



KOSOVO





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The bridge that spans the Ibar River in Northern Kosovo is symbolic of the ethnic division that has marked the region since the days of the Roman Empire. The bridge serves as a divide between the country's majority Albanian population and the Serbian population. As you approach the bridge, you can easily spot the NATO forces who stand guard on either side. The bridge divides the city of Mitrovica in half.



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A NATO security force member stands watch over the Ibar bridge that divides the Albanian and Serbian communities in Kosovo.
U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SFC JESSE BELFORD

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The Ibar bridge, currently under construction by the EU, is heavily guarded and open only to foot traffic.

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An Albanian and an American flag hang across an apartment balcony on the Albanian side of the bridge.

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Police forces stand watch over the Serbian side of the bridge and large concrete barriers block vehicle traffic.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOS

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The landscape on the Serbian side of the bridge is dotted with Serbian flags. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SFC JESSE BELFORD

On one side is the Albanian community. On the other side is the Serbian community. Interaction between the two is limited at best and only came about in 2013, when an agreement was signed between Kosovo and Serbia that stopped short of recognizing Kosovo’s independence, but brought Serbs in northern Kosovo back under the overall authority of Kosovo’s institutions. The agreement offered limited autonomy for the Serbs through an association of northern Serb municipalities, doing little to heal the divide in the country, instead perpetuating the ethnic divide that is at the root of the its problems. Until 2013, a large barricade that was manned by the Serbs blocked the Ibar Bridge. With the 2013 agreement, it was thought that freedom of movement would occur. Instead, the bridge remains impassable by cars. Huge concrete planters and benches block the bridge. They were placed there by the Serbians who called the creation a “peace park.” It is a reminder of the divide — the them vs. us mentality that has shaped the region since the 7th century when Serbs first migrated into what is now known as Kosovo.

Centuries later, Turks and Albanians migrated to the area in the wake of the Ottoman take over. As the 19th century drew to a close, Albanians replaced Serbs as the majority ethnic group in the country; the Serbian defeat of the Ottoman’s

the First Balkan War in 1912, gave control back to Serbia. As was the case with many small Baltic countries, Kosovo became part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia following the end of World War II. With the fall of Yugoslavia, the Serbian domination of the majority of the populace remained problematic ultimately resulting in unrest, which lead calls for Kosovar independence in the late ‘80s. The Serbs, who created a new constitution in 1989, quickly squashed the movement and revoked the independence of Kosovo. In 1991, Kosovo’s Albanian leaders lit the spark that set the country on fire when they held a referendum and again declared Kosovo independent.

What followed, as was the case in neighboring Bosnia, was almost a decade of undeclared war, with the Albanians starting an insurgency against the Serbs. The Serbian response was quick and bloody. Albanian officials were removed from their posts. Albanian schools were closed. Albanian teachers and professors were removed from their jobs. Reports of ethnic killings, beatings and rapes were widespread. A large number of Albanians fled the country to refugee camps in Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania. More than 800,000 Albanians fled with little more than the clothes on their backs, as world leaders tried to broker peace.

In March 1999, a three-month NATO mission forced the Serbs to remove their military and





police forces from Kosovo.

Following on the heels of the NATO mission, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1244, which placed Kosovo under a transitional administration, the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, which remained in place until 2005, when the UN began a process to determine the status of the country.

For two years, the Serbs, based out of Belgrade, negotiated with the transitional government in Pristina, which is now the capital of Kosovo without any real resolve. On Feb. 17, 2013, the Kosovo Assembly declared independence again and has been recognized as the legitimate government by more than 100 countries. In April 2013, the two countries began to normalize relations through talks facilitated by the European Union. The Government of Kosovo has since joined the UN, the EU and NATO.

Today, the country's makeup remains largely Albanian, with 92.9 percent of the population claiming Albanian ethnicity, 1.6 percent Bosniaks and 1.5 percent Serbian. Those numbers are skewed when it comes to the Serbian population because at the time of the last census the northern portion of Kosovo was excluded. It is largely Serbian and Serbs and members of the Roma (gypsy) community in the South boycotted the census.

The country is 95.6 percent Muslim and is highly influenced by neighboring Muslim countries including Turkey, which has gifted the country a number of large mosques in recent years, including one that overlooks the Ibar River Bridge. Orthodox and Roman Catholics make up 3.7 percent of the population.

Unemployment is a major problem, more than half of the working age people in the country are unemployed.



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KOSOVO





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Kosovo's current government has an elected president who serves as the Chief of State. The head of the government is the Prime Minister. The country's assembly elects the president and the cabinet. The president is elected by a two-third-majority vote by the assembly for a five-year term. If a nominee does not receive a two-third majority in the casting of two ballots, a simple majority in the third round of voting elects him. The Assembly, known as *Kuvendi i Kosoves* or *Skupstina Kosovo* has 120 seats, with 100 members directly elected and 20 seats reserved for ethnic minorities, with 10 of those seats reserved specifically for Serbs. The members of the assembly serve for four-year terms.

Kosovo's economy, while showing progress is still struggling. It is highly dependent on international aid and input into the economy by the diaspora, which accounts for about 15 percent of the GDP. The high unemployment rate, particularly among young people is also causing a brain drain, with young people immigrating in order to gain their education and remaining in foreign countries to begin their careers. The majority of the country's population lives in rural areas.

An aging electrical grid keeps Kosovo from gaining more business investment; however, in 2012 Kosovo privatized its electricity supply and sought funding through the World Bank and the United States to construct a new power plant and rehabilitate the older ones. Also in 2012, Kosovo joined the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and in 2014 signed agreements with the European Union that are focused on trade liberalization. In August 2015, as part of its EU-facilitated



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normalization process with Serbia, Kosovo signed agreements on telecommunications and energy distribution; however, there are still disagreements over who owns economic assets within Kosovo.

Kosovo does not have a military force. The Kosovo Security Force, established in 2009, is responsible for search-and-rescue, firefighting, demining and hazardous material response. NATO-led Kosovo Force peacekeepers under the UN Interim Administration Mission remain in the country stabilizing relationships between the Albanians and Serbs. Their presence is seen not only in Pristina, but also in the South of the country and in Mitrovica, where the Iber River Bridge remains blocked — a symbol of Kosovo's struggle. **SW**

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The Bajram Pasa Mosque, donated to Mitrovica by Turkey, dominates the landscape in the city center.

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One of the minority ethnic groups in Bosnia is comprised of Roma Gypsies, who are not well liked within the country.

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The development of highways has helped tie the country together, with all roads leading to Pristina.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOS

CMSE Kosovo

BY JANICE BURTON

On a crisp Sunday morning in October, the Civil Military Support Element, 92nd Civil Affairs Battalion, 95th Civil Affairs Brigade, assigned to Pristina, Kosovo, along with the staff of *Special Warfare*, traveled from the capital to the Macedonian border and then back to the divided town of Mitrovica. Along the way, the team pointed out important landmarks and projects that had been completed through the combined efforts of the team, the U.S. Embassy staff and their Kosovar partners.

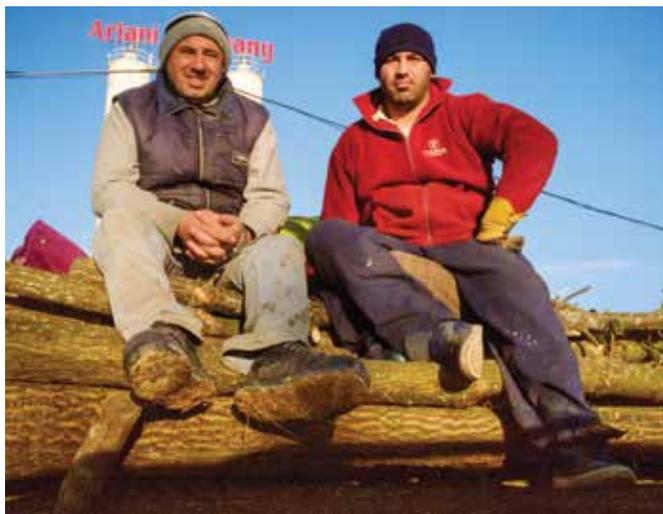
Heading south, the team followed the highway, passing horse-drawn wagons filled with hay and produce stands. A road sign comes into view, and the team leader pointed it out. The area is not really any different than others that lie along the route. But over the past several years, it has gained notoriety. It has become known as a hub for young men who are making their way to Syria to join Daesh. The radicalization of young men is one of the many problems plaguing Kosovo and one that the team must consider in their efforts to support the young republic.

Passing through the countryside, there are few if any factories. Somewhat out of place in the barren countryside, the landscape is dotted by stores displaying intricate chandeliers. This becomes even more ironic when you look at the houses. They seem unfinished. The windows are open. There are no panes or shutters. Other than farms, there does not appear to be centers for employment, which is another problem facing the country, as well as the brain drain that occurs when young people flee a country in order to build a life.

On the other side of the country is Mitrovica, which appears more prosperous than other cities. There are more signs of commerce and influence. Driving into the main business area, a giant mosque, a gift from Turkey, dominates the landscape. If you continue heading north, a blocked bridge manned by armed troops from Italy, part of a NATO peacekeeping mission in the country, divides the city in half. On one side is the Albanian population that makes up the majority of Kosovo's population. On the other side is the Serbian sector. The divided city is one of the last visible signs of the war that tore the country apart in the 1990s. But the memories of people on both sides of the bridge are



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long. Each can talk of the horror that occurred during the war. It is those memories that fuel continued ethnic tensions between the Albanian and Serbian communities within the country.

These are some of issues that consume the time and energy of the Civil Military Support Element, 92nd Civil Affairs Battalion, 95th Civil Affairs Brigade, operating out of the U.S. Embassy in Pristina. The team has developed a number of programs to address various aspects of these problems, all with the goal of building the capacity of Kosovo forces and the support of the populace for the government by showcasing the government's ability to provide for its people.

In southeastern Kosovo, where radicalization of the youth population is of serious concern, the CMSE has conducted a number of programs; two of which were directed specifically at the women of the region; three of which were medical; and one designed to assess and make recommendations to the operations of the country's armed forces.

The Women for Women Project is a women's empowerment and economic development program in the southeastern region that directly counters the ability of violent extremists recruiters to target the villages. Working with Spirit of America (see story on page 45), a non-profit organization designed to provide resources to American Soldiers to help them fulfill their mission, the CMSE arranged for the purchase of equipment to support agricul-



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A quiet farming community where a large number of young men have been recruited by Daesh.

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Two men ride down the road on a stack of freshly cut trees. Employment in Kosovo is scarce but the mining of the country's natural resources such as timber and coal provides some opportunity.

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Driving thorough the countryside between cities the roadside is dotted with produce stands, strip malls and many houses that appear to be under construction.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOS

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ture training efforts in the villages of Remnik, Lubishte and Begrace. The project gives the team better access and greater influence within the rural areas that are the most susceptible to extremists recruiters.

Another event sponsored through the Women for Women Project was a women’s health seminar in Dubrave. Working in conjunction with Women for Women International, two U.S. military officers assigned to the 345th Combat Support Hospital at Camp Bondsteel, taught classes on prevention and treatment of hepatitis, which is a major health problem in the country, and the prevention of back injuries. Held in what has been identified as one of the major regions for extremists recruiting, the program strengthened the resolve of women in the community to stand against the recruitment efforts in their villages by demonstrating American support to the female populace, as well as an American presence in this extremely rural region.

Other programs aimed at breaking the connection of the extremists recruiters to the rural population revolve around building a belief by the people that the Government of Kosovo can not only meet their needs, but also protect them. To that end, the team helped facilitate donations of medical supplies to remote hospitals and clinics.

In September 2015, the CMSE coordinated a five-day assessment of the Kosovo Police Special Intervention Unit, which is the backbone of the Kosovo counterterrorism efforts and the unit that is responsible for the majority of the high-risk violent extremist and organized crime arrests by Naval Special Warfare forces in the country. During the training event, the NSW unit assessed the SIU officers’ proficiency in communication, hand and arm signals, reacting to contact and breaking contact in open and wooded terrain. The success of the program served as the foundation for continuing training between the NSW forces, the CMSE and the SIU.

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On Oct. 20, 2015, the CMSE team met with the Rahovec Municipal Director of Health and the Director of the Main Family Medical Center to coordinate a CPR training event. The event, which would utilize members of the U.S. Embassy team, as well as the CMSE, was directed toward 12 members of the clinic staff. The training gave the team and the Embassy the ability increase their situational awareness in the region and build relationships with the medical personnel. It also increased the capacity of the hospital staff to provide care and demonstrated the commitment of local agencies to care for the populace. Programs of this nature increase the confidence of the populace in their government, making them less vulnerable to violent extremist recruitment.



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On Oct. 26, 2015, the CMSE worked with KSF CIMIC Department and the 354th Combat Support Hospital to provide medical supplies to the Klina Main Family Medical Center. The event helped not only enhance the capacity of the clinic but also the ability of the KSF CIMIC to conduct civil-military operations. While conducting the engagement, the team also had the ability and time to talk with local townspeople about their concerns and needs. The 354th CSH provided the supplies and the CIMIC transported them and saw to their distribution. The donation also demonstrated the ability of the Kosovo Security Forces to support the local population.

In an effort to lessen the ethnic divide in the country, the CMSE conducted school assessments in disputed areas where the schools are funded by the Government of Serbia rather than the Government of Kosovo. The Government of Kosovo will not allow Serbian language in government-funded school systems. The CMSE met with ethnic Gorani educators to identify sources of disputes between the minority community and the Government of Kosovo. In 1998, the Gorani population was estimated at 50,000. Today, there are fewer than 11,000 Gorani inside the borders of Kosovo. Many of the Gorani fled during the war, while others left after the war citing the unstable situation and economic issues. Currently there are 19 Gorani inhabited villages in Kosovo. Chief among the concerns was the lack of funding due to the language constraint, but also the condition of the school facilities, which are run down and overcrowded.



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Civil Affairs Team Members along with other U.S. Forces and Kosovo Security Forces deliver and present medical supplies to doctors and nurses at the Klina Family Medical Center.

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A Civil Affairs Team Member escorts the Klina Medical Center's head doctor through the streets of town discussing the needs of the community.

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Civil Affairs Team Members, Kosovo Security Forces and other U.S. Forces meet with the Klina Municipal Director of Health.

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Civil Affairs Soldiers join a group of kids in a rigorous game of soccer while visiting a school.



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The CMSE also held two religious tolerance seminars with the assistance of the 92nd Battalion Unit Ministry Team and a behavioral health officer. The purpose of the seminars was to highlight the important role religion and education play in the prevention of extremist ideologies and violence. During the seminar, the students interacted and discussed issues in an open forum with the U.S. staff officers. The students examined the causes and effects of extremism juxtaposed to the moral and tangible benefits of tolerance. The seminar opened doors in the Islamic community and opened lines of communication between people of different faiths.

Working in concert with various partners, the CMSE built relationships and understanding with the Government of Kosovo and the populace. With each engagement, the rapport between the American forces and their Kosovar partners increased, as did their capacity to meet the needs of the people. **SW**

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