams on polluted sites.
- Organization of conferences at the University of Pristina.
- Organization of youth camps (Ulpjana).
- Music festival.
- Sports tournaments.
- Twinning of towns.

Account of the involvement of the COMKFOR and about his role in the crisis exit process

As I said at the beginning of my intervention, **Kosovo is today in the stabilization phase and before the normalization phase** that should begin with the implementation of the final statute which should take place towards the end of the year or early next year.

In this context, and **in the absence of threat from the outside**, I have handed over the management and the conduct of daily operations to my deputy so that **I can dedicate myself to what I would call the “political and military” role which is so essential in operations.**

Indeed, due to the place of the KFOR and the daily relations it has throughout the province, and to the responsibilities of the COMKFOR (2nd authority of the province after the Special Representative of the Secretary General - SRSG), I especially dedicated myself to **develop and maintain permanent contacts at all levels** (local players, population, medias, religious representatives, opinion relays) in order to be able to listen to everyone and really become impregnated with the local situation.

On the other hand of course, I was in permanent contact with the international players and the IC representatives, contributing in this way, on the one hand, to reach the objectives that are looked for as far as the political normalization of the province is concerned and, on the other, to the information actions vis-à-vis the IC.

To illustrate this, during the year I commanded the KFOR, I regularly reported to the Contact Group, I welcomed 350 high level visits, I participated in 2 NATO ministerial meetings and I made 3 presentations to the North Atlantic Council.

In addition I would like to particularly emphasize the **exceptional quality of relationships and cooperation with the SGSR**, where our common approach of issues and solutions to be implemented has been of influence to all lower ou has echelons and have really enabled us to carry out concerted, coherent and efficient actions.

Under those circumstances, you can easily imagine the **considerable influence** role, not only in the military field, but also in the diplomatic and political fields that my function allowed me to have and that, as commander and NATO representative on the spot, I was the only one able to take on.

We will have the opportunity to come back over those different aspects during our exchange of ideas if you so wish.

Thank you for your attention.
