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Special Edition Interview with the U.S Army KFOR Regional Command East (Series-2)

Interview with Capt. Jace Rivard, KFOR Regional Command East Public Affairs Officer, conducted by Editor in Chief

Sir, we are very grateful to have this special occasion with you. Thank you for accepting the invitation.

Q 1: The United States has been continuously supporting Kosovo by all means of political, diplomatic, economic assistance as well as military contribution in the multinational NATO-led KFOR mission.

- **Could you give us the posture of the U.S troops in this mission at the current time?**

U.S. Soldiers in Kosovo are currently supporting NATO's KFOR Regional Command – East which is one of two regional commands postured beneath KFOR higher headquarters. The mission continues to be ensuring a safe and secure environment and freedom of movement for all people in Kosovo.

- **And what battalions, National Guards, Army Reserve, and Active Duty are parts of this mission?**

KFOR Regional Command-East is currently led by Commander, 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain), Col. Brey Hopkins. The Brigade Headquarters is from the Vermont Army National Guard and is currently deployed to Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo. The aviation Task Force supporting KFOR RC-E at Camp Bondsteel from its normal headquarters in Connecticut and is constructed of units of 1st Battalion, 169th Aviation Regiment, with the Connecticut, New Hampshire, Puerto Rico and Maryland Army National Guard. The KFOR RC-E Maneuver Battalion is led by Commander, 1st Squadron, 172nd Cavalry Regiment (Mountain), Maj. Zach Fike. This Vermont headquartered unit is currently deployed to Camp Novo Selo and Camp Nothing Hill in Kosovo.

There are a multitude of enabling units to include an Active Duty medical support company from Fort Bragg, N.C. as well as a detachment from the 29th Military Police Company with the Maryland Army National Guard.

Q 2: One of the crucial exercises of KFOR since 2012 has been the annual exercise ‘Silver Sabre’.

➤ **In what areas of training this exercise places its objectives?**

KFOR conducts the annual Silver Sabre exercise in conjunction with Institutions in Kosovo (IiK) to include the Kosovo Security Organizations with the aim of testing and training in the area of emergency response. Recently KFOR has taken a step back and allowed the IiK to plan their own emergency response exercise and publicly display their capabilities as KFOR helps train and coach.

➤ **And what role and contribution has the U.S Army in this multinational military event?**

KFOR Regional Command-East assists with the event as advisors and coaches while the Institutions in Kosovo and Kosovo Security Organizations plan and execute Silver Sabre.

Q 3: The U.S Army and National Guard have been also leading the demolition Operations and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) in Kosovo.

➤ **How important do you see and assess the efforts invested in these crucial areas?**

Since the inception of Kosovo Force (KFOR) in 1999, the U.S. and multinational partners have provided EOD support to Kosovo. Over the last 20 years great strides have been made to ensure Institutions in Kosovo have the capability to manage calls for unexploded ordnance (UXO) and during our deployment we’ve witnessed the local institutions capable of handling calls for UXO on their own with oversight by our KFOR Regional Command-East EOD personnel.

Q 4: In early July Vermont National Guard was deployed to Kosovo and since then it has been in KFOR mission.

- **Could you tell us in what missions, tasks, and operations the Vermont NG is participating during this deployment?**

Our mission under NATO KFOR is derived from the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 from 1999, to provide a safe and secure environment and freedom of movement for all people in Kosovo. We continue to provide support when needed to the local institutions through regular patrols along the Administrative

Additional: [**'SILVER SABRE' – KFOR Exercise on Emergency Response Restarts, NATO**](#)

KFOR soldiers test readiness at Silver Saber, U.S Army

News from: **U.S KFOR Regional Command East**

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NATO's Support in the evacuation and relocation of Afghans

By NATO military official September 2021

NATO is supporting the evacuation and relocation of Afghans. Elements of the [NATO Response Force \(NRF\)](#), commanded by Admiral Robert P. Burke (US Navy), are leading the operation and providing care, security, processing and accommodation for the Afghan evacuees.

The NRF has robust command and control capability, ideal for a mission of this size and complexity. It provides collective defence and a rapid military response in times of crisis, but it can also perform peace-support operations, provide protection to critical infrastructure, and support disaster relief. The NRF is regularly exercised, for instance during exercise Steadfast Defender 21 earlier this year, exercise Noble Jump 19 and exercise Trident Juncture 18.

The core element of the NRF in this operation is the Joint Logistics Support Group Naples (JLSG) that forms Task Force Noble.

More than 20 Allied nations are contributing, providing transportation aircraft, construction equipment, ambulances, medical teams, civil affairs teams and security personnel.

Around 300 NRF troops are deployed in temporary locations hosting Afghan evacuees. We are working closely with Poland and institutions in Kosovo, who have agreed to temporarily host the evacuees. There are also hundreds of NATO personnel supporting the operation from our commands and headquarters. For instance, [NATO's Allied Air Command](#), based in Ramstein, Germany, has been critical to this effort, providing transportation aircraft and crews.

We are committed to ensure a safe and compassionate transfer of the Afghan evacuees, through a series of temporary locations and on to resettlement. It is a huge effort, and Allies and partners are coming together to make it happen as quickly as possible. At this point, it is too soon to know how long the operation will take.

Additional: [NATO Staffs work together to help Afghan refugees in Spain](#)

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Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit

By: U.S. Army Chaplain (Maj.) Eric Stuepfert, KFOR Regional Command – East Chaplain

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The trees are beginning to turn. It's one of the most beautiful times of the year, even for the locals. Just weeks ago, the rolling mountains stood tall, covered in green as far as your eyes could see. As a Vermont Green Mountain Boy, you'd think I'd be used to this by now. The difference this year, is that I'm not in Vermont. The 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain) is currently deployed to Kosovo on a NATO peacekeeping mission named Kosovo Force or KFOR.



As a Chaplain, I have had the great pleasure of meeting many of the religious leaders throughout Regional Command East and have been able to observe many of the religious traditions and customs found within Kosovo. I have visited historic sites that I read about as a child, and have seen the magnificent architecture of churches and mosques throughout the Balkans. Recently I had the privilege of speaking at the Kosovo Center for Peace in Pristina.

In the speech, I stressed the words found in America's Declaration of Independence, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."^[1]

Kosovo has a long history, and much of that history influences today. Like Americans, the people of Kosovo are deeply influenced by their ethnic and religious heritages. Like Americans, one generation informs the next generation about the past, both the challenges and the successes. As I travel around and interact with Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbians, I see and hear this firsthand. I have also seen the principles and values of America's Declaration expressed. For a people with so much history, it gives me hope to hear the ideas of liberty and respect being communicated around the dinner tables. The belief that all men and women are created equal by their Creator and therefore have certain rights that transcend ethnic, religious, and historical boundaries is foundational to the respect that the people of Kosovo desire and deserve, both from the international community and with one another. The more that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness can be on the hearts and minds of the people of Kosovo, the more the challenges of the past can be overcome through mutual respect and cooperation.

In the future, a Kosovar may stand on top of one of their mountains that are covered in green trees. While gazing around at the beautiful landscape God has given them, they may think that they too are in Vermont, like I myself do. But this won't be because of the mountains rising through the morning clouds or the green lush trees, but because of the freedoms they enjoy. May God bless them as they strive for liberty, and may God help the United States be an example to Kosovars and others throughout the world, as we live out the principles and values found in our Declaration.

[1] <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

Additional: [An exclusive interview with MAJ. Sam K. Otto, Spokesperson of the Public Affairs, U.S. Army KFOR Regional Command East.](#)

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Acknowledgments: Image 1: Image 1: Members of Kosovo Force Regional Command-East from Greece, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the United States, in multinational training 'Combat Lifesaver Course' hosted by the U.S. Army KFOR 29 Soldiers, Medical team of Headquarters Troop, 1st Squadron, 172nd Cavalry Regiment (Mountain), **Vermont Army National Guard**. Camp Novo Selo Kosovo, Aug. 19, 2021. ©U.S Army/2nd Lt. Isabelle Motley.

Image 2: U.S. Army Maj. Eric Stuepfert, Chaplain of Regional Command – East KFOR29, and Imam Labinot S. Maliqi, Executive Director – Kosovo Center for Peace, lead a prayer luncheon on Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo. October 5th 2021 ©KFOR Regional Command East/KFOR Regional Command East Religious Support Team.

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