

**THE MACEDONIAN CONFLICT OF 2001:
BETWEEN SUCCESSFUL DIPLOMACY,
RHETORIC AND TERROR**

ISSN 1711-4284

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Studies in Post-Communism
Occasional Paper no. 7 (2004)



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www.stfx.ca/pinstitutes/cpcs

Having declared independence on 8 September 1991, Macedonia, “the only ex-Yugoslav republic to secede non-violently, has been considered one of the bright spots in former Yugoslavia.”¹ Hailed as an exemplary case of successful inter-ethnic co-operation, the country surprised analysts and diplomats when it almost surged into a full-blown civil war in the first half of year 2001. Led by Ali Ahmeti, the previously unknown National Liberation Army (NLA) was a motley group of former Kosovo Liberation Army fighters from Kosovo and Macedonia, Albanian insurgents from the Southeast Serbian regions of Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja, young Albanian radicals and nationalists from Macedonia, and foreign mercenaries. From February to August 2001, the NLA organized an armed insurrection against the Macedonian government.²

At the onset of the conflict, the organization’s goals were unclear. Its communiqués claimed it was fighting against ‘Slavo-Macedonian’ oppressors and for a ‘Greater Kosovo’ or a ‘Greater Albania’. Later, the NLA changed its rhetoric and argued that it was “fighting for the human rights of the Albanians in Macedonia and for constitutional reforms.” Using guerrilla warfare and brutal methods like ethnic cleansing and terrorism against ordinary civilians, Ahmeti’s group soon emerged as a powerful actor in Macedonian politics, capable of prolonged combat and further exacerbating the country’s ethnic divisions. With emotions running high among government officials and ordinary ethnic Macedonians and Macedonian Albanians alike, the danger of civil strife was real. Following international mediation, Ahmeti agreed to keep the NLA at bay if the government enacted constitutional reforms to improve the position of the Macedonian Albanian

¹ Robert W. Mickey and A. S. Albion, “Success in the Balkans? A Case Study of Ethnic Relations in the Republic of Macedonia,” in *Minorities: The New Europe’s Old Issue*, ed. by Ian M. Cuthbertson and Jane Leibowitz (New York: Institute for East West Studies, 1993), p.58.

² The National Liberation Army’s acronyms are ONA in Macedonian and UCK in Albanian. The later is also the acronym of the Kosovo Liberation Army.

minority. The constitutional reforms envisioned in the Ohrid Framework Agreement effectively entrenched special rights for this ethnic group.

For reasons not discussed in this article, the European Union (EU) was unable to deal with, constrain and stop the armed conflicts ravaging Southeast Europe in the early 1990s. In contrast to the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where its action was sordidly belated, during the 2001 Macedonian conflict the EU proved capable to use effectively soft foreign policy instruments to prevent another Balkan bloodshed, in close cooperation with the U.S. and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The article examines conflict prevention, containment, transformation and termination by looking closely at how an ethnic conflict in a volatile region was contained, and large-scale ethnic violence and regional brawl prevented. It investigates the reasons why in 2001 the Republic of Macedonia did not plunge into a bloody conflict although ethnic polarization and antagonism, a weak state, hostile neighbors, and above all an armed struggle between government and radical militant forces plagued the country. The article argues that the diplomatic efforts of international actors represented the main factor stabilizing the conflict.

The first section examines how EU-US cooperation successfully prevented conflict. Following an overview of the conflict, the study examines the effectiveness of the new institutional framework for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Starting from the specific conflict prevention policy instruments the EU designed for Macedonia, the article explains how the EU employed its foreign policy mechanisms to prevent the conflict. Since the CFSP and the ESDP were first used in the short Macedonian war, the latter can be seen as a test case for the effectiveness of the former. Though these new EU structures are yet to be coordinated properly with the international political environment, they had positive results on containing the crisis in

Macedonia. The article notes the role of Javier Solana, the CFSP High Representative. The post was envisioned in the Amsterdam Treaty, but many questioned its effectiveness. Solana's contribution to solving the conflict in Macedonia was extraordinary. I discuss the efforts of the High Representative and his Policy Unit (or the Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit, as the Amsterdam Treaty refers to it) to contain the looming catastrophe in the Western Balkans. In a co-ordinated effort, at a key moment during the conflict Solana and the European Commission offered the Macedonian political elite incentives to stop the carnage through the Stabilization and Association Agreement and the newly established Rapid Reaction Mechanism.

The first section also examines the relationship between EU institutions involved in Macedonia, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the U.S. structures by focusing on the co-ordinated activities of the NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson and the special American envoy to Macedonia James Pardew. Today the Ambassador to Bulgaria, at the time of the conflict Pardew was a senior advisor with the State Department Bureau of European Affairs, in which capacity he co-operated closely with Robertson and the NATO Ambassador to Macedonia Hans-Joerg Eiff. The importance of the U.S. diplomatic efforts for ending hostilities and finding a peaceful conflict solution through the Ohrid Framework Agreement was immense. During the crisis, the U.S. closely co-operated with the Macedonian government, especially with President Boris Trajkovski.

At a critical juncture in the conflict, the Macedonian President visited the U.S. and asked for American assistance in bringing peace to his country. The U.S. diplomatic efforts were instrumental in laying down the foundation of the new governing coalition including representatives of the country's major political parties, and then in drafting the peace plan of Trajkovski. The peacemaking efforts of former senior U.S. diplomat and OSCE envoy Robert Frowick are also discussed, as he was instrumental

in the formulation and adoption of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and the resolution of the conflict.

Students of conflict prevention and transformation have not yet systematically analyzed the Macedonian conflict. Most articles written after the crisis focused on its causes and the Ohrid Framework Agreement of August 2001, which marked the beginning of the end of the hostilities. This study contributes to our understanding of the transformation and termination of a particular war and the diplomatic efforts needed to solve conflicts around the world. For example, the article outlines the domestic conditions necessary for opposing sides to accept a diplomatic solution, and investigates the role of local political elites, top institutions like the Presidency, the cleavages within government and Parliament, and the factions participating in the armed conflict. Are there possibilities for peaceful conflict resolution if the rebels lack a centralized organization system? How did international actors react to the Macedonian challenge before deciding to intervene in the burgeoning conflict in March 2001? What were their reasons?

The article raises a number of questions related to ethnic conflicts around the world. What is the nature of the international actors' 'security' perceptions? What are the determining factors that lead the EU and the U.S. to get involved in conflict prevention and management? When do the U.S. and the EU see a 'security threat'? Which criteria qualify events for this label? How much can diplomatic efforts of great powers affect a conflict resulted from excessive inter-ethnic animosity? Are ethnic relations or the input of the political elite more important for conflict prevention? What role do ethnicity, ethno-nationalism and ethnic conflict play in determining international actors to seek conflict prevention? Is ethnic conflict important if it threatens regional stability or is it a mobilizing/ demobilizing factor for international actors to engage in conflict prevention? These are questions the article deals with.

Though the NLA Albanian rebels lacked the strength to defeat the Macedonian governmental forces, they became a security threat to the country's interethnic relations and regional stability. As the government found it difficult to suppress the insurgents, the international community – fearful of a descent into a full-scale civil war that would threaten the stability of the entire Southeast Europe and endanger the NATO mission in Kosovo -- intervened to broker a peace agreement. Co-ordination between governments and European and American diplomats proved a vital prerequisite for ameliorating ethnic conflicts they wished to avert. Moreover, the new European foreign policy instruments -- especially the Office of the High Representative -- passed the test of significance and effectiveness, and could be of further use in future EU engagement in Western Balkans and elsewhere.

The transformation of the armed conflict of 2001 into a peaceful deliberation of key points of the Macedonian legal order was marred with difficulties. The main problem rested with the ideology and the actions of the clandestine NLA. At the onset of the conflict, the NLA, which the international community and the Macedonian government saw as a terrorist organization, did not seem much of a threat to civilian targets. Nonetheless, during the conflict its actions and discourse wavered more than the statements issued by Skopje, Brussels, London and Washington, DC. Therefore, the study outlines the NLA's fragile identity compared to the images projected by international actors and the Macedonian government.

The relevance of the 11 September terrorist attacks on scholarly debates on terrorism and identity juxtapositions casts a long shadow over other international contexts and developments. Foucauldian power formation and identity moulding theoretical frameworks have an important contribution to the study of social and national liberation movements. After 2001, the number of studies on terrorism soared, while governments denounced worldwide guerrilla tactics. Clear definitions of terror and terrorist activities can no longer be supported by media accounts of

specific armed insurrections. Political power, mass-media branding and political identity discourses are interrelated phenomena analyzed here.

The second section undertakes a discourse analysis of the image the NLA presented to the world during the conflict. In particular, emphasis is placed on Macedonian and international media's description of the role of that organization in order to contextualize the NLA's problematic identity in a dialogical framework incorporating human rights discourse and violent activities. There is no simple answer to the question whether the NLA was indeed a terrorist organization. Through a careful analysis of the actions and the rhetoric of all actors involved, we get a clearer picture of the label the NLA deserves. This analysis could provide a framework useful in future exercises of labelling other social, political, or military outcasts and their organizations.

Among the questions the second section deals with are the following: What were the NLA's political demands? Did they differ at various stages of the conflict and, if yes, how? Why did the NLA rebel? Did the NLA use terrorist tactics and, if so, during which phase of the conflict? Did these tactics reflect the organization's public statements? How were the NLA's words and deeds related? Did the NLA fighters share the same beliefs or did the organization have different factions subscribing to different agendas? How did the moderating efforts of international actors influence the organization? How did formal and informal negotiations with Macedonian governmental representatives affect the NLA military tactics on the battlefield? Were there loose ends in the NLA structure responsible for destructive acts against civilian targets? Is it possible that the most gruesome acts of violence were undertaken by armed gangs with no formal relation to the NLA? Did the decentralized nature of the NLA military structure impact these groupings? Can we speak of the NLA as a coherent organization?

Overview of the Conflict

The conflict began on 22 January 2001, when an NLA unit attacked the police station of the Tearce village (Tetovo region) killing a police officer and injuring three others. Weeks later, another serious incident was sparked off when on 16 February, a private Macedonian TV station sent a crew to an isolated mountainous village inhabited by Macedonian Albanians, on the border with Kosovo. After NLA uniformed men harassed the crew and did not allow it to film, the Macedonian police sent a patrol unit to investigate. A conflict soon erupted between Macedonian security forces and NLA members. Initial reports gave conflicting information on the NLA, while Macedonian President Boris Trajkovski and Premier Ljubcho Georgievski claimed that the rebels were mostly Kosovo Liberation Army members who infiltrated the country from Kosovo. It was widely believed that the rebels sought to divide the country and create a Greater Albanian state. Macedonian officials criticized NATO for not doing enough to disarm the Kosovo rebel forces, discourage their encampment in the buffer Ground Safety Zone separating Kosovo from Serbia, and prevent their entry in Macedonia. NLA members claimed that the rebel force comprised several thousand men, coming mainly from Macedonia.

By late February, Macedonian special police units defeated the rebels by driving them across the Northern border into Kosovo, but in mid March the NLA forces reappeared in the hills above Tetovo, a key Northwest Macedonian town with a Macedonian Albanian majority. The NLA forces' strategic position allowed them to have an overview of the town and overlook a district almost exclusively Macedonian. As the NLA began firing indiscriminately on the district, there were worries of conflict escalation.³ The government issued an ultimatum asking the NLA to lay down arms and leave the country, or face a full-scale offensive. Ahmeti rejected the ultimatum, announced a

unilateral ceasefire, and called for political dialogue. In response, President Trajkovski claimed that the government first had to "neutralize the terrorist threat," but agreed to start a political dialogue on inter-ethnic relations with legitimate political parties. On 25 March, the government launched an offensive, which eventually led to the withdrawal of the NLA forces. Though the operation was applauded as a great military success of Macedonian security forces, there were doubts on what actually happened during the offensive. Since there were few reported casualties and no NLA prisoners of war, the assumption was that not much fighting had occurred. The NLA's dislodging from the hills above Tetovo led to a month long lull in the conflict.

After a calm period when the main political parties launched roundtable discussions on legislative reforms, violence resumed when the NLA massacred eight Macedonian army and police agents in an ambush near Tetovo. The attack led to riots in which Macedonians attacked Macedonian Albanians and the businesses of Muslim Macedonians in Bitola, Veles, and Skopje. In response, the government imposed a curfew in Tetovo, Kumanovo and Bitola, and Premier Georgievski announced that his cabinet considered to declare a state of war in order to have greater flexibility in fighting the NLA.⁴ On 3 May, the NLA forces launched another ambush on security forces in Vaksince (near Kumanovo), killing two Macedonian soldiers and kidnapping a third. The rebels set up bases in several villages near Kumanovo. Despite the government's use of helicopters and repeated counterattacks, the situation in the Kumanovo region remained unchanged for a full month.

In early June, there was fighting in the Tetovo area, as NLA units approached Skopje. Five Macedonian army soldiers were killed in a rebel attack nearby Tetovo on 6 June, while days

⁴ According to the Macedonian Constitution a state of war gives enhanced powers to the President and the army, and allow for presidential rule by decree, fewer restraints on the army, the banning of demonstrations, a nation-wide curfew, and sealing the country's borders.

³ *Vest* (16, 17, 20 and 26 March 2001).

later a group of rebels descended on the Aracinovo village, on the outskirts of the capital. After the NLA threatened to start an urban warfare-style conflict in Skopje, bomb the capital, the nearby oil refinery, and the international airport, the conflict entered a new stage. Fearing an escalation of the already explosive situation, the EU and the U.S. made a coordinated effort to appease the tension by urging both sides to restrain themselves. The ceasefire the government and the NLA announced on 11 June lasted only eleven days. The Macedonian Premier decided to attack and liberate the village, despite repeated pleas for reserve of the international community. Though the governmental offensive was proceeding successfully, it met with fierce resistance and the international community moved in to arrange a cease-fire through the EU envoy Javier Solana. In effect, the Macedonian government agreed to withdraw its security forces only under considerable Western pressure. On 25 June, U.S. soldiers with the KFOR NATO contingent assisted in the evacuation of the Albanian guerrillas, and later the Macedonian police units gradually re-entered the village.

Following such controversial actions, and a Western involvement perceived as pro-guerrilla, that same evening large crowds gathered in front of the Macedonian Parliament building to protest the government's decision to allow the NLA to withdraw. Protesters asked for the resignation of the President, who addressed the Macedonian public the next day, barely managing to appease the tension. To make the situation worse clashes resumed in Tetovo, and on 1 July rebel forces advanced into villages outside the town. Ethnically cleansing this Macedonian-inhabited area, the NLA provoked intense counter-attacks by the state security forces. Yet again, the international community intervened, with the U.S. and the EU envoys brokering separate open-ended cease-fire agreements on 5 July.

Numerous truce violations were reported, especially after the NLA rebels advanced into parts of Tetovo later that month. As a result, thousands of Macedonians fled their homes, and the

situation in the city was reportedly chaotic and lawless. The media also described kidnappings and violence against civilians by the NLA and renegade Macedonian Albanian factions. As the government was unable to guarantee security, Macedonians were forced out of Tetovo's ethnically mixed areas. On 25 July, NATO and the rebels agreed to reinstate the ceasefire, have the rebel forces pull back from their advanced positions, and allow displaced individuals to return to their homes.

Many local observers were convinced of neither the NLA's ability to respect the agreement nor NATO's willingness to force the rebels into submission. On 24 July, in Skopje, hundreds of Macedonian protesters, angered by what they saw as constant Western support to Albanian militants, attacked the U.S. embassy and other Western missions. While the four main Macedonian political parties pursued concerted talks on legislative reforms meant to neutralize Macedonian Albanian grievances and help mitigate the conflict, serious fighting occurred in Tetovo and the vicinity. Tensions further rose in early August after a series of violent attacks. First, on 7 August in a surprise raid of a Skopje private house a Macedonian special police unit killed five NLA members and seized a cache of weapons and explosives, accusing the rebels of planning a terrorist attack on the capital. The next day, ten Macedonian soldiers were killed in a NLA ambush on the Skopje-Tetovo highway.

While angry demonstrators staged violent protests in the cities of Skopje and Prilep battles continued in Tetovo over the next few days. On 10 August, eight more security forces members were killed when their vehicle struck two land mines on the mountain slopes near Skopje. The government launched an anti-terrorist raid, which left at least five persons dead near the Ljuboten village. While authorities insisted the dead were combatants, others claimed they were civilians executed in cold blood. Soon afterwards, the main Macedonian political parties signed an agreement to bring peace and reforms aimed at improving the position of Macedonian Albanians. On 19 August,

Ahmeti announced that the NLA planned to observe the peace accord and surrender its weapons to an ad hoc NATO mission. Though less severe than the other Yugoslav conflicts, the short Macedonian war of 2001 was serious affair. About 100 persons were killed in the conflict, over 100,000 civilians were forced to leave their homes, there was significant property damage, and the local economy shrank considerably.

Macedonian Party Talks and the Ohrid Framework Agreement

Following prolonged fighting and the spread of rebellious activity, the international community began emphasizing that the conflict required a political, not military, solution, and encouraged dialogue among major Macedonian parties to enact legislative reforms for the prevention of longer-term conflict. Somewhat reluctantly, the Macedonian leadership accepted the proposal, and on 2 April President Boris Trajkovski convened the first meeting of representatives of all Macedonian political parties to address inter-ethnic issues. Though the NLA wished to participate in the talks, the Macedonian government refused direct contacts with the rebels. On 23 April, at the fifth round of the all-party talks, President Trajkovski announced that the postponement of the national census, the return of displaced persons to their homes, and the reconstruction of homes destroyed in the fighting. At the same time, the four largest parties agreed on the creation of a more inclusive ‘Government of National Unity’.⁵ These parties were the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), the Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM), the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) and the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP). At the pressure of Western

⁵ Since its 1991 independence, Macedonia has had coalition governments including one Macedonian Albanian party. From 1992 to 1998, the PDP participated in the SDSM-led government. After 1998, the former opposition party DPA joined the governing coalition led by VMRO-DPMNE.

diplomats, who believed that a broad coalition represented a step toward peaceful conflict resolution, on 11 May these political parties agreed to form a national unity government.

The new government was fragmented, with different factions holding sharply different views on how to deal with the crisis. On the one hand, the ruling parties were highly critical that no Macedonian Albanian coalition partner condemned the NLA insurgency. On the other hand, misconceptions and distrust divided the two Macedonian Albanian parties participating in the government (DPA and PDP), though both advocated amnesty and talks with the NLA as solution to the predicament. Both were also critical of the campaign of the security forces warning against civilian casualties. In addition, there were notable differences between the SDSM and the VMRO-DPMNE regarding crisis management. The viability of the new government was tested on 22 May, when the Macedonian Albanian parties clandestinely met with the NLA representatives and reached agreement on an amnesty deal for the rebels and a negotiated solution to the conflict. Divisions in the government grew as the other coalition parties harshly denounced the backstage accord.

There seemingly was an ill-coordinated effort by the Macedonian President and Premier and the international actors to solve the conflict through talks with the NLA. As a result of increasingly deficient communication among governmental factions and lack of political goodwill, the agreement was made public before it was fully agreed upon. The OSCE envoy Robert Frowick, a seasoned U.S. diplomat, facilitated the talks.⁶ Though serving as personal representative of the OSCE Chairman in Office Mircea Geoana, Frowick acted more in unison with Washington, DC. As James Pardew’s intervention during the late March 2001 U.S. Congress Hearing suggests, Frowick worked

⁶ His earlier assignments include Head of the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje in 1992 and Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1995 to 1997. After September 1999, he was Deputy Special Advisor to the U.S. President and Secretary of State on Dayton Implementation.

together with the U.S. Ambassador to Macedonia Michael Einik, the NATO Ambassador Eiff, and EU representatives “to facilitate discussions among political parties on concrete political steps to address the underlying causes of the problems in Macedonia.”⁷ As Frowick was not a U.S. but an OSCE diplomat, it was easier for Washington to disagree with his actions if they failed.⁸

Following Frowick, both Georgievski and Trajkovski were for a peaceful resolution to the crisis through diplomatic means. The President explicitly told Frowick that with the new national-unity coalition there was no need to fight, and asked if Frowick could exercise his authority among the Albanians in the region to stop the conflict.⁹ Frowick maintains that, after complicated negotiations with the Pristina NLA intermediary and the government in Skopje, a peace plan was drafted. For him, the only contentious point was Ahmeti’s insistence that both the NLA and the governmental coalition sign the plan. Upon receiving the rough copy of the peace plan, Premier Georgievski hardened the Macedonian government’s stand by regrouping military units and starting a small-scale offensive in the Kumanovo area. There was confusion in the government. The DPA and PDP leaders decided to sign a draft version of the plan, despite Frowick’s disapproval and to the surprise and criticism of the SDSM and the VMRO-DPMNE. To make matters worst, Ambassador Eiff met Ahmeti in Prizren the same day the agreement was signed.

⁷ Transcript of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe hearing (29 March 2001), p. 10. On 22 March, the U.S. Ambassador Johnson told the OSCE General Council that “we warmly welcome the Chairman-in-Office’s announcement that he intends to appoint Ambassador Robert Frowick as his Personal Representative to the Situation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to support political dialogue and develop further confidence-building steps.” See OSCE Chairman-in-Office Press Release (30 March 2001), and OSCE Skopje Mission Press Statement (21 May 2001).

⁸ Jonathan Steele declared “it is not clear whether Frowick, who is a special envoy to the OSCE, was acting on his own initiative or, more probably, on behalf of governments who could disown him if things went wrong.” See *The Guardian* (29 May 2001).

⁹ Author’s personal Interview with Robert Frowick, 13 May 2003, Chapel Hill.

Once the VMRO-DPMNE and the SDSM opposed the agreement, the international actors had to follow suit. EU sources privately agreed that much of the Prizren deal was “very very good, and in line with the international community’, but there were serious problems with its timing and lack of co-ordination.”¹⁰ Even the U.S. announced that it rejected Frowick’s attempts to bring the NLA to the negotiation table. The diplomatic patch-up negatively influenced the inter-governmental relations. It took external pressure to calm down the tensions within the coalition. On 29 May in Skopje, during tense meetings with the EU High Representative Solana and senior U.S. diplomat James Swigert, coalition party leaders and President Trajkovski agreed to resume the political dialogue. They also issued a public statement saying that the 22 May declaration was rendered irrelevant. The efforts of the international community were crucial in moving Macedonian politicians closer to a negotiated conflict settlement. At a June meeting with Solana and Swigert, coalition party leaders agreed to undertake an accelerated, comprehensive dialogue to seek a compromise solution on specific political issues, including constitutional reforms. The EU stepped up the diplomatic pressure since on 25 June party leaders were to report progress to the meeting of the EU General Affairs Council.

From then on, the Macedonian President took the leading role in finding a quick but viable diplomatic solution to the conflict. On 8 June, President Trajkovski presented Parliament with a ‘crisis resolution plan’ that offered the NLA partial amnesty, asked rebel forces to disarm, and provided for the reconstruction of damaged homes. On 12 June, the government adopted the plan. Days later, Trajkovski asked for NATO assistance in disarming the rebel forces if a political agreement was reached, and organized talks with the ruling parties to amend the constitution in order to improve the status of the Albanian community. By 20 June, the President announced that talks were deadlocked because the PDP and the DPA sought veto powers and

¹⁰ *European Report* (2 June 2001).

hoped to reorganize the state into a federation. Talks briefly resumed on 25 June, but broke up the next day in the midst of angry public demonstrations in Skopje following the Aracinovo clashes.

Discussions restarted with the arrival of EU special envoy Francois Léotard and U.S. diplomat James Pardew. On 4 July, the Macedonian government agreed to consider constitutional reforms. As a result, the peace envoys presented the representatives of the main political parties with a single framework document to form the basis for further discussion. The parties agreed to work on the document, based on an earlier proposal made by the French constitutional law expert Robert Badinter. Due to the fragile situation in Skopje talks moved to the lakeside retreat of Ohrid. By the end of the month, the party representatives agreed to recognize Albanian as an official language in areas where Albanians comprise 20 percent or more of the population.

On 5 August, during a visit to Macedonia, Solana announced that parties agreed to increase ethnic Albanian representation in the country's security units. Despite spiralling of violence in the Tetovo region, parties initiated a final political agreement. Without doubt, most reforms were agreed upon with Ahmeti's informal consent. Indeed, after the 13 August ceremonial signing of the Ohrid agreement in Skopje, the NLA agreed to surrender its weapons under NATO supervision, and thereby indirectly consented to the plan.¹¹ In exchange, the President pledged to grant amnesty to the NLA, but not to the rebels suspected of war crimes. On 15 August, the Macedonian government formally approved the deployment of a NATO force to collect weapons. Parliament was to adopt constitutional

¹¹ During the Ohrid talks there were signs that the process was harmonized with Ahmeti's group. The NLA would not have agreed on 'decommissioning' if it did not regard the terms of the agreement as acceptable. Ahmeti commented different versions of the agreement while they were drafted. The PDP leaders met Ahmeti in Pristina during the talks. See *Vest* (20 July and 1 August 2001).

amendments and other reform legislation within 45 days, while the NLA was to disarm itself under NATO supervision.

I. International Actors and Conflict Resolution

Throughout the conflict the international community sought to prevent conflict escalation, yet coordination between international actors was often imperfect and the signals given to the Macedonian government confusing. For example, though international actors condemned the NLA's violent tactics they insisted on 'a proportional use of force' by the Macedonian security units, thus effectively limiting the possibility to engage the rebels militarily. At the same time, international actors held the view that the Macedonian government should improve the situation of ethnic Albanians by adopting new policies and amending the legislation. While at the beginning of the conflict the NLA rebels were labelled "murderers, thugs and terrorists," later on the international community took a different approach and used moderate terms like 'rebels, guerrilla, ethnic Albanian forces' to describe them.¹²

¹² See statements of British Ambassador to Macedonia Mark Dickinson (*Vest*, 16 March 2001), British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook (*The Guardian*, 21 March 2001, Reuters, 5 April 2001, and Xinhua News Agency, 27 March 2001), French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine (ITAR/TASS Mews Agency, 11 March 2001), State Department deputy spokesman Philip Reeker (in Saso Ordanovski "NLA Violence Sabotages Talks," *Balkan Crisis Report* no. 243 (3 May 2001)), Javier Solana (*The Guardian* and *The Independent*, 21 March 2001, *Vest*, 21 March 2001, and *European Report*, 3 May 2001), and George Robertson (*Vest* and BBC News, 7 May 2001). After a discussion with the Macedonian President, Secretary of State Colin Powell expressed "the US's total commitment to territorial integrity of Macedonia; our commitment to this democracy which is facing dastardly and cowardly acts from terrorists and terrorist organizations that are trying to subvert the democratic process" (US State Department, 1 May 2001). The Department's 2000 Annual Report on Patterns of Global Terrorism classified the NLA as a terrorist organization, www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2000.

With the change in discourse, the international community began insisting that the country's political leaders find a political solution to the crisis rather than pursue a military path risking a civil war. From March to May, the EU High Representative Javier Solana and the NATO Secretary General George Robertson issued numerous statements and made repeated trips to Skopje hoping to alleviate the situation. Their diplomatic efforts were compromised by the inconsistent behavior of the Macedonian political players. As in the case of other former Yugoslav crises, Macedonian politicians had difficulty honoring promises and frequently changed their minds on important issues. With no permanent presence of high-ranking officials of these foreign institutions, little progress was made in Macedonia.

The 'shuttle diplomacy' policy could prevent the radical elements in the government from declaring a state of war and influence the formation of the 'Government of National Unity', but ultimately could not end the fighting. Since the solution to the crisis was not found through mediation facilitated by OSCE diplomats, the EU and the U.S. decided to get involved in the crisis more directly. Progress was achieved through the Ohrid Peace Agreement, and in late June both the EU and the U.S. intensified pressure on the Macedonian government to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, and each nominated a special representative to facilitate talks between the major parties. The next section briefly discusses the different international players' role in the crisis.

The European Union

Since the early days of the conflict, the EU assumed a leading role in international diplomatic efforts to promote peace in Macedonia. During the conflict, the Union successfully used its foreign policy tools to convince Macedonian politicians to take a specific course of action. In coordination with NATO, the Union's actions were key for preventing the escalation of violence. As the

DPA leader Arben Xhaferi said, "troops and weapons did not stop violence. What did was the hope provided by the EU that it would intervene in starting political negotiations."¹³ On 19 March, the Union foreign ministers agreed on a package of measures including border control assistance to support the Macedonian government and promote interethnic relations, and on 23 March in Stockholm expressed solidarity with the Macedonian government, urged continued restraint, and pledged assistance with border management, refugee support, local government, and judicial reform, including minority rights.

Apart from supporting the Macedonian government, the Union held out the prospect of integration into Europe and financial material assistance to the country. The European Commission pledged an aid package of 40 million Euros for 2001, through its CARDS programme for Western Balkans. Some 50 million Euros in macro-financial grants and loans was promised if Macedonia reached a standby agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). On 5 April, the Union granted Macedonia the most favored nation status, and days later the country became the first in Southeast Europe to conclude a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), though at the time it was assumed that the country was not ready for this step.

The EU saw the agreement signing as a diplomatic gesture aimed at forcing Macedonian political leaders to end hostilities and introduce political reforms. Effectively, the Union established the SAA to strengthen ties with and increase assistance to the five Western Balkan countries. On 9 April, when the SAA was signed, EU foreign ministers welcomed Macedonia's acceptance of a timetable for political reforms under the auspices of the all-party talks led by President Trajkovski. A month later, the External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten received the authority to spend Rapid Reaction Mechanism funds of 2.5 million Euros on repairing houses damaged during the February-March fighting.

¹³ John Peterson, "US and EU in the Balkans: "America Fights the Wars, Europe does the Dishes?," *EUI Working Paper* no. 49 (2001), p. 11-12.

After meeting local political leaders in May, Solana facilitated the formation of the Government of National Unity. Later he convinced the Macedonian government not to declare a state of war, and pressured Skopje to uphold ceasefire agreements. On 25 June, the Union named former French Defence Minister Francois Leotard as Special Permanent Envoy to Macedonia. His task was to discuss the details of the peace settlement with the U.S. special envoy to Macedonia. The same day, the EU warned that future economic assistance to Macedonia depended on reaching a political settlement to the conflict, and stated that prospects for Macedonia's EU integration depended on the success of the political dialogue between the country's main political parties. When a political solution to the crisis was found in August at the Ohrid talks, the EU welcomed the peace agreement and pledged to organize a donors' conference once the Macedonian Parliament approved and implemented the accord.

NATO's Diplomatic Efforts

NATO's attitude to the war resembled that of the EU and the U.S.. NATO General Secretary George Robertson made numerous joint trips to Skopje with EU High Representative Solana to convince the Macedonian government that only political solutions would solve the crisis. The Macedonian government blamed the NATO forces under the KFOR mission in Kosovo patrolling the border of the U.S. administered province for not doing enough to curb the NLA arms and personnel cross-border trafficking.¹⁴ Skopje harshly criticised the perceived passivity of KFOR American soldiers securing the Kosovo Southeast borderline adjacent to the Macedonian region of Kumanovo, where much of the initial fighting occurred.¹⁵ NATO rejected the

¹⁴ *Vest* (22 February 2003).

¹⁵ Far more critical were senior European officers, who alleged that the U.S. secretly supported Albanian insurgent fighters in Macedonia and Southern

criticism, but stepped up its border patrol, sent military advisors to assist the Macedonian government in responding to rebel attacks, increased its liaison presence in Skopje, and appointed German Ambassador Hans-Joerg Eiff as its senior representative in Macedonia.

NATO political envoy Pieter Feith played a critical role in negotiating cease-fire agreements in Macedonia. In Spring 2001, NATO resisted calls for military intervention in the conflict, and NATO General Ralston testified before the U.S. Congress that additional troops should aid the KFOR mission, not a new Macedonian mission, also arguing against expanding the KFOR mission to Macedonia. For the General, a crucial consideration was the fact that the mountainous Kosovo-Macedonia border could not be completely sealed off. NATO forces did not interfere in the conflict. The only exception occurred in June, when a small contingent of American forces helped escort about 300 armed Macedonian Albanian rebels from Aracinovo to an NLA-held territory.

In mid-June, President Trajkovski requested NATO assistance to demilitarize the rebels. NATO agreed to send troops to supervise the NLA's disarming provided that four conditions were fulfilled. These were: 1) the leaders of the main factions represented in the Macedonian Parliament would sign a peace agreement; 2) a status of forces agreement with Macedonia would stipulate the conditions of NATO troop deployment; (3) a plan for weapons collection, including the NLA's explicit pledge to disarm, would be agreed upon, as well as 4) an enduring cease-fire.¹⁶ While the latter condition was fulfilled with the help of an internationally brokered ceasefire on 5 July, the political dialogue on reforms dragged on until 13 August when political parties agreed on conflict settlement. After the Ohrid talks, the

Serbia, allowing guerrilla armies in its sector to train, smuggle arms and launch attacks across two international borders. See *The Observer* (11 March 2001).

¹⁶ "Statement of NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson (22 August 2001).

Macedonian government and the rebel forces agreed to have NATO assist in implementing plans to demilitarize the NLA.

The U.S. and the Quest for Peace in Macedonia

During the early stages of the conflict, the U.S. sought to isolate and contain the crisis by helping the Macedonian government deal effectively with what were at the time a few uncoordinated NLA fighters. In mid-March, the U.S. agreed to supply a unit of Predator unmanned aerial vehicles to Skopje to assist NATO in aerial reconnaissance, and to increase intelligence sharing with Macedonian authorities. The U.S. also responded to Skopje's allegations that Kosovo militants came to Macedonia to flare up tensions. On 13 March, Representative Bereuter introduced bill H.R. 982, which prohibited U.S. assistance to Kosovo unless the President certified that Kosovo residents did not support ethnically-motivated violence in Macedonia or southern Serbia. The resolution was referred to the U.S. House Committee on International Relations. More significantly, on 23 March President George W. Bush strongly condemned the violence of 'Albanian extremists', and supported the Macedonian authorities, while encouraging them to act with restraint and work with elected Macedonian Albanian representatives to address the legitimate concerns of the ethnic Albanian community.

In fact, the American administration asked Skopje to reform and improve the lot of the Macedonian Albanians, thereby neutralizing the need for militant actors like the NLA. On 12 April, Secretary of State Colin Powell travelled to Macedonia to underscore American support for Skopje's efforts to solve peacefully the differences plaguing the country. At a meeting in Washington, D.C. with the President of Macedonia, President Bush announced a \$10 million aid commitment over four years to create the multilingual Southeast European University in Tetovo, which was also to accommodate the needs of the large Albanian community in that part of the country.

In May, the U.S. welcomed the formation of the 'Government of National Unity', and urged it to accelerate the pace of inter-ethnic reforms. During his June 2001 trip to Europe, President Bush expressed strong support for an intensified political process meant to achieve political reforms and greater minority rights in Macedonia. Also in June, the U.S. reportedly told its NATO allies that it decided not to contribute armed forces to a proposed NATO disarmament mission in Macedonia, although it did not object to the creation of such a mission by other countries.¹⁷ Furthermore, Senator McConnell introduced Senate Resolution 115 encouraging a lasting ceasefire and a political solution to the Macedonian crisis, while President Bush approved of measures intended to isolate and sanction extremist forces in the Balkans, including NLA members.

The measures included blocking the assets and property of extremist groups and individuals, and prohibited U.S. payments to these groups and individuals. The President also barred from entry into the U.S. leading NLA members responsible for actions that threatened Balkan peace and stability. Faced with a deteriorating situation on the ground and concerned the proposed NATO disarming mission in Macedonia on 27 June, President Bush said that he would not rule out the possibility that U.S. armed forces might be sent to this country, and that no option was "off the table." Later on, the U.S. declared that it would participate in the force in ways involving logistics, command and control, communications, and intelligence, largely using U.S. military assets already on the ground in the Balkans.¹⁸ Once the peace agreement was reached, the U.S. welcomed the Ohrid accords, a White House statement stating that "the insurgents must disarm and disband, and Macedonia's Assembly must adopt the necessary constitutional amendments and legislation."

¹⁷ *The New York Times* (16 June 2001).

¹⁸ State Department Press Briefing (2 August 2001).

The OSCE's Diplomatic Efforts

The OSCE was long involved in conflict prevention in Macedonia. Besides the engagement of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Max van der Stoep from 1993 to 2001, in September 1992 OSCE established a Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje. During the conflict, the OSCE Mission condemned 'acts of violence by both sides in the conflict', investigated claims of human rights abuses and condemned the misuse of religious and cultural sites. On 21 March, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Romanian Foreign Minister Mircea Geoana, announced his intention to nominate American diplomat (and former head of the OSCE Mission in Skopje in 1992) Robert Frowick as his Personal Representative. In May "Ambassador Frowick initiated the first serious attempt to bring about a cessation of hostilities by applying a method which had worked that same month in the case of the Kosovo rebels in Southern Serbia: he brokered direct negotiations between the DPA, the PDP and the NLA on a ceasefire in exchange for amnesty."¹⁹ Frowick's mission resulted in the controversy over the 'Prizren Declaration' of 22 May and the condemnation of it by the main Macedonian ruling parties, and consequently the international community. The OSCE Mission to Skopje took a similar view and Ambassador Frowick was forced to leave the country at the end of May.

Explanations of Diplomatic Actions

The conflict in Macedonia had a diplomatic not a military solution, Western governments told local leaders. While at the onset of the crisis the international community harshly criticized the NLA, soon afterwards it asked the Macedonian government to look for 'political solutions' to what was perceived as the

¹⁹ See "Macedonia: The Last Chance for Peace," *ICG Balkans Report* no. 113 (20 June 2001), and *IWPR Balkan Crisis Report* no. 251 (31 May 2001).

'problematic' status of the country's Macedonian Albanians. Though this policy change legitimized the violent actions of Ahmeti's group, international powers deemed the policy as the only feasible solution to the conflict. They ruled out the option of militarily assisting the Macedonian security forces to defeat the NLA as dangerous and unattractive. The 'spin' on the situation in Macedonia was to present the crisis as resulting from a situation in which "Macedonia, although ostensibly democratic and tolerant, has discriminated against and otherwise mistreated its Albanian population since independence."²⁰ As such, the NLA rebellion was justified and "the solution to the crisis requires[d] major concessions on the part of the Macedonian government."²¹ I reconstruct the reasoning behind the international community's position that the Macedonian government should attempt not to defeat the NLA but to negotiate a political solution.

When the conflict broke, "on the one hand, the EU condemned the use of violence by Albanian extremists and supported the government in combating terrorist acts, on the other hand, the EU urged the government to avoid further escalation through its large-scale counter-offensives and to start a dialogue on political reforms with the elected Albanian parties instead."²² The Union repeatedly stated this position to the Macedonian government in both regular meetings and the Stockholm summit, the Macedonian President Trajkovski attended. The EU Declaration to Macedonia at this Summit read:

"We reaffirm our solidarity with you in the current crisis and urge you to continue to respond with restraint. Every effort should be made to prevent an escalation of military activity...effective internal political reforms and consolidation of a true multiethnic society are indispens-

²⁰ Ted Carpenter, "Waist Deep in the Balkans and Sinking Washington Confronts the Crisis in Macedonia," *Policy Analysis* no. 397 (30 April 2001), p. 5.

²¹ *Ibid*, p.5.

²² Ulrich Schneckener "Developing and Applying EU Crisis Management", *ECMI Working Paper* no. 14 (2002), p.31.

able. We stand ready to assist in this process in FYROM within the framework of the considerable assistance which the European Union is giving already to FYROM [sic].”²³

While the EU Council told Macedonia reforms were needed, High Representative Solana remarked on the troublesome points in need of change. Talking in the European Parliament, Solana said that the preamble to the Macedonian constitution, which recognizes the country as "the national state of the Macedonian people," is "not appropriate" and "eventually must be changed."²⁴

After the March offensive around Tetovo, in which the Macedonian security forces appeared to have defeated the rebels, Solana warned the crisis was not over yet, but was becoming more political than military in nature, and urged 'all Macedonians' to "address urgently the root causes of legitimate grievance."²⁵ This 'reformist' EU stance remained unchanged during the conflict. Diplomacy was used to find a political solution to the crisis. When on 9 April Macedonia signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), the EU Council of Ministers President Anna Lindh declared that

"it is most satisfying that the EU is able to support and encourage the reform efforts of FYROM in this way, despite the difficulties of recent months" and that Macedonia needs an "ambitious action plan for fundamental reforms - political, economic, social and legal - to consolidate a true democratic and multiethnic society in FYROM [sic]."²⁶

²³ EU's Stockholm European Council Presidency Conclusions: "Declaration on FYROM, Western Balkans," (23-24 March 2001).

²⁴ *European Report* (31 March 2001).

²⁵ *European Report* (28 March 2001).

²⁶ *European Report* (12 April 2001).

The radicalization of the situation in late April and May did not fundamentally alter the Union's crisis management approach. After the gruesome murder of Macedonian security forces members near Tetovo, the EU Commissioner for External Relations Chris Patten repeated that while the Union condemned the murders it also considered political reform in the country a must. Patten appealed to Macedonian political leaders "to stand firm in the face of this new attack, and to redouble their commitment to the dialogue they had begun."²⁷ Similarly, Solana asked for calm, and stressed that intensified political dialogue was the only way to solve the crisis. In response to escalated tension, the EU tried to coordinate better its diplomatic efforts with NATO and the U.S..

After the failure of the Frowick mission and the Aracinovo incident, the EU stepped up its peacemaking efforts to announce substantial financial aid packages for Macedonia conditional on peaceful conflict resolution. By late June, the Union had synchronized its position with the American administration to improve coordination and communication between their special envoys to Skopje. At the time, "international mediators no longer left the negotiation process to the parties, but tabled their own proposals in order to achieve some progress."²⁸ But the EU remained firmly convinced that the crisis had to be solved through political reform, as demonstrated by the statement Lindth, Solana and Patten jointly issued after the Aracinovo incident.

The diplomats condemned the violence in Macedonia and stated that the Union still sought to do the utmost to "assist the democratically elected government in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to achieve a solution to this crisis through dialogue, and to restore peace and calm for all its citizens."²⁹ They overruled military assistance to the Macedonian government, asked the latter to exercise restraint and propose legislative

²⁷ EU Statement (29 April 2001).

²⁸ Schneckener, "Developing and Applying," p.34.

²⁹ EU Statement by Anna Lindh, Javier Solana & Chris Patten (26 June 2001).

amendments bettering the position of the Macedonian Albanians, and asked Skopje to stop trying to win a military victory over Albanian rebels and instead resume negotiations on political reforms if wishing to receive EU aid.³⁰ Washington DC shared this position on the Macedonian crisis.

The U.S. officials formulated an official position on the conflict much later. Transcripts of the 29 March 2001 hearing before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe demonstrate that the U.S. shared much of the EU's position on conflict resolution. At the hearing, key witnesses were Supreme Allied Commander Europe (NATO) General Joseph W. Ralston, the U.S. European Command and Supreme Allied Commander Europe, NATO and Ambassador James W. Pardew, Department of State official, Daan Everts, the then Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo. In his testimony, General Ralston touched on the U.S. missions participating in multinational taskforces in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo.

With respect to the disturbances in Macedonia, Ralston's main concern was to avoid disturbing the supply line of the U.S. KFOR troops in Kosovo. He mentioned that U.S. soldiers with the mission "intensified our patrols on the Kosovo border, in order to do everything that can to cut down on the number of arms and armed fighters that go back and forth across that border,"³¹ explained that the nature of the terrain prevented the U.S. forces from sealing off the border, and presented the coordinated EU-NATO effort. He further noted that NATO "tried to put the pressure onto the Albanian extremist groups that this is action that will not be tolerated, and at the same time we have appealed for restraint on the part of the FYROM [sic] Government to not go in and attack villages and cause this problem to get even worse," and concluded by saying that "we need to continue the efforts on a

³⁰ UPI (25 June 2001) and *European Report* (27 June 2001).

³¹ Transcript of Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe hearing on 29 March 2001, CSCE 107-1-1, p.7.

diplomatic and political side, to try to contain the violence."³² For the NATO chief military officer in Europe, the Macedonian government was to be restrained and diplomatic and political efforts pursued.

Ambassador Pardew's testimony clarified the position of the U.S. administration on the subject. He said that despite notable progress in Kosovo "unfortunately, a small number of Albanian extremists have taken up arms to forcibly promote their political agenda in Macedonia and southern Serbia, at the expense of the majority of moderate Albanians." Pardew noted the concerted diplomatic effort of the American authorities, NATO, EU and the Macedonian government. The aim was to help Skopje meet its security needs, and focus aid "on programs to diffuse inter-ethnic tensions and address Albanian grievances."³³ In other words, the U.S. insisted "on improved human rights situations and living conditions for ethnic Albanians in Macedonia" and demanded "calibrated and proportional security measures by national forces in Serbia and Macedonia."³⁴ Responding Senator Hilary Clinton, the general stressed the importance for the KFOR of the supply line via Thessaloniki and Macedonia to Kosovo, and declared that "in fact, if we would lose that supply line then we would be in dire straights."³⁵ Ralston admitted to the possibility of the "falling of Macedonia" and expressed concerns for a potential mass refugee exodus destabilizing the region.

In his testimony, Pardew reiterated his concern over European stability, a key issue for the U.S., and said that the States had to continue to support stability in the Balkans as a work-in-progress. On the local Albanian community's support for the NLA, he said that despite lack of significant support to the extremists "there are legitimate complaints in the Albanian community about their status as citizens of Macedonia" and

³² Ibid, p. 8.

³³ Ibid, p. 9.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 10.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 19.

“legitimate minority rights issues need to be addressed.”³⁶ In the ‘prepared submission’ to the hearing, Pardew suggested that the NLA aimed to “seek a settlement that would put northern Macedonia beyond Skopje’s control, allowing them to operate without regard for borders.”³⁷

More importantly, the U.S. “encouraged the government to respond proportionately to attacks by extremists and to exercise restraint, taking all possible steps to avoid civilian casualties,” and “to launch a broad-based dialogue with elected representatives of the Albanian community to address legitimate concerns.”³⁸ Hence, the American strategy regarding the Macedonian conflict was multilayered, including measures like

“support of moderate political leaders in Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia, active measures by UNMIK and KFOR to reduce the ability of extremists to use Kosovo and the Ground Security Zone as safe havens for insurgents, improving the human rights situation for ethnic Albanians in Macedonia and Serbia, demanding calibrated and proportional security measures by national forces in Serbia and Macedonia; promoting reform of the FRY/Serbian security forces, and enhancing the capabilities of the Macedonian security forces.”³⁹

International actors ruled out a military solution to the conflict. Not surprisingly, even as he pledged U.S. support for the Macedonian government, Secretary of State Colin Powell urged it to “tackle the grievances” of the Albanian minority and not alienate that group through excessive military action. Powell urged Skopje to “start to look at the points of irritation in your society,” and later said that “there may be some constitutional

changes you want to look at.”⁴⁰ NATO Secretary General George Robertson and other Western leaders espoused similar views.⁴¹ Paradoxically, while experts considered Macedonia the only Southeast European country seeking to promote minority rights and multiculturalism, “the underlying message was that a substantial portion of the blame for the violence resided with the Macedonian authorities and the very makeup of the Macedonian state.”⁴²

Pardew presented this position at another Congressional Hearing devoted to the Macedonian crisis in response to one of Senator Lugar’s questions. In replay, Pardew said that “whether or not the US or NATO should be -- should assume responsibility for an insurgency that’s in Macedonia, *somewhat created by the Macedonian government in its treatment of its citizens*, is a very serious question [italics added].”⁴³ Pardew testified that while responsible to protect its territory and citizens, the Macedonian government “must respond to extremist provocation in a measured and proportionate way that protects the lives of civilians” and that “the ongoing military standoff makes all the more urgent the need for progress on the political front.”⁴⁴ He said that “our objectives

⁴⁰ Quoted by Reuters (23 March 2001).

⁴¹ Solana, quoted by *Financial Times* (28 March 2001), p. 2.

⁴² Carpenter, “Waist Deep,” p. 9.

⁴³ Transcript of Senate Committee on Foreign Relations hearing (13 June 2001)

⁴⁴ Transcript of Senate Committee on Foreign Relations hearing (13 June 2001), p.8. In his written statement to the Senate Committee, Pardew explicitly noted that “the roots of the problem in Macedonia, and thus the dimensions of a solution to the crisis, extend beyond the security sphere. No purely military approach can resolve this conflict. Efforts to quell the armed insurgency must take place, therefore, within a framework of political measures that advance Macedonia along the path of necessary democratic, social, and economic reforms. Working hand-in-hand with our European Allies, with NATO, the EU and the OSCE, the Administration is urging the Government of Macedonia to exercise restraint in its military response, while at the same time we are stressing the importance of taking concrete steps quickly to address legitimate minority grievances, ameliorate ethnic tensions, and strengthen Macedonia’s multiethnic democratic institutions.”

³⁶ Ibid, p. 21.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 42.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 42.

³⁹ Ibid, p.43.

are to quickly stabilize the security situation in Macedonia while at the same time laying a foundation for a *political solution acceptable to all ethnic groups in Macedonia* [italics added].⁴⁵ Pardew specifically mentioned the areas which, according to the U.S., Macedonia had to take into account the “inequities in terms of Albanian participation in the institutions of government: the police force, the military, their access to resources, their cultural identity, language.”⁴⁶ Working side by side with its European partners, the U.S. was to adhere to the agreed upon strategy, being at the same time aware that it was next to impossible to cut the NLA’s supply lines.

Consider also the 11 July testimony of Pardew’s superior, Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, at a Europe Subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee hearing on the situation in the Balkans:

“In Macedonia, a violent insurgency is destabilizing a country that has experienced 10 years of democratic, multi-ethnic governance. We’re working with our allies to put Macedonia back on the path of democratic development and Euro-Atlantic integration. This will require political reforms that are significant but achievable within Macedonia’s democratic political process... We are certainly working extremely hard with all of the parties in Macedonia, with all of the members of the unity government, to accomplish a political settlement that takes into consideration the concerns of all ethnic groups in Macedonia... There is no future for Macedonia in a military settlement.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 8. In his testimony, Pardew wrote that “our strategy includes using all the diplomatic tools at our disposal to encourage serious progress on political reforms that address legitimate ethnic Albanian grievances.”

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 18.

⁴⁷ Transcript of the Hearing of the Europe Subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee (11 July 2001), p. 35.

Ms. Jones specified that there was “discussion of a fundamental change in various elements of the political structure and including the constitution in Macedonia to speak to the ethnic issues that have obtained in the country for quite some time.”⁴⁸ She repeatedly spoke about the U.S. being against Albanian extremism, but pointed out that the only possible strategy for stopping the conflict was a political reform in Macedonia.

On 30 July, Department of State Spokesman Charles Hunter told journalists that the U.S. strongly condemned a “pattern of deliberate cease-fire violations by ethnic Albanian armed groups in Macedonia, violence and intimidation perpetrated by the extremists against ethnic Macedonian civilians, including the burning of their homes, as well as planting land mines in civilian areas and on public roads.” He further stated that “such violations undermine the efforts of elected representatives to achieve a political solution, which all sides have said they support” and that “all parties need to press forward with negotiations and reach an agreement that addresses the concerns of all sides, that respects the rights of all the people of Macedonia, and that preserves Macedonia’s territorial integrity and sovereignty.”⁴⁹

Finally, on 6 June the American Permanent Representative to the OSCE Permanent Council David Johnson stressed that “events in Macedonia are of great concern to all of us,” and that “these actions of violence must stop now... ethnic Albanian extremism is harming greatly the interests of Albanians in Macedonia and throughout the region.” He then specified the desired course of action for the Macedonian government: “we encourage Macedonia’s legitimately elected government and party leaders, even in these most difficult moments, to press forward on the correct path they have chosen: inter-ethnic dialogue to address the concerns of all citizens of Macedonia, together with measured

⁴⁸ Transcript of the Hearing of the Europe Subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee (11 July 2001), p. 39.

⁴⁹ Daily Briefing, US Department of State (30 July 2001).

response to provocations."⁵⁰ Such statements suggest that the U.S. administration believed that the successful completion of the Ohrid all-party talks on legislative reforms could neutralize the NLA's violent actions and achieve peace.

Several factors could explain the international actors' choice for such a policy. Following Oxford Analytica, while the U.S. did not plan to interfere in another Balkan conflict, the EU military response was unlikely because the dangers were too great.⁵¹ Once on the ground, a European force could either crack down on Albanian fighters and provoke a backlash in Kosovo or remain neutral and de facto allow the NLA to intensify attacks in hopes that the country would ultimately divide into an Albanian and a Macedonian zone. The latter scenario risked the danger of having the Macedonian multiparty and multiethnic government coalition fall. The former option was unfeasible because "if Kosovar Albanians perceive KFOR as an enemy, the international presence in Kosovo will quickly become un-tenable."⁵² Carpenter believed that NATO military intervention against the NLA was unlikely. Though "this strategy has a greater potential to dampen the mounting threat of instability in the Balkan," it likely would have allowed Kosovo Albanians to regard NATO forces as an enemy and launch attacks against alliance troops.

Knowing that there "is little stomach in the US for enduring casualties in murky struggles that have little to do with US security interests, the insurgents would probably make US forces prominent targets."⁵³ William Pfaff had a similar view:

"Washington says that it wishes to preserve its "credibility" with the Albanians. In fact, it is appeasing Albanian extremists. A factor in the situation is that the guerrillas are blackmailing Washington. They, or

extremists among them, know that if the United States turns against them, they can provoke a major crisis between Americans and NATO allies, and profit from what follows. The scenario would involve killing enough U.S. soldiers to provoke the Bush government and Congress into pulling American troops out of the Balkans. It is a reckless scenario, dangerous for all concerned, and possibly fatal to NATO. But it is plausible."⁵⁴

President Bush believed that guerrilla attacks against the NATO soldiers in Kosovo were probable. His Executive Order mentioned rebel attacks against American troops: "in March 2001, guerrillas operating on the border between Kosovo and Macedonia attempted to fire upon U.S. soldiers participating in the international security presence in Kosovo known as the Kosovo Force (KFOR)" and that also "guerrilla leaders subsequently made public threats against KFOR."⁵⁵

In fact, Carpenter argued that American and Western European elites were desperate to avoid a NATO military mission in Macedonia, and that winning the support for committing troops to Macedonia was problematic given the American public and congressional opposition to the original Kosovo intervention. Carpenter added that it was be "acutely awkward for the NATO governments that had portrayed their intervention in Kosovo as a moral crusade on behalf of mistreated ethnic Albanians to explain to their legislatures and publics that the alliance must now intervene to prevent the same faction from running amok and destabilizing a democratic neighbor."⁵⁶ To intervene against the NLA and risk clashing with the KLA would effectively

⁵⁰ Statement by Ambassador Johnson (6 June 2001).

⁵¹ Oxford Analytica (27 March 2001).

⁵² Oxford Analytica (27 March 2001).

⁵³ Carpenter, "Waist Deep," p. 9.

⁵⁴ William Pfaff, in "The Balkans Boil Over: The U.S. ties NATO's hands," *Commonweal* (6 April 2001), page 8.

⁵⁵ "Declaration of National Emergency With Respect to the Western Balkans Region" by US President Bush (27 June 2001).

⁵⁶ Carpenter, "Waist Deep," p. 9.

undermine the success of the 1999 NATO intervention in Kosovo. This was unacceptable.

Rejecting military intervention and worrying that the Macedonian security forces actions against the NLA could lead to civil war and regional instability, the U.S. insisted that the only possible venue was to pressure the Macedonian government to show restraint and adopt legislative amendments that rendered the rebels' demands a moot point by protecting the rights of Macedonian Albanians. In fact, Ambassador Frowick testified that in late March, after the Macedonian security forces offensive in Tetovo, the U.S. Administration decided for a political solution to the conflict.⁵⁷ Pardew told the Senate Committee for European Relations that "we don't see a military solution to this. We see a solution more on the order of the confidence-building measures that were implemented in southern Serbia being implemented in Macedonia as a way to get at the fundamental problem, which is separating the insurgents from their population support base."⁵⁸

At a Congressional hearing on events in Southeast Europe, Assistant Secretary Jones said on the possible involvement of U.S. combat troops in the conflict that "because of past years of extremely bad experience in the Balkans, there is a very, very strong effort underway to do as much as we possibly can to force the political process so that there will not be -- so that the question you raise will not ever come to the president's desk."⁵⁹ Answering a question on the possibility of sending troops to bring stability to Macedonia, President Bush rejected the option and said that "most people believe there's still a political solution available before troops are committed."⁶⁰ That the U.S. did not want a military solution to the conflict was evident from the Washington's

⁵⁷ Author's personal interview with Robert Frowick, 13 May 2003, Chapel Hill.

⁵⁸ Transcript of Senate Committee on Foreign Relations hearing (13 June 2001), p. 23.

⁵⁹ Transcript of Europe Subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee hearing (11 July 2001), p. 64.

⁶⁰ Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents (18 June 2001).

position on military hardware acquisition by the Macedonian government. After Skopje bought attack helicopters and a Sukhoi fighter-bomber from Ukrainian arms suppliers, in late July U.S. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice asked Ukraine to stop weapons supply to Macedonia.⁶¹ Working on a negotiated settlement, the U.S. did not want Skopje to look for military options by purchasing weapons and hardware.⁶² The international community must have considered that the NLA's defeat would negatively affect the sentiments of the Albanians in the region and seriously hamper Western management of the Kosovo problem.⁶³

The international community's actions were probably seen as the only feasible solution because the KFOR forces could not adequately police the Macedonia-Kosovo border. According to Oxford Analytica, "while KFOR has some 7,000 troops deployed in Macedonia as well as its forces in Kosovo, it lacks the manpower to patrol vigorously the border and is wary of engaging in a confrontation with Albanian smugglers and guerrillas."⁶⁴ The report explained that much of the problem related to the presence of American troops in the Kosovo sector adjacent to the area north

⁶¹ UPI (25 July 2001).

⁶² Among the many conspiratorial and unconfirmed stories about the conflict, there were reports that the U.S. asked the Macedonian authorities to supply the NLA with weapons. See Scott Taylor, "Macedonia's Civil War: 'Made in the USA'," www.Antiwar.com (20 August 2001), and his *Diary of an Uncivil War: The Violent Aftermath of the Kosovo Conflict* (Ottawa: Esprit de Corps Books, 2002). On 21 July, during the fierce fighting in and around Tetovo, Macedonian media reported that KFOR helicopters dropped containers with unknown content in rebel-controlled rural territories around Tetovo. See *Vest* (23 July 2001) and *Dnevnik* (23 July 2001). While anonymous sources from the Macedonian security forces suspected that the cargo included light weaponry, Taylor claimed it contained heavy weapons delivered to the NLA. NATO denied that its choppers have been flying over Macedonian air space.

⁶³ Kristina Balalovska et al, *Crisis in Macedonia* (Rome: Ethnobarometer, 2003), p. 73, for a discussion of the reasons why the U.S. got involved in the Aracinovo episode.

⁶⁴ Oxford Analytica (2 March 2001). The press reported that the NLA members easily crossed the Macedonia-Kosovo border. See *The Guardian* (13 March 2001), BBC News (20 March 2001), and Balalovska, "Crisis," p. 13.

of Skopje and up to the border between Serbia 'proper' and Macedonia. As Washington was anxious to avoid casualties, "Macedonian Albanian guerrillas and their Kosovar allies can cross the border in both directions with impunity, and retreat to bases in Kosovo when they need to" so that "as long as KFOR prioritizes avoiding any casualties, this situation is unlikely to change substantially."⁶⁵ Since the NLA could count on arms and manpower supplies from across the border (an activity the U.S. was unable or unwilling to curb), the war could have dragged on risking to turn the fragile inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia into a civil war. As such, the peace process in Macedonia was a result of a number of factors cooperating and interests colliding, the most important of which was the position of the U.S. and the EU.

In the winter of 2000 and the spring of 2001 the NLA became a security threat for regional stability. Its military actions threatened to poison inter-ethnic relations in the country and bring Macedonia on the brink of civil war. The conflict pitting the government and the NLA guerrillas threatened to disturb the communication lines of the KFOR mission. As a result, the international community stepped in to contain the conflict. As previously argued, the EU successfully used its foreign policy instruments to contain the conflict. With the help of the ESDF, the EU High Representative for CFSP Javier Solana and his Policy Unit made a significant effort to stop the looming catastrophe in Macedonia. At critical moments during the crisis, Solana and the European Commission offered incentives to the Macedonian political elite to stop the conflict, the most visible example being the signing of the SAA in early April. Solving the conflict, the Union closely cooperated with NATO, OSCE, and the U.S.

The previous discussion tried to outline the contribution of direct intervention by international factors in moulding the interests of the warring parties until a peace settlement is reached. The Macedonian case shows that Western countries can intervene

⁶⁵ Oxford Analytica (2 March 2001), and Balalovska, "Crisis," p. 79-80.

decisively and have sufficient capabilities to field in order to influence events in turbulent countries. Though the process was marred by complications and controversies due to differences in opinion, perception and power needs among the country's main political actors peace, settlement was an achievable goal. Concealed diplomatic efforts also brought rebel fractions in harmony with the diplomatic process. Relying on a mixture of leverages, the U.S. and the EU proved capable to force the Macedonian government and the rebels to accept a peace settlement. In effect, the great power's diplomatic hard work can affect even a conflict characterized by strong animosity between ethnic groups.

Further, the international community had its own reasons to seek a negotiated solution for the Macedonian conflict. The perception that the security of the international forces in Kosovo and Balkan stability was at stake determined international actors to take part in conflict prevention and management. Ethnicity, ethno-nationalism and ethnic conflict played a significant role in determining international actors to intervene in Macedonia, and avoid another major conflict in the Balkans. Remember that in the early 1990s, the international community was reluctant to intervene in the ethnic crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite the serious threat it posed to regional stability. The U.S. involvement in the Balkans in mid 1990's and especially during the Kosovo crisis revealed a change in policy concerning threats to regional stability.

II. Changing Labels and Rhetoric

The NLA rebellion faced widespread condemnation from the international community. Leading international figures from the EU, U.S., Russia and all of Macedonia's neighbors including Albania harshly criticised the rebels and asked them to stop their guerrilla warfare. At the onset of the crisis, the NLA members

were labelled “murderers, thugs and terrorists.” At a meeting with his Macedonian counterpart Srdjan Kerim, French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine said that the international community supported Macedonian authorities in the fight against terrorist groups active in Northwest Macedonia, and stated that “we should not admit that separate groups using terrorist methods posed a threat to stability in the region.”⁶⁶ The UK Ambassador to Macedonia Marc Dickinson said the situation was grave but the country would survive, and on behalf of the EU asked all Macedonia’s politicians “to condemn the terrorists.”⁶⁷ Around the same time the UK Foreign Secretary Robin Cook described the NLA fighters as ‘terrorists’.⁶⁸ On a visit to Skopje, Solana commented that the refusal of the Macedonian authorities to negotiate with the NLA was justified, as “the terrorists have to be isolated. All of us have to condemn and isolate them.”⁶⁹ Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov asserted that “the world community must state in clear terms that the developments in the south of Serbia and in Macedonia [constitute] aggression by international terrorists, who must be resolutely rebuffed if we are against destabilization and an explosion in the Balkans.”⁷⁰

After in late March the Macedonian army carried out successful operations around Tetovo, the international community pressed the government for legislative reforms and warned that further armed activity was to be treated as terrorist, a label Cook used repeatedly during his visit to Macedonia in April.⁷¹ The same month, the U.S. classified the NLA as a terrorist organization.⁷² Following a quiet period in May, fighting resumed when NLA

⁶⁶ ITAR/TASS News Agency (11 March 2001).

⁶⁷ *Vest* (16 March 2001).

⁶⁸ Xinhua News Agency (27 March 2001).

⁶⁹ *The Guardian* (21 March), *The Independent* (21 March 2001) and *Vest* (21 March 2001).

⁷⁰ Patrick Moore, “Balkan Report,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (23 March 2001).

⁷¹ Reuters (5 April 2001).

⁷² See <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2000/>.

fighters ambushed, killed and mutilated members of a Macedonian reconnaissance security forces patrol. International condemnation ensued. At the 1 May briefing, State Department deputy spokesman Philip Reeker referred to the weekend's "tragic, barbaric terrorist attack" and warned that "we will not allow terrorists to derail the political dialogue . . . to have those people sit at a table is unacceptable."⁷³ After meeting the Macedonian President, Secretary of State Colin Powell reiterated "the US's total commitment to territorial integrity of Macedonia; our commitment to this democracy which is facing dastardly and cowardly acts from terrorists and terrorist organizations that are trying to subvert the democratic process."⁷⁴ Solana harshly condemned the killing of soldiers, calling it a "cowardly terrorist attack."⁷⁵

The following week NATO General Secretary George Robertson made a memorable statement concerning the NLA activities, when he called the rebels "a bunch of murderous thugs whose objective is to destroy a democratic Macedonia and who are using civilians as human shields" in a cynical bid to provoke "another Balkan bloodbath."⁷⁶ As the crisis deepened there were noticeable changes in the international actors' position toward the NLA guerrilla, and preference for moderate labels such as “rebels, guerrilla, ethnic Albanian forces” to describe the rebels. Except for Russia, the great powers ceased describing the NLA as a terrorist organization. This change in rhetoric paralleled the diplomatic insistence in the talks with Skopje that the crisis should be solved through political not military means.

⁷³ Philip Reeker quoted in Saso Ordanovski “NLA Violence Sabotages Talks,” *Balkan Crisis Report* no. 243 (3 May 2001).

⁷⁴ US Department of State Statement (1 May 2001).

⁷⁵ *European Report* (3 May 2001).

⁷⁶ George Robertson in *Vest* (7 May 2001), and BBC News (7 May 2001).

The NLA: Rhetoric and Aims

The NLA was an umbrella type organization comprised of nationalists, drug smugglers, dissatisfied Macedonian Albanians, ordinary peasants and foreign mercenaries.⁷⁷ Yet, many of its commanders were veterans of the Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës, also known as the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Most prominent among leaders was Ali Ahmeti, a founder of the KLA.⁷⁸ The NLA had clear links to the KLA and a splinter group active in the predominantly Albanian enclaves of southern Serbia, the Liberation Army of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac. But the NLA also had important domestic roots, and included a number of ethnic Albanians from Macedonia who had previously fought with the KLA. Though planned for a long period of time a combination of factors sparked the 2001 conflict, which nevertheless had been planned for a long period of time. Among these factors were the strengthened position of moderate Albanian parties in Kosovo, the post-2000 Macedonian border patrols' attempt to crack down on cross-border smuggling and weapons trafficking by Albanians, the February 2001 signing of the Macedonian-FRY border delineation agreement, and the May 2001 NATO decision to allow Yugoslav forces back into southern Serbia which led some NLA fighters to cross into Macedonia.

What did the NLA wish to accomplish? As previously argued, London, Paris or Washington did not have a common position on the NLA's actions and objectives. Unsurprisingly, during the conflict political commentators had difficulty discerning the NLA's real goals. Many believed that the NLA sought to create the Greater Albania or Greater Kosovo, others believed that Macedonian faced a power struggle among the factions dominating the local Albanian community, while still

⁷⁷ Alex Bellamy, "The New Wolves at the Door: Conflict in Macedonia", *Civil Wars* vol. 5, no. 1 (Spring 2002), p. 132.

⁷⁸ P. H. Liotta, and Cindy R. Jebb, "Macedonia: End of the Beginning or Beginning of the End?," *Parameters* (Spring 2002), p.4.

others thought that a combination of factors sparked the rebellion. Pardew told a June 2001 Congressional Hearing that:

"At its most basic level, I think the objectives of these people who are running this insurgency are personal power for themselves. And that -- and they are pretty flexible on what they would accept. I think some of them would like to see this romantic notion of a greater Albania, but that's probably a very small element. I think some of them would like to partition Macedonia. But at the end of the day, I think they're seeking greater political influence inside the Albanian community both in Macedonia and Kosovo."⁷⁹

Was Pardew correct? Could the goals of this clandestine organization be discerned through a close reading of its public statements?

Throughout the crisis, the NLA issued ambiguous statements and communiqués obscuring its true objectives. The organization announced its existence to the world after the 22 January 2001 attack on the police station. From Germany, the NLA faxed a letter to the BBC stating that "the uniform of the Macedonian occupier would be targeted until the Albanian people are freed."⁸⁰ This led many to believe that it aimed to separate the Albanian populated areas of Macedonia by force and carving up a Greater Albania. Soon thereafter, however, the NLA changed its position and on 11 March declared that it sought "international mediation of the conflict and a new constitution which would stress that Macedonians and Albanians are equal national groups in the same state."⁸¹

A week later, some NLA members told a BBC reporter that they planned "to fight a long-planned-for 'war of liberation.'"

⁷⁹ Transcript of Senate Committee on Foreign Relations hearing (13 June 2001), p.15.

⁸⁰ BBC News (27 February 2001).

⁸¹ BBC News (11 March 2001).

While blaming the situation on "a decade of oppression by the Slav[sic] Macedonian government," a senior NLA commander stated that his fellow fighters "do not want to endanger Macedonia's stability and territorial integrity, but we will fight a guerrilla war until we have won our basic rights, until we are accepted as an equal people in Macedonia." He further claimed that the NLA's actions were designed to "get the attention of the Macedonian police and government, to determine them sit down and talk and solve the problem peacefully."⁸² Around the same time, the London-based *The Observer* reported that the NLA "issued a declaration of war last night, calling on all 'able-bodied men' to join their uprising in favor of self-rule."⁸³ Paradoxically, the organization appeared to be fighting a "war of liberation," which was "not to endanger the territorial integrity of the country," but was meant to call the attention of the Macedonian government to "sit down and talk."

The NLA's controversial attitude transpired in other interviews with the rebels. Spokesman Sadri Ahmeti told *New York Times* that the NLA wanted Macedonian forces to "withdraw from our territories," and that he himself was "fighting for the liberation of my territory." Ahmeti admitted that he would like to see all Albanians in the Balkans living together in a common state, and stated that "personally, I am for all Albanians living together, but we are not against international institutions, such as NATO; we do not want to fight them and lose our allies."⁸⁴ Then again, Commander Arban Aliu [*nom de guerre*] told the *Christian Science Monitor* that the NLA rebels "are fighting for the same rights that people have been trying to achieve for years by political means, so we are trying this way now," and added that "we are not fighting civilians. This is a liberation war." While Aliu agreed that Macedonian borders should remain intact, Mala

⁸² BBC News (20 March 2001).

⁸³ *The Observer* (18 March 2001).

⁸⁴ *New York Times* (20 March 2001) and *Los Angeles Times* (20 March 2001).

claimed to fight for an "independent, separate Albanian state of Western Macedonia."⁸⁵

Consider the 'military communiqué' issued to *Deutsche Welle*, in which NLA outlined key conditions for ending the insurgency. The clandestine group wanted Albanian recognized as an official language and constitutional amendments granting their community equal status to Macedonians' and increased representation in government and police force.⁸⁶ The same day, the *Guardian* published an NLA communiqué stating that:

"the present trend of recognition of our rights is trivial. We also appeal to all political factors, internal and external, to give their real recognition to those who are fighting to be equal, because such fighters could never be terrorists. We are no adventurers. We had no lives to gamble away. We don't seek killings and war, because for centuries we were the victims. From this moment peace does not depend only on us."⁸⁷

At the onset of the conflict there was great confusion in the NLA statements and communiqués. Fighting both a 'liberation war' and for 'better rights of the Macedonian Albanians' could hardly be a consistent option one could hold on to.

At first, the international community criticized the NLA, while later it adopted a moderate stance on the guerrilla force. Did this shift reflect the fact that the NLA consolidated its position relative to the international community and the Macedonian government? It is hard to give a definite answer. In late April Commander Sokoli told *Newsweek* that the NLA demanded "greater rights" for Macedonian Albanians and for "Albanians to be considered as equals to the Macedonians, Albanian recognized as an official language, [have] the right to higher education in our

⁸⁵ *Christian Science Monitor* (21 March 2001).

⁸⁶ Laura Rozen, "NLA Autonomy Goal," *Balkan Crisis Report* no. 228 (21 March 2001).

⁸⁷ *The Guardian* (21 March 2001).

native tongue, [see] changes to the Constitution that would guarantee equal status and treatment and a new census observed by international institutions to guarantee the legitimacy of the numbers.”⁸⁸ Days later, the NLA declared the Lipkovo, Slupcane and Vaksince villages, northeast of Kumanovo, a ‘liberated area’.⁸⁹

Furthermore, in late June the NLA again adopted an inconsistent position. *Time* reported opinion differences among rebels regarding the group’s ultimate goal. *Time* noted that an NLA soldier spray-painted the KLA’s initials across the fading 600-year-old frescoes of an Orthodox monastery, while a ‘Greater Albania’ sign marked one of the gates. A young NLA member commented that “if we [the NLA] had tanks we could go all the way to Bulgaria and Athens,” before being chided by a fellow soldier who said that the NLA was “fighting only for our rights in Macedonia.”⁹⁰ There were evident divisions among the NLA fighters. Thus, the international community labelled the NLA differently throughout the conflict, and the ambiguity was accentuated by the fact that the NLA fighters themselves did not have clear-cut goals for the organization.

NLA Actions during the War

The question remains: Were the NLA members terrorists, rebels, freedom fighters, or fighters for human rights of the Albanians in Macedonia? The best way to answer the question is to look at particular NLA actions during the conflict to understand that the NLA was simultaneously a terrorist and a guerrilla organization. On the one hand, during the conflict the NLA acted

⁸⁸ *Newsweek* (27 April 2001). Similar demands were put forth by NLA leader Fazli Veliu in a letter sent to the UN Security Council. See Balalovska, “Crisis,” p. 25.

⁸⁹ Stefan Troebst: “From bar to Bitola? ‘Greater Kosovo’, Serbia and Macedonia,” *Central European Review* vol. 3, no. 27 (October 2001).

⁹⁰ *Time* (25 June 2001).

as a typical guerrilla force, bombing police stations, ambushing enemy patrol units, taking over villages populated by its own kin in the hope that the government would overreact and the locals would join the movement. On the other hand, the NLA engaged in terrorist activities.

Ahmeti claimed that the NLA could not be described as a terrorist organization “because it only shoots at people in uniform.”⁹¹ On the NLA fighters he added that one “who wears an army badge, who has an objective for which he is fighting, who respects the Geneva Conventions and the Hague Tribunal, who acts in public with name and surname, and answers for everything he does is not a terrorist.”⁹² But on several occasions the NLA fighters shot at civilians. Besieging Tetovo in March, the NLA shot and bombarded the town, with the primary target being the predominantly Macedonian Koltuk neighborhood.⁹³ Because of the NLA bombardment and the sniper fire, several civilians were injured, one person died, and property was damaged, including the St. Nikola church.

A year after the conflict, the NLA leader Gezim Ostreni described the group’s strategy: “I tried to avoid having many casualties...material damage was considerable, but we were really working to protect all citizens, regardless of their ethnic background. We protected them because we knew that citizens are not politicians, and we tried to avoid what happened in Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo--to avoid ethnic cleansing, so we can succeed in living together.”⁹⁴ The statement is far from reality, since as early as March NLA units ethnic-cleansed Macedonians in the Tetovo region. BBC reported that in Lavce the few

⁹¹ Beta News (2 August 2001).

⁹² Timothy G. Ash, “Is There a Good Terrorist?,” *The New York Review of Books* (29 November 2001).

⁹³ See “White Book on the activities of the NLA,” *Dnevnik* (2001). *Vest* (16, 17, 20 and 26 March 2001).

⁹⁴ Joylyon Naegle “Members of Disbanded UCK Look Back at Last Year’s Fighting” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Report* (17 April 2002).

remaining Macedonians were “being told to leave their homes.”⁹⁵ In May, the NLA kidnapped and tortured Macedonian civilians in the Kumanovo region. Four villagers from Matejce were released, but their health had been compromised. The NLA vandalized the old Sveta Bogorodica monastery and burned all the houses of the Macedonians and Serbs. Kumanovo faced a severe water shortage after the NLA took over and mismanaged the supply facility. In June at least on two occasions the NLA fired on a train commuting between Skopje and Kichevo.⁹⁶

Still, the NLA’s worst deeds occurred in July and August. Macedonians were under heavy pressure to leave the Tetovo area, and became victims of kidnappings, temporary detentions and persistent intimidation by the NLA fighters. Initially, the NLA undertook ethnic cleansing of four Tetovo villages inhabited by Macedonians, maltreating the civilians. Houses were robbed and damaged, and a civilian was shot dead at close range. Trying to resist their son’s forceful mobilization, a Macedonian Albanian couple was wounded in a gunfight with NLA soldiers. A number of Macedonian Albanians with the reserve units of the police were forcefully taken by the NLA.⁹⁷

In early July, NLA units bombarded Tetovo, injuring civilians and causing material damage while mistreating and kidnapping Macedonian residents. Some of the kidnapped were released after being beaten up and tortured, and twelve of them are missing to this day. The NLA was particularly active on 23 July when it kidnapped Macedonian civilians, ethnically cleansing the Macedonian sector of the Neproshteno village. Days later, the Leshok village was cleansed of its Macedonian population. The property of Macedonians living in ethnically mixed villages was destroyed. Additional kidnapping and maltreatment occurred the following month near Tetovo. Macedonian civilians were beaten

⁹⁵ BBC News (20 March 2001).

⁹⁶ *Reality Macedonia* (21 June 2001), *Dnevnik* (14 July 2003), “White Book,” and *Vest* (4, 23 and 31 May, 13, 16, 18 and 25 June 2001).

⁹⁷ “White Book,” and *Vest* (2 and 3 July 2001).

up in Tearce and Tetovo, and others were abducted. Days after the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, the NLA blew up the St. Anastasij monastery near Leshok.⁹⁸ The NLA undertook atrocious deeds, but before concluding that it was a terrorist organization, we should turn to the concept.

Though the word ‘terrorism’ appears in law books and legislation around the world, it is hard to determine what should count as terrorist act and how to identify the terrorists. There are a number of definitions of and approaches to studying terrorism, but they are fraught with difficulties. For example, there is the contentious issue of whether the victims of terrorism are solely civilians. After 11 September, the American military tribunals have treated those who attack military personnel and civilians alike as terrorists. Is this the right approach? Many argue that only organized acts directed against civilian population should count as terrorism. Only unjust regimes regard the army as a ‘legitimate target’. What constitutes an ‘unjust regime’ and a ‘just cause’ for violence is nevertheless a debatable issue.

Perhaps the most controversial issue when trying to define terrorism is captured by the slogan “one person’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter.” Whether an organization is defined as terrorist or not is largely determined by politics. At the onset of the crisis, the NLA fighters were viewed as ‘terrorists’ and ‘murderers’, but later on political reasons determined the international community to moderate its tone considerably and label the NLA members as ‘rebels’. The reasons for this change in terminology are not difficult to find. Once the international community favored a political solution to the crisis, it needed the NLA’s approval to stop the fighting. Though the organization did not participate in the debates on the legislative reforms to be implemented in the country, the clandestine endorsement of the NLA was key to the success of the political dialogue. The Ohrid

⁹⁸ *Vest* (7, 10, 20, 21, 25 and 30 July and 9, 10, 14 and 22 August 2001), “White Book,” and *New York Times* (21 and 30 July 2001).

Agreement would have been difficult to reach if the NLA members were still viewed internationally as ‘terrorists’.

The NLA did not clearly state its goals. Its claim of fighting for the liberation of ‘Albanian territories in Macedonia’ appeared to qualify it as a nationalist formation. This claim, stated by some members of the organization, contradicted the NLA official communiqués, which emphasized their ‘fight for human rights’. Even assuming that the NLA sought to improve the lot of Macedonian Albanians, there is still the unsolved moral problem of whether a presumably good cause justifies horrendous means. Conventional discussions of terrorism make note of acts of violence committed against property and people, and there were plenty done by the NLA. Whether their cause was just or not, the NLA members violently attacked Macedonian civilians and their property, without good military reason for doing so. Without examining the causes of the NLA rebellion of 2001 and its justness, we could say that the NLA fought a ‘guerrilla war’ with terrorist means. Rather curiously, the organization intensified its brutal, terrorist methods at a time when its official statements were talking not of ‘Greater Albania’ or ‘Greater Kosovo’, but of improved human rights for Macedonian Albanians, and the international community supported a political solution to the crisis and described the NLA fighters as rebels not terrorists or murderers.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ The international community’s search for a political option and its moderated tone were perhaps the result of a calculated effort. Some claim that NATO and EU contact persons convinced NLA leaders to change their claims from territory to rights. See Balalovska, “Crisis,” p.79.

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