

NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY

NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

**HOW THE INTERAGENCY PROCESS REALLY WORKS: U.S. REPOSE TO
THE ALBANIAN INSURGENCY IN MACEDONIA**

LAURA J. KIRKCONNELL

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THE INTERAGENCY PROCESS

SEMINAR N

PROFESSOR

DR. RICHARD MELANSON/DR. TERRY DIEBEL

ADVISOR

AMBASSADOR ALLEN KEISWETTER

Report Documentation Page

*Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188*

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1. REPORT DATE 2002	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2002 to 00-00-2002		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE How the Interagency Process Really Works: U.S. Response to the Albanian Insurgency in Macedonia		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
		5b. GRANT NUMBER		
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
		5e. TASK NUMBER		
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) National War College, 300 5th Avenue, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319-6000		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited				
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES				
14. ABSTRACT see report				
15. SUBJECT TERMS				
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified	31	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON

How the Interagency Process Really Works: U.S. Response to the Albanian Insurgency in Macedonia

In February 2001, the ethnic Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA) launched an insurgency in Macedonia. The conflict did not affect vital U.S. national interests, but potentially threatened vital interests of our European NATO allies. As Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Macedonia from 1999-2001, I helped implement the U.S. response to this crisis. I perceived a U.S. “strategy” to have our European allies lead efforts to resolve the crisis, as a step toward getting Europe to eventually take over the U.S. role in Kosovo. In investigating the inter-agency process, however, I found that there was no “strategic decision” to have the Europeans take on a greater role. Rather, the U.S. response was the result of interaction among:

- mid-level U.S. officials who saw a need to manage the crisis;
- the President’s desire to limit the U.S. role in the Balkans, including the number of U.S. troops;
- the greater level of European national interests at stake;
- mixed opinions within the U.S. Congress over whether the Albanians or Macedonians were to blame for the violence;
- Albanian-American interest groups;
- media coverage;
- the desire that events in Macedonia not disrupt more strategically important efforts to bring stability to Kosovo and Serbia; and
- events on the ground.

As fighting worsened, these factors pushed the United States to higher-level engagement to support EU and NATO-led efforts, while preventing the United States from seeking to lead those efforts.

Background of the Insurgency

There had been a few, intermittent terrorist attacks by ethnic Albanian rebels in Macedonia from the end of the Kosovo war in 1999 through January 2001, but not a

sustained insurgency. During this time, there had been a dispute between the Macedonian government and NATO nations. The Macedonian government called on the NATO-led force in Kosovo (KFOR) to stop the spread of violence from Kosovo to Macedonia. KFOR noted that such action was not part of its mission to provide a “safe and secure environment” in Kosovo, and that the Macedonian government was blaming KFOR in order to divert attention from the internal source of terrorist activity. Both sides were partly right.

As noted by the Congressional Research Service, the timing of the NLA rebellion was primarily caused by “increasing radicalism of the disparate ethnic Albanian militant groups operating in Kosovo, Serbia and Macedonia, many of whom were linked to organized crime and regional smuggling rings.ⁱ” During the war between Kosovo and Serbia, ethnic Albanians from Macedonia joined the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) to fight Serb forces. The main NLA commanders were, in fact, former KLA fighters. When the 1999 KLA-Serbia cease-fire agreement required the KLA to hand over its weapons to KFOR, the KLA established large arm caches in Macedonia. Macedonian KLA began supporting smuggling efforts for ethnic Albanian UCPMB insurgents in the demilitarized zone of Serbia, or fought and trained with UCPMB forces. When the NATO nations became more sympathetic to the new government in Yugoslavia after the downfall of Slobodan Milosevic, and began to talk about turning the demilitarized zone back to Serbia, the NLA began its uprising in Macedonia.

Although the timing of the insurgency was due to the Kosovo conflict, widespread discrimination against Albanians in Macedonia gave the rebels popular support. Ethnic Albanians in Macedonia enjoyed greater rights than minorities in any

Balkan nation, but progress in ending discrimination had been slow.ⁱⁱ Ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians seldom mixed, and ethnic Albanians were largely excluded from the security services. As 30 percentⁱⁱⁱ of the population, ethnic Albanians believed the Constitution should be changed to give them equal status as a founding people of the Macedonian state, rather minority status to the 65 percent Macedonian majority. Ethnic Macedonians believed enshrining ethnic Macedonians as the founding people of Macedonia was critical to the survival of their ethnic group,^{iv} and that Albanian demands were motivated by a desire to split the country, and align with either Kosovo or Albania. The intensity of the emotions tied to this debate meant that the NLA insurgency posed a real threat of escalating into civil war.

February through mid-March 2001: Working Level Management of a Crisis

On February 16, 2001 the NLA moved from sporadic terrorist tasks to a sustained insurgency when it took over the village of Tanusevci.^v At the time, Washington was in transition to a new Administration that had pledged to reduce the U.S. role in the Balkans and bring U.S. troops home.^{vi} Not wanting to be perceived as focused on the Balkans, the Administration had deliberately leaked the fact that the first Principals' Committee (PC) meeting of the new Administration was on Iraq, and kept secret the fact that there was a PC on the Balkans that same day.^{vii} The Bush Administration also sought to distinguish itself from the Clinton Administration by cutting the number of Special Presidential Envoys. Every existing Special Envoy position was reviewed by the new Secretary of State Colin Powell, who eliminated the Special Envoy for the Balkans.

U.S. officials directly responsible for Kosovo and Macedonia were concerned that fighting would spill into Kosovo because two-thirds of Tanusevci lay in Macedonia, and

one-third of the village was on the Kosovo side of the border. A spill-over of fighting into Kosovo could endanger KFOR personnel and undermine KFOR's mission to provide a safe and secure environment in Kosovo. Initially, inter-agency decisions on how to respond were worked informally between the State Department, National Security Council (NSC) and Defense Department without a formal Inter-Agency Working Group and only limited discussion in a Deputies Committee meeting. The siege of an isolated border village did not warrant high-level consideration from an Administration whose priorities were outside the Balkans. The only European nations to publicly express concern were Greece and Russia.^{viii} Those U.S. and European officials focused on the Balkans gave top priority to the more strategically threatening Albanian insurgency in the Presevo valley of Serbia.^{ix} The decision on Macedonia was to press the Macedonian government to address ethnic Albanian concerns; use KFOR to tighten the Kosovo-Macedonia border; and work with European allies to resolve the crisis. This decision was based on CIA assessments that the NLA was a small insurgency that could be contained by increased KFOR efforts to tighten the border.^x

What Congressional and media attention there was focused on events in Presevo. The only Congressional response to events in Macedonia was a March 7 statement by Congressman Doug Bereuter (R-Nebraska) for the Congressional Record condemning Albanian extremists for the worsening situation in Macedonia and Presevo.

The Macedonian government was becoming more virulent in blaming KFOR for allowing Albanian insurgents to enter from Kosovo. In response, on March 5, NATO Secretary General George Robertson told the press he had been in contact with Macedonian President Boris Trajkovski to ensure him that NATO was taking strong

measures to prevent the spread of violence into Macedonia. NATO was also seeking to prevent an escalation of violence by urging the Macedonians to seek only a political solution to the crisis.^{xi}

While there was no decision to intervene in Tanusevci, increased KFOR border patrols inadvertently ended the NLA occupation. On March 6, during a cordon-and-search operation in the nearby Kosovo village of Mijak, NLA members fired on U.S. troops. USKFOR wounded one or two NLA members in return fire, and the NLA fled into a building in Tanusevci. In accordance with the KFOR rules of engagement, USKFOR observed but did not interfere, with the NLA withdrawal from Tanusevci overnight.^{xii}

On March 7, violence spread as the NLA began to occupy a series of villages in eastern Macedonia, leading to intermittent clashes that continued until August 2001. On March 9, President Trajkovski formally requested KFOR deploy troops and helicopters in a “buffer zone” running the full length of the Kosovo-Macedonia border. U.S. and NATO officials believed such a tasking was undoable given the impossibility of sealing the border, unacceptable mission creep that would divert scarce resources from the more critical effort for a successful return of Serb forces to the GSZ and would undermine KFOR’s official mission to establish a safe and secure environment in Kosovo.^{xiii}

Mid-March: Worsening Violence Puts Macedonia on Washington’s Agenda

The NLA’s March 14 attack on Macedonia’s second-largest city of Tetovo and its surrounding villages was the trigger for U.S. action.^{xiv} The fighting now threatened NATO interests, and gained media attention. Since fighting had moved to a city about a hour’s drive from an international airport, BBC and CNN international broadcasts began

leading with footage of government shelling of NLA positions, including those in private homes on the hillside, and visits with the NLA “behind enemy lines.” The NLA invited reporters on these tours in order to espouse propaganda claiming they had thousands of members ready to rise up all over Macedonia.^{xv} German television ran extensive footage of the fighting after some mortar rounds and rocket propelled grenades landed near the German compound in Tetovo, which was on a Macedonian military base. Given the priority of force protection, NATO quickly withdrew the German contingent from Tetovo. Although Macedonian authorities had authorized KFOR to take any necessary measures to return fire against the NLA to protect themselves, KFOR avoided this obvious Macedonian attempt to suck it into the fighting.

From mid March onward, the NSC and State Department working closely together drove the U.S. response to the Macedonian crisis. According to a State Department official working on the Balkans,^{xvi} the transition to a new Administration complicated Washington’s response to the Macedonian fighting. It was clear to mid-level U.S. officials responsible for the Balkans that Macedonia would not get the immediate attention it would have under the Clinton administration, who “would have jumped on” the crisis.^{xvii} In response to the fighting in Tetovo, there was an Interagency Agency Working Group meeting that reviewed a State Department policy paper. The level of interagency interest was reasonably high and the CIA increased its resources devoted to reporting.^{xviii}

The Defense Department did not object to NSC and State driving the U.S. response because sending additional U.S. troops was never on the table.^{xix} Because of President Bush’s stated desire to reduce U.S. troop commitments in the Balkans, officials

in the executive branch understood that additional troops were out of the question. From 1999 onward, USKFOR officials had been making clear to their colleagues in U.S. government agencies that the strain of Kosovo operations was harming U.S. military readiness. These factors shaped the perceptions of State Department and other U.S. officials of what was doable, so sending additional U.S. troops was not pursued. At the working level, disagreements with the Defense Department centered on the pace of the delivery of military aid, and sharing of intelligence information.

The Tetovo fighting made NATO more responsive to President Trajkovski's request for help. Although on March 19, Secretary General Robertson delivered the message that NATO would not meet President Trajkovski's request to establish a buffer zone, and would not extend KFOR's mandate into Macedonia, he promised to send additional troops to help close smuggling and supply routes.^{xx} NATO's action was closely coordinated with the United States. That same day, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher announced that "First and foremost, our job is to fill the task along the Macedonian side of the border....our mandate at this point is only within Kosovo."^{xxi}

Although the successful return of the Ground Safety Zone to Serbia had by then allowed KFOR to shift patrols from the Presevo to Macedonian border, it was not enough, so Robertson publicly called for an additional 1400 troops. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld was quick to publicly squash consideration of sending more U.S. troops. On March 22, he told the press that not only were there no plans to send troops to Macedonia, but no additional troops would be sent to Kosovo. Instead, existing U.S. troops in Kosovo would be repositioned to assist in border patrols.

These increased U.S. patrols soon began to convince Washington that the NLA

posed a more serious threat. The U.S. colonel in command of the U.S. base in Kosovo, Colonel Tatta, began attending U.S. Embassy Skopje Country Team meetings to brief on seizures of NLA arms shipments by USKFOR. USKFOR seized several large shipments, including rocket launchers that could threaten KFOR helicopters that regularly flew between Kosovo and KFOR's logistic base in Macedonia. The amount and sophistication of weapons seized by KFOR revealed that the NLA posed a more significant military threat than initially thought.

After Tetovo, fighting in Macedonia gained greater attention in Congress. On March 13, Congressman Bereuter proposed HR 982, the Stabilization and Pacification of Southern Serbia Act, in response to “ongoing violence in southern Serbia and Macedonia that has been fomented by Albanian extremists seeking to create a greater Kosovo by annexing areas of Macedonia and southern Serbia...” The legislation would have terminated economic assistance for Kosovo on June 30, 2001 unless President Bush certified that Kosovar citizens and residents were no longer providing assistance to extremists provoking violence in Presevo and Macedonia.^{xxii} The law did not pass. Several Members of Congress were strongly supportive of Albanian efforts to end discrimination against them, although most would not publicly enter the fray until President Trajkovski's May 2 visit with President Bush raised the profile of the Macedonian conflict.^{xxiii} A June 13 Senate hearing on U.S. engagement in Macedonia revealed that Senators were divided among those demanding a Special Envoy be sent, those wanting to limit U.S. involvement, those championing the Macedonians besieged by “terrorists,” and those championing Albanian victims of Macedonian discrimination.^{xxiv} The divisions in Congress about what should be done prevented that

body from mustering sufficient commitment to affect Administration handling of the crisis.

The conflict in Macedonia threatened to undermine EU efforts to stabilize a region of great importance to EU members, and spark renewed refugee flows to European nations. Therefore, in early March, EU Security and Foreign Policy Chief Javier Solana publicly urged the Macedonian government to show restraint in its response to the insurgency.^{xxv} Later in March, Solana began frequent visits to Macedonia to urge a political solution to the crisis. His visits were part of an intense diplomatic effort that included Ministerial statements, inviting Macedonian leaders to EU Ministerial meetings, and threats to withhold aid.

The State Department participant said there was no deliberate decision to have the Europeans lead in responding to the crisis. Rather, it was the result of a desire to manage the Macedonian problem and a new Administration that did want to “own” that problem. Rather than being up front on the Balkans, the United States had been exerting its influence through NATO, the OSCE, the UN Security Council^{xxvi} and the “Contact Group” (United States, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Russia and Germany), and close coordination with the EU. It was natural to use those same avenues to influence the Macedonian crisis.

Close coordination with the EU to resolve the crisis was an extension of existing cooperation on economic aid. Prior to the crisis, the United States and EU had teamed up to use the leverage of Macedonia’s desire to join the EU to press the government to reform. In fact, many U.S. aid programs were geared to helping Macedonia bring its political and economic systems up to European standards in order to meet the

requirements of a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU. During the crisis, the United States and EU pressed all the political parties in Macedonia to travel together to Luxembourg for the April 9 signing of the SAA, as a step toward forming a “grand coalition“ between the ruling and main opposition parties. The EU had convinced the United States that the Macedonian government needed to form a grand coalition in order to advance inter-ethnic reform. Without the ethnic Macedonian parties in Parliament being on board, inter-ethnic reform proposals would not get the three-quarters vote required in Parliament to change the Constitution.

The State Department official responsible for Balkan policy worked in close cooperation with EU colleagues, staying in frequent contact and running drafts of his position papers by EU officials in order to coordinate the U.S. and EU response. The U.S. Embassy in Macedonia was in frequent contact with EU nations to coordinate handling of the crisis. In fact, during the spring of 2001, U.S. Ambassador to Macedonia M. Michael Einik and British Ambassador to Macedonia Mark Dickinson were the only two resident Ambassadors allowed to join most of Solana’s meetings with Macedonian officials. The British Ambassador represented Sweden, which was then President of the EU. Ambassador Einik later held frequent meetings of a “Contact Group” of key European Ambassadors resident in Macedonia to maintain close coordination.

Another U.S. government decision was to increase U.S. influence on events by suggesting President Trajkovski invite an OSCE envoy to support the inter-ethnic dialog that President Trajkovski was leading. President Trajkovski had begun seeking a dialog prior to the conflict. He felt an obligation toward Albanian voters, who had been responsible for his narrow election victory. After fighting began, Trajkovski formalized

his dialog among the leaders of all parties in Parliament as an “All Party Conference” on inter-ethnic reform. The U.S. motive in proposing an OSCE envoy to support this dialog was two-fold: to supplement EU and NATO efforts; and give Washington additional eyes and ears on the ground in Macedonia. U.S. representation in the OSCE would ensure greater access to an OSCE envoy’s efforts than those of EU and, even NATO envoy’s. Ambassador Einik was instructed to offer an OSCE envoy, noting that the United States had no preference whether the envoy was European or American. President Trajkovski responded by requesting his friend, retired U.S. Ambassador George Frowick, as the envoy.

Events on the ground, nudged by the United States, had increased the level of U.S. involvement. At the time, Albanian Americans and some Democratic members of Congress were calling for the Administration to send a U.S. envoy. The Administration had rejected what they saw as the “Clinton way” to solve the problem.^{xxvii} As the State Department official noted, “Bush was dismantling envoys, so it was unthinkable to add new ones.”^{xxviii} U.S. officials managing the crisis were quick to use Ambassador Frowick, however. Frowick met with State Department Deputy Secretary Richard Armitage before departing to Macedonia. NSC Director for the Balkans Greg Schulte, and State Department Deputy Assistant Secretary Jim Swigert kept in close touch with Ambassador Frowick, staying well-informed on his efforts.^{xxix} Since Albanians in the region claimed they trusted the Americans more than the Europeans,^{xxx} Ambassador Frowick was given the mission of working behind the scenes to exert American pressure to push the Albanians to negotiate.

A coordinated EU, NATO and OSCE effort was underway by mid-March.

During a visit by Macedonian Foreign Minister Srgjan Kerim to a meeting of EU Foreign Ministers in Brussels, the Swedish Foreign Minister and EU President Anna Lindh noted the importance of ongoing cooperation between the EU, KFOR and OSCE to resolve the Macedonian conflict.^{xxx1}

March-April: Higher Level U.S. Engagement as Events Deteriorate

On March 22, the Macedonian government launched an offensive that cleared the NLA from Tetovo and surrounding villages. Media coverage focused on the most visible aspect of the fighting, government bombardment of an ancient fortress and homes on the hillside above Tetovo where the NLA had established fighting positions. The level of fighting, the publicity it received, and urgent phone calls from President Trajkovski to U.S. and European leaders raised the level of attention EU and U.S. governments paid to the crisis. President Bush issued a statement condemning the NLA, expressing strong support for Macedonian government efforts to end the crisis, and urging restraint.^{xxxii} The EU Presidency issued a similar statement.

At this point a series of Inter-Agency Working Group, Policy Coordinating Committee, Deputies Committee and Principals meetings began to be held where it was agreed that: the crisis in Macedonia was a serious problem that could be very destructive to progress made in the Balkans; Macedonia had added importance to European members of NATO; the United States needed to be engaged politically, but not militarily, in resolving the crisis; and Macedonian territorial integrity was in U.S. interests.^{xxxiii}

By March 26, the United States and EU countries had grown concerned that the Macedonians were using excessive force. Secretary Powell appeared jointly with French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine, who was visiting Washington, to urge the Macedonian

government to use proportionate force and address the grievances of its ethnic Albanian citizens.^{xxxiv} The EU Presidency made a similar statement. The EU and NATO put their diplomatic efforts into high gear. Solana visited Macedonia three days after the government offensive began, and returned on March 26 with NATO Secretary General Robertson. Solana told the press “I would like to underline today the fact that the Secretary General of NATO and the Representatives of the European Union are here together,”^{xxxv} From that point on there were frequent high-level NATO/EU delegations to Macedonia, in addition to separate high-level visits by EU and NATO officials, in a joint effort to push for a political resolution of the crisis.

Macedonia’s unexpected use of Ukrainian helicopters^{xxxvi} and subsequent import of ground attack aircraft, Katysha rockets and other arms from Belarus, Ukraine and Russia, added a geopolitical dimension to Washington’s concerns. At several points during later handling of the crisis, Secretary Powell and President Bush discussed the Macedonian crisis with Russian leaders.

Interagency meetings in Washington decided that rather than send an envoy to Macedonia, they would send Secretary Powell for a visit on April 12. Enroute to Macedonia, Powell met with the Contact Group. U.S. officials used the pressure of the Powell visit to force the Macedonians to deliver on the President’s inter-ethnic dialog, scheduling Powell to meet with the President’s “All Party Conference”^{xxxvii} for a progress report.

May 2001: White House Meeting Ensures Highest-Level U.S. Attention

The State Department, working with the NSC, used the Powell visit to force the U.S. bureaucracy to finally commit to a White House visit for President Trajkovski by

having Powell deliver the invitation in person. President Trajkovski had sought a White House visit since assuming office in the fall of 1999. Once President Bush invited President Trajkovski, U.S. Presidential prestige became involved so NSC pressure intensified to make U.S. efforts succeed, including breaking the working-level logjam on providing military aid and sharing aerial surveillance data.

On March 23, President Bush had told the press that, “We are already providing surveillance information to the Macedonian government, and our Defense Department is dispatching Predator unmanned aerial vehicles to assist in this effort.”^{xxxviii} Despite the President’s statement, USKFOR told the U.S. Embassy in Macedonia that USKFOR orders forbid sharing surveillance information with the Macedonians. Rumsfeld’s public statement of March 23 about additional aerial surveillance aircraft being sent to Macedonia noted that the purpose was to supply additional information to KFOR and the Defense Department.^{xxxix} He did not mention sharing information with the Macedonian government. USKFOR opposed sharing an asset needed for missions in Kosovo. Other agencies objected to sharing information with the Macedonian military. When the NSC announced that President Bush would formally offer the sharing of aerial surveillance to President Trajkovski when they met May 2, however, Washington agencies were forced to settle their dispute.

The only planned NSC “deliverable“ that President Bush did not offer President Trajkovski during the White House meeting was the imposition of financial sanctions against key NLA figures. It was difficult to satisfy the legal requirements for such an action, and the move would make financial contributions by Albanian Americans to the NLA illegal. While the Macedonian community in the United States is small, the large

number of Albanian immigrants enabled that community to affect U.S. policy in Macedonia. Throughout the crisis, the Administration tried to convince Albanian Americans to persuade Macedonian Albanians to forsake violence and pursue a peaceful resolution of their grievances against the Macedonian government. Former U.S. Senator Robert Dole, General Clark, and others were enlisted in the effort to convince Albanians in the diaspora, and in Macedonia, not to support the NLA. Albanian American groups denounced Macedonian government destruction of Albanian homes in NLA-occupied areas, vigilante violence against ethnic Albanians in Macedonia, and the police's slowness to halt rioting and destruction of Albanian property. The Administration was quick to have the Embassy make strong protests to Macedonian authorities. It is hard to determine to what extent pressure from Albanian American groups influenced this U.S. policy, because the motive in protesting such actions was also to prevent an escalating cycle of violence that would lead to civil war.

By May 2, the Administration was able to satisfy the legal requirements and justify sanctions on NLA leaders due to the NLA's use of increasingly violent attacks to thwart political progress, and its holding of civilians as "human shields" by preventing their departure from villages under government siege.^{x1} Those sympathetic to Albanian concerns, however, had a powerful ally who blocked the sanctions. Although all other agencies had agreed by May 2 to implement financial sanctions, OMB official Robin Cleveland blocked the move.^{xli} Previously, Cleveland had been a staffer to Senator Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky), and had often persuaded her boss to block aid to Macedonia because of the government's oppression of ethnic Albanians. Her objection was finally overcome after officials throughout the executive branch lobbied her.^{xlii}

The White House visit was critical to the success of efforts to prevent Macedonia from sliding into civil war because it motivated President Trajkovski to press ahead with inter-ethnic reform despite escalating NLA attacks, and ensured high-level U.S. engagement during the most dangerous part of the Macedonian crisis (June 2001) through to the achievement of a peace agreement and start of NLA disarmament in September 2001.

People at the May 2 meeting told the author that Presidents Bush and Trajkovski seemed to hit it off. President Trajkovski was touched by the warmth and respect he received from President Bush. The meeting went longer than scheduled, and was followed by President Bush inviting President Trajkovski for a private tour of the rose garden, so the leaders could talk one-on-one. The success of the White House visit gave President Trajkovski sufficient leverage to resist calls by Macedonian Prime Minister Lubcho Georgievski, and many ethnic Macedonians, for harsh military actions in response to particularly vicious NLA ambushes of Macedonian security forces on April 23, April 28 and May 3.^{xliii} The Prime Minister, Interior Minister, military officials and leaders of all ethnic Macedonian political parties regularly called for strong military action to defeat the NLA. The Prime Minister's nationalist rhetoric was especially inflammatory. He frequently publicly denounced the President's attempts at a political solution. In Macedonia's Parliamentary system, the Prime Minister had control over the police, who were a paramilitary force and doing most of the fighting against the NLA. The President was commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The NLA deliberately timed its April 28 and May 3 attacks to coincide with Trajkovski's visit to Washington in an attempt to undermine him because he was the only Macedonian official seeking a

political solution to the crisis. Given that the Macedonian security forces' main tactic was shelling and bombing NLA-held villages, the NLA wanted to provoke a military response in order to generate more recruits to the NLA cause. The NLA also objected to the President's refusal to allow them at the negotiating table. President Trajkovski's negotiations on a political settlement were between party leaders who had been elected to Parliament, not with a group trying to shoot its way to the negotiating table.

On May 4, once Trajkovski left Washington, Macedonian security forces resumed helicopter and artillery fire on NLA-held villages.^{xliv} On May 11,^{xlv} however, the government formed the long-sought grand coalition with the main opposition parties. The coalition nearly collapsed on May 22, when Arben Xhafferri, the leader of Macedonia's major Albanian political party (DPA)^{xlvi} appeared on the front page of a Kosovo paper shaking hands with NLA leader Ali Ahmeti to mark the signing of an agreement between the NLA, the DPA and Macedonia's other major Albanian party (PDP). Macedonian leaders, including President Trajkovski, were enraged by this apparent betrayal. Macedonian leaders and EU officials mistakenly blamed OSCE envoy Frowick because the agreement, which was dubbed the "Prizren Declaration,"^{xlvii} used some language that had been on documents Ambassador Frowick had faxed to various parties in an attempt to promote the inter-ethnic dialog.^{xlviii}

The debacle forced Washington to raise the level of its participation in efforts to promote inter-ethnic dialog. Deputy Assistant Secretary Swigert was dispatched to Macedonia to reconcile with the EU, resolve the coalition crisis, and develop a strategy for a cease-fire and negotiations. At this point, U.S. policy in Macedonia was being set by the Deputies Committee. Swigert reported to that Committee, which gave him

instructions.^{xlix} In addition, the Quint Group began regular meetings at the Political Director level and Swigert or his boss, Assistant Secretary Jim Dobbins, were briefing Colin Powell daily.¹ Swigert worked as a de-facto member of the EU delegation that had been dispatched to resolve the coalition crisis. On May 29 Solana achieved an agreement after marathon talks where all parties agreed to set aside the Prizren declaration and return to negotiations.

On June 8, President Trajkovski presented a peace plan in a nationally televised address before Parliament. The plan called for an international force to help decommission weapons voluntarily handed over by the NLA as part of a peace agreement. On June 14, after meetings with Secretary General Robertson, President Trajkovski formally requested NATO troops provide this service.

At the very moment President Trajkovski was announcing his peace plan, the NLA staged its most threatening act to date, seizing the city of Aracinovo, five miles from Skopje and three miles from the international airport. The easy land connections between Aracinovo and Albanian neighborhoods in Skopje panicked the local population. CNN International fueled the panic by broadcasting false claims by the NLA commander in Aracinovo that he had weapons capable of hitting Skopje and the airport. The commander had made such claims to a BBC reporter two days earlier, but he had thought them too inflammatory to broadcast. Ethnic Macedonian vigilante groups began to form, and there were anti-Albanian attacks in Skopje.^{li} In addition to the palpable threat of civil war, NATO forces were directly threatened by the NLA presence in Aracinovo since KFOR troops were based at the airport. Although KFOR knew the NLA lacked weapons capable of reaching the airport from Aracinovo, the NLA could easily move its weapons

within range of the airport.

The threat posed by the NLA occupation of Aracinovo, and intelligence assessments showing growing NLA strength and declining influence of Albanian moderates, convinced the United States and EU nations to abandon their policy of no contact with the NLA. Officials working on Macedonian policy used the June 13 NATO Ministerial meeting in Brussels^{lii} to forge a new direction. In reaction to President Trajkovski's speech Powell, Robertson and Solana decided that that, if requested by the Macedonian government, NATO and the EU would work together on dual-tracks: a cease-fire and negotiations for a political solution, and that Swigert would become an official member of Solana's delegation to demonstrate the unity of EU and U.S. efforts to resolve the crisis. The threat posed by the NLA occupation of Aracinovo also convinced the Macedonian government to change its direction, dropping its refusal of outside mediation and accepting EU and NATO mediation.

After the NATO team negotiated an NLA withdraw from Aracinovo on June 25, the EU assigned a "Special Permanent Envoy for Macedonia," Jack Leotard. The United States then dispatched the State Department's Senior Advisor on the Balkans, Ambassador James Pardew, to join Leotard in mediating talks on a political solution. Ambassador Pardew was not officially dubbed an envoy. Their mediation was supported by high-level interventions by European and U.S. leaders to press for progress. These interventions included phone calls to the top Macedonian leadership and public statements. On August 14, for example, President Bush followed up an August 13 statement by his press secretary supporting the signing of an agreement with the NLA, with his own statement:

This morning I spoke with my friend President Boris Trajkovski to congratulate him on his courage and leadership in negotiating the political settlement that was signed yesterday in Macedonia.The United States offers its strong support to President Trajkovski and to the democratic government of Macedonia....^{liii}

Epilogue and Conclusion

In August, the NATO team obtained NLA agreement to “disarm“ by handing over 3500 weapons to a NATO force. To maintain pressure on Macedonian leaders, NATO delayed deploying this force until the mediators reached a political settlement in September. Britain led the 3500-member NATO mission to accept NLA weapons. Germany led the follow-on NATO mission to protect EU and OSCE observers supervising the return of security forces to formerly NLA-occupied areas was led by Germany. U.S. participation in both missions was limited to logistical, intelligence and related support using troops already deployed to Macedonia for logistical support to KFOR.^{liv}

Many factors identified at the start of this paper limited U.S. participation in the NATO forces deployed to Macedonia in response to the crisis: the President’s desire to limit the U.S. role in the Balkans; the greater level of EU interests at stake; and lack of media attention and support in Congress or among the American people for a more active role. The fact that events on the ground, however, escalated handling of the crisis all the way to President Bush has ensured that those working to resolve the crisis have been able to call in high-level U.S. intervention as needed to press all sides to adhere to the peace agreement. Although U.S. officials handling the crisis are concerned that fighting may resume, so far, peace has been achieved through a European-led effort strongly supported by the United States.

ⁱ Julie Kim, *CRS Report to Congress* “Macedonia: Country Background and Recent Conflict,” Updated

July 5, 2001

ⁱⁱ Ethnic Albanians had been members of every Parliamentary government since Macedonia's independence in 1991, holding Ministerial positions. They enjoyed greater rights than minorities in any Balkan nation, including Greece, Bulgaria and Albania, which denied their Macedonian minorities official recognition, rights to education in their languages and other rights Albanians in Macedonia enjoyed.

ⁱⁱⁱ Because ethnic Albanians boycotted the only official census, the official figure of 23.5 percent understates the size of Macedonia's Albanian minority. Most U.S. and European observers believe the true number is around 30 percent, although one NLA commander claimed that Albanians made up 70 percent of Macedonia's population.

^{iv} Ethnic Macedonians argue that Macedonia is the only nation state for their ethnic group, a group whose existence is denied by all its neighbors. Greece, Albania, Serbia and Bulgaria generally claim that the "Macedonian ethnic group" are actually Bulgarians, southern Serbs, or southern Slavs.

^v The NLA took over Tanusevci the day after Macedonia signed an agreement with the new Serbian government to demarcate its border, a move encouraged by the United States and EU. The NLA falsely claimed that the border agreement changed the existing border. In fact, the agreement recognized the border between the two Yugoslav Republics as the official international border, but Tanusevci residents had faced increasing problems with Macedonian security forces over the previous year as Macedonian authorities concerned about security had begun enforcing the border and failed to address concerns of residents suddenly cut off from family, friends and natural markets on the Kosovo side.

^{vi} The *Congressional Quarterly* had reported that, "Heightening U.S. involvement in the Balkans would be a setback for Bush, who came to office pledging to work hard toward extricating U.S. troops from the region. Earlier this month, the White House had announced that it was withdrawing 750 soldiers from Bosnia. At the time, Bush had again expressed hope that the United States could turn over its peacekeeping responsibilities to its European allies." (Miles A. Pomper, "Macedonian Unrest, Serbian Aid Force a Renewed Focus on Balkans, *Congressional Quarterly Weekly*, March 24, 2001, page. 676)

The *Quarterly* further noted that early in the Administration, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, National Security Adviser Rice and "other top officials had talked of ending U.S. participation in existing missions in Bosnia and Kosovo." (*Congressional Quarterly Weekly*, June 23, 2001, page 15304)

^{vii} January 2002 interview with Confidential Source, State Department Official.

^{viii} The Russian statement read in part, "The actions of the gunmen are aimed at provoking a crisis situation and destabilizing the international political situation in (Macedonia).... The continuation of such a situation threatens the security and stability of the whole region." ("Russian Calls for Balkan Border Guarantees" *RFE/RL NewsLine*, February 27, 2001; see-270201)

Russia, looking to influence policy in the Balkan's had long voiced Macedonian complaints that KFOR was not fulfilling the part of its UN mandate calling for regional stability because it was failing to prevent Albanian insurgents from entering Macedonia.

^{ix} When Vojislav Kostunica gained power in Serbia, the UCPMB insurgency threatened to undermine a

regime the United States and its European allies wanted to support. On March 1, NATO began brokering cease-fire talks with the UCPMB in order to allow a Serb return to the demilitarized Ground Safety Zone (GSZ). The UCPMB signed that agreement on March 12. A smooth hand-over of the GSZ to Serbia was the top priority of U.S. and European officials concerned with the Balkans. (Confidential Source and RFE/RL Newslines, see-020301)

^x Confidential Source.

^{xi} Nikolai Dimitrov, security advisor to President Trajkovski, publicly chided a statement by Robertson's deputy assistant, Daniel Speckhard, calling for Macedonia to refrain from military action. (*RFE/RL*, March 15, 2001, see-050301)

^{xii} Reports from KFOR personnel at the time to U.S. Embassy Skopje, and Carlotta Gall, "G.I.'s Join Macedonians in Fight Against Albanian Rebels," *The New York Times*, March 9, 2001, p. A4.

^{xiii} In early March, the newly arrived commander of KFOR flew Ambassadors of NATO nations resident in Macedonia to KFOR headquarters for a day of briefings. He stressed the impossibility of sealing the border, the heavy strain that increased efforts to patrol that border were placing on KFOR, the priority being given to the Presevo valley. He also detailed why, except for people caught illegally crossing the border, KFOR could not interdict Kosovars supporting the NLA. Arresting Kosovars supporting the insurgency in Macedonia would appear to be taking sides against Albanians, would enrage the very Kosovars KFOR depended on to maintain order within Kosovo, and make KFOR troops a target for reprisals.

^{xiv} Confidential Source

^{xv} The coverage was so distorted and alarming to the Macedonian populace, that the British and U.S. Ambassadors worked to get more balanced coverage. The British Ambassador convinced the BBC to send a more experienced reporter better able to discern when he was being fed one side of the story, while the U.S. Ambassador gave background briefings to American reporters.

^{xvi} Confidential Source

^{xvii} Confidential Source

^{xviii} Confidential Source

^{xix} Confidential Source

^{xx} "NATO To Boost Controls on Kosova-Macedonian Border," *RFE/RL Newslines*, March 19, 2001

^{xxi} "U.S. Says KFOR Working to Close Border," *RFE/RL Newslines*, March 20, 2001

^{xxii} Congressional Record, page H838, March 13, 2001.

^{xxiii} In March 2001, Senator Bob Smith (New Hampshire) told the *Congressional Quarterly*, “a major step in solving the conflict would be independence for Kosovo...in exchange for Kosovar Albanians ending their support for the Macedonian rebels.” (Miles A. Pomper, “Macedonian Unrest, Serbian Aid Force a Renewed Focus on Balkans, *Congressional Quarterly*, March 24, 2001, p. 676)

On May 16, Congressman Bonoir (D-Michigan) spoke on the House floor of oppression of Albanians in Macedonia, “This is the time for the Macedonian government to take action to remove the institutional discrimination against Albanian Macedonians. This is the time for the Macedonian government to take on initiatives that make amends to the Albanian people.” (“Macedonian Government Must Make a Choice,” Congressional Record, House, page H2252, May 16, 2001)

^{xxiv} “The Crisis in Macedonia and U.S. Engagement in the Balkans,” June 13, 2001, U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

It was the first hearing called by Senator Joe Biden (D-Delaware) after Democrats took control of the Senate. Biden had frequently visited Kosovo and Macedonia. The witnesses called where:

- General Wesley K, Clark, former SACEUR
- Major General William L. Nash, Senior Fellow and Director of the Center on Preventative Action, Council on Foreign Relations
- Ambassador James Pardew, Senior Advisor on the Balkans, State Department Bureau of European Affairs
- Richard Pearle, Resident Fellow, American Enterprise Institute
- Daniel P. Serwer, Director of the Balkans Initiative, United States Institute for Peace, Washington, D.C.

Biden used the hearing to stress the need for greater U.S. political engagement, “...my colleagues on this committee also recognize the grim fact that if we allow the Macedonian state to disintegrate, it could shatter the current peaceful relations in southern Europe among Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, Albanian and Turkey. ... I am simply concerned that we are falling into the time-worn tendency of doing too little too late.” During questioning, Biden indicated some support for a military role, “So I do not suggest that there is a military solution, but I would suggest there is no political solution without a military back-up in Macedonia.”

Senator Jesse Helms (R-North Carolina) supported actions of the Macedonian government and condemned the NLA, “Until recently Macedonia was a model, albeit an imperfect one, for inter-ethnic coexistence and democratic rule in Europe’s most war-torn region.... Ethnic Albanian terrorists are today using violence in an effort to undermine Macedonia’s stability. Indeed, I am impressed with the restraint with which the Government of Macedonia has responded to these vicious attacks. Now I realize that there are legitimate Albanian grievances in Macedonia, but none warranting a turn to violence.”

Senator Robert Torricelli (New Jersey) spoke of Albanian crime threat to Italy and asked Pardew “...will people be harsh with the United States that and our policies in Kosovo and Serbia generally participated in raising unrealistically Albanian expectations, which unwittingly and unfortunately may have further fueled the problems (in Macedonia and Kosovo)?“

By June 22, Senators Biden, McConnell and Patrick Leahy (D-Vermont) tried to muster a compromise position calling for higher level U.S. political engagement to protect the rights of all ethnic groups, and Macedonian territorial integrity. (Congressional Record Senate Page S6670, June 22, 2001 “Senate Resolution 115, “Encouraging a Lasting Cease-Fire in Macedonia, Commending the Parties for Seeking a Political Solution, and for Other Purposes,” Sponsored by Senators McConnell, Leahy and Biden) In

introducing the resolution, McConnell noted "...the parties in Macedonia need to recognize that the United States will not intervene militarily, nor will we finance a war on behalf of either side....The United States will support a political settlement that upholds the rights of all citizens of Macedonia, regardless of ethnicity, and which preserves the political and geographical of the country." He also said, "The administration needs to give this precarious situation far more attention than it has thus far."

^{xxv} "Solana Calls for Political Solution in Macedonia," *RFE/RL*, March 20, 2001

^{xxvi} The relationship with the UN Security Council was not only one way. U.S. policy was influenced by UNSC resolutions and debate. Macedonia took its case to the UN on March 4. By March 16, the UNSC had passed a resolution condemning "extremist violence...supported from outside the country." UN Special Envoy Carl Bildt of Sweden expressed "extreme alarm the situation in Macedonia and urged NATO to take action to seal Kosovo's border with Macedonia." On March 21, that view was incorporated into UNSC 1345, proposed by France, which condemned the violence being "supported externally by ethnic Albanian extremists," and called on KFOR "to further strengthen its efforts to prevent the transfer of arms and personnel across borders and to confiscate weapons within Kosovo." (Julie Kim, *CRS Report to Congress* and *RFE/RL Newslines*, March 22, 2001, see-220301)

^{xxvii} Confidential Source

^{xxviii} Confidential Source

^{xxix} Confidential Source

^{xxx} Ivo H. Daadler, Balkans expert at the Brookings Institution, "We're the only ones with credibility with the Albanians in Kosovo, Macedonia and Southern Serbia..." (Quoted by Alan Sipress, "U.S. Seeks to Speed Material Shipments to Macedonia Forces: Country Finally Has Bush's Attention," *The Washington Post*, by Alan Sipress)

^{xxxi} "Macedonia Hopes for EU Help," *RFE/RL*, March 19, 2001, see-190101

^{xxxii} The President's statement said: "I strongly support the efforts of President Trajkovski and the Macedonian Government to uphold democracy and the rule of law. We encourage the government to act with restraint and to work closely with elected representatives of the Albanian community to address legitimate concerns, while taking the necessary steps to prevent further violence.... The United States is working with its allies and friends in the region to assist the Macedonian Government in countering the violence perpetrated by the extremists" ("Statement on the Situation in Macedonia," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, April 2, 2001. Volume 37, issue 13, page. 511-512)

^{xxxiii} Confidential Source

Although the United States has an overall interest in the territorial integrity of states, in Macedonia there is a particular concern because the disintegration of Macedonia could spark a regional war. Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia have overlapping historical claims to territory in what is now Macedonia.

^{xxxiv} “Powell: Macedonian Battle Far From Over,” *RFE/RL Newslite* March 27, 2001

^{xxxv} “EU, NATO Take Message to Macedonia,” *RFE/RL News Line Southeastern Europe*

^{xxxvi} The Ukrainian helicopters had actually been leased to KFOR until the week before to fly KFOR personnel from their Skopje headquarters to Kosovo. After a year of diplomatic to-and-fro over which KFOR nation would pay for the Ukrainian contract, it was allowed to expire -- just in time for the Ukrainian contractor to pick up some new business from the Macedonian government.

^{xxxvii} *RFE/RL*, March, 22, 2001, see-220301

^{xxxviii} “Statement on the Situation in Macedonia,” *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, April 2, 2001, volume 37, Issue 13, page 511-512

^{xxxix} “Bush Refusal to Intervene in Macedonia Seen as Increasing Risk of Balkan War,” *BNN Frontrunner*, March 26, 2001

^{xl} As Ambassador Pardew testified to Congress on June 13, NLA was engaged in attacks, ambushes, occupation of villages, “taking hostages, and putting Albanian civilians in grave danger. OSCE and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) efforts to evacuate civilians in some NLA-occupied areas have been blocked by the NLA, raising serious concerns that the NLA is intentionally keeping villagers where there are as human shields. The NLA has been intransigent in setting unacceptable conditions for civilian evacuations in negotiations with the ICRC.” (June 13, 2001 hearing before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations)

^{xli} For over two years, Senator McConnell blocked \$ 7.4 million of military aid (FMF) for Macedonia. Robin Cleveland cited Macedonia’s mistreatment of Albanian refugees during the Kosovo crisis.

^{xlii} Confidential Source

^{xliii} *RFE/RL Newslite Southeastern Europe*, April 30, 2001, see-300401.

^{xliv} *RFE/RL Newslite Southeastern Europe*, May 7, 2001, see-070501

^{xlv} *RFE/RL NewsLine-Southeastern Europe*, May 14, 2001, see-140501

^{xlvi} DPA stands for Democratic Party of Albanians, and PDP stands for Party for Democratic Prosperity. Since the DPA was actually in the government, ethnic Macedonian officials were especially outraged that its leader had signed an agreement with an organization at war with the state.

^{xlvii} William Drozdiak, “Secret Deal Threatens Macedonian Coalition; Albanian Leaders’ Pact With Rebels Criticized,” *The Washington Post*, May 25, 2001, p. A 24.

^{xlviii} That language was used without the knowledge of Ambassador Frowick, whom the DPA and PDP deliberately kept in the dark about their negotiations with the NLA.

^{xlix} Confidential Source

¹ Confidential Source

ⁱⁱ *RFE/RL Newslines - Southeastern Europe*, May 29, 2001, see-290501

ⁱⁱⁱ “U.S. Military Involvement in Macedonia Sets Off Riots and Renewed Violence,” *BNN Front Runner*, June 26, 2001; Julie Kim, “CRS Report to Congress,” July 5, 2001; *RFE/RL News line - Southeastern Europe, item 119*, June 13, 2001

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ “Statement by the President,” August 14, 2001, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Estes Park, Colorado. See also “On Signature of a Political Settlement in Macedonia, Statement by the Press Secretary,” August 13, 2001, Office of the Press Secretary

^{lv} The U.S. has had troops stationed in Macedonia since 1993, when they came as part of a UN Peace-keeping force. By the time of the NATO missions, the United States had about 700 troops in Macedonia to provide logistical support to KFOR. (June 13, 2001 testimony of Ambassador James Pardew before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.)

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