

FORT BONDSTEEL

Overview of Newspaper Articles and Commentaries Concerning This US Military Base in Kosovo

The U.S. forces in Kosovo have established a military base to the tune of over \$35 million dollars, violating the sovereignty of Yugoslavia in contradiction to UN Resolution 1244 and unauthorized by any aspects of the Resolution. This may also be in violation of the intent of Congress and a misappropriation of funds.

Articles from the International Herald Tribune, Boston Globe and Christian Science Monitor along with articles by other writers appearing in various sources follow. Salient points include:

Construction of Fort Bondsteel begin in the summer of 1999.

“The United States immediately - and without any permission from anybody - seized a large area of Gnjilane county to built largest army base in the Balkans.”
(Diane Johnstone)

It covers between 775 and 800 acres.

It includes a Burger King, two chapels, a library, fitness club, volleyball court, hospital, movie theatre, as well as SEA Hut accommodation for troops, drywalled barracks with electric wiring and air conditioning.

It has an ammunition site and a helicopter pad capable of serving Apache (offensive) helicopters (up to 55 helicopters)

It is large enough to accommodate an aircraft runway.

The cost of the initial phase was \$32 million. At a later point in construction the cost had risen to \$36.6 million. It is not known at this time what the final cost will be.

Various commentaries that it “could last a generation,” “will last for many years to come,” “The United States is taking advantage of this opportunity to build a base spacious enough to provide future needs,” “We just don’t know how long we will be here,” (this latter is by Shawn Sullivan, political advisor to General Craig Peterson, the camp’s commanding officer).

ETHNIC CLEANSING IN THE AMERICAN SECTOR

From
APPRAISAL OF THE TWO OSCE
REPORTS "KOSOVO/KOSOVA: AS SEEN,
AS TOLD"

by Diana Johnstone(2/29/00)
www.tenc.net [emperors-clothes]

The American occupation sector is in the southeastern corner of Kosovo, chosen perhaps for two apparent advantages: a low level of violence before and during the bombing, and command of the strategic Kacanik pass to Skopje, capital of Macedonia, on the way to the Aegean port of Thessalonika. The United States immediately -- and without any permission from anybody -- seized a large area of Gnjilane county to build the largest army base in the Balkans, "Camp Bondsteel". Since prior to the war, Gnjilane had a large concentration of Kosovo Serb communities and no strong UÇK presence, it was relatively calm during the conflict. "Since the end of the conflict, however, the situation has been startlingly different", OMIK reported.

"The descent into violence has been swift and widespread". Serbs have fled. "The Roma population has left en masse. Daily human rights reports in June, July and August were dominated by reports of killings, house burnings, missing persons and abductions..." (p.23). When observers returned to Gnjilane on June 20, only one house in the town had been destroyed, but by the end of October, the number had risen to 280. "In sharp contrast to the period before the conflict, there was a strong and highly visible UÇK presence" in the area. The UÇK took over many public buildings and set up its own "self-styled administration" which neither KFOR nor UNMIK was able to counter. Violence was constant. "Though aimed primarily at the minority communities, many Kosovo Albanians were also terrified by events, and called for increased KFOR protection" (p.26). "One target group appears to be LDK members", the report observes. The LDK, Democratic League of Kosovo, is

the party of Ibrahim Rugova, which before the United States switched its support to the UÇK in mid-1998 was generally considered by the "international community" to be the legitimate representative of the Albanian people of Kosovo.

SETTLING IN FOR A LONG KOSOVO RUN

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November 22, 1999, Monday

Michael J. Jordan, Special to The Christian Science Monitor
HIGHLIGHT:
President Clinton tomorrow visits the biggest new US base since Vietnam.

The amber waves of grain that once covered rolling hills two miles east of Urosevac, in south-central Kosovo, are no more. They've been replaced with sprawling Camp Bondsteel.

The heavily fortified, 755-acre military base is the largest the United States has built from the ground up since the Vietnam War.

Still under construction, it features amenities such as a mobile Burger King (burgers and fries only), fitness center, volleyball court, library, and two chapels. It's so large that it's divided into "uptown, midtown, and downtown."

As President Clinton visits tomorrow to spend an early Thanksgiving with the troops, some observers here are wondering: Why is Bondsteel so big?

In Kosovo's other four sectors, contingents from 30 nations participating in the NATO-led peacekeeping force live in existing apartment blocks and, in some cases, factories.

Soldiers at this \$ 36.6 million American base say it's strictly about safety and

comfort. If nothing else, it sends a direct message to Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, who already has provoked four wars this decade and may be capable of more mayhem.

"The base is a response to the perceived need for a presence in the Balkans for years to come," says Bryan Hopkinson, Kosovo director of the International Crisis Group, a Brussels-based think tank. "It shows the US means business."

One day it could mean even more. Some say Camp Bondsteel will smooth the logistics of a future US military intervention. Others see it yielding benefits in terms of Balkan geopolitics and trade. Perhaps with this in mind, says Mr. Hopkinson, US planners are shrewdly "taking advantage of favorable circumstances" to build a base spacious enough to accommodate any future needs.

Those "favorable circumstances" are the key. Three months of NATO airstrikes this spring ended a Serbian campaign of "ethnic cleansing" that unleashed some 1 million refugees in the Yugoslav province. So ethnic Albanians here are thrilled to have 47,000 international troops - 6,300 of them from the US - protecting them, even if assistance has so far fallen short of their goal of independence.

This contrasts starkly with Macedonia and Hungary, Yugoslavia's neighbors to the south and north. During the airstrikes, both countries were uneasy about being drawn into NATO operations. Hungary, unlike Macedonia, is a NATO member. But the nation only rid itself of Soviet troops nine years ago.

"Albanians are the only people who embrace NATO with all their heart," says Sevdije Ahmeti, a human-rights activist in Kosovo. "America will find no better allies in the Balkans, or in Europe, than us."

Continued instability

Allies may be needed with Milosevic still holding the reins in Belgrade. A

slew of destabilizing scenarios are possible: secession by tiny Montenegro, leaving landlocked Serbia the lone remaining Yugoslav republic; conflict with ethnic Hungarians in northern Serbia; civil war between pro- and anti-Milosevic factions; or upheaval in Macedonia, which has its own restive Albanian minority.

It's unclear whether Camp Bondsteel would deter a crisis. But at least the Americans will be nearer the action, and more secure and comfortable while they wait. The base is one giant air-tight fortress perched atop a series of small hills. With soldier safety high on the Clinton administration's agenda, nothing is left to chance. The 4,800 troops stationed here - roughly three-quarters of the total US force in Kosovo - are ensconced behind miles of barbed wire and countless earthen berms and concrete barriers. Eleven guard towers keep a vigilant eye.

In terms of comfort, the US military learned a vital lesson from Bosnia. American troops entered in 1995, but grew demoralized after three harsh winters spent in tents. Finally, in 1998 they erected insulated, plywood "Sea-Huts," which were first used during the Vietnam era. At Camp Bondsteel, US planners went straight for the cozy Sea-Huts. Each has five rooms, sleeping six soldiers per room.

The base contains a large helipad for nearly 55 transport, reconnaissance, and attack helicopters, including a dozen of the vaunted Apaches.

There is no runway for fixed-wing fighter aircraft, although Hopkinson and other analysts speculate that the base may be big enough for future contingencies like a runway. US officials reject this possibility, pointing to the area's undulating terrain. They also have tried to quash rumors that Camp Bondsteel eventually may replace Aviano, Italy, as one of the prime European airfields of the US Air Force.

Strategic importance

Still, observers suggest Camp Bondsteel would serve several geostrategic func-

tions. Though Kosovo is a diamond-shaped province smaller than New Jersey, its ethnic Albanians highlight their proximity to the Black Sea to the west, the Mediterranean to the south, and the Adriatic to the east.

As NATO expands eastward, perhaps even into the Balkans, some say Bondsteel could underpin security for the alliance's southeastern flank.

It's not only Russia that considers the Balkans within its sphere of influence. Between the Bosnian Muslims and the predominantly Muslim but highly secular populations of Albania and Kosovo, the Arab world is also looking to make inroads. "Kosovo can be treated as a small spot in the ocean, or a very important spot in Europe," says Ms. Ahmeti. "The Near East also tries to put us [in] their sphere, so we're sandwiched."

But some Western diplomatic sources scoff at the idea of Kosovo having any real strategic value.

"The notion that the US is interested in forward bases and extending its international presence is fundamentally paranoid and fundamentally wrong," says one diplomat, who asked not to be identified. "On the contrary, the US would prefer to let countries conduct their own defense and not have to intervene around the world."

And while President Clinton and others talk of a Marshall Plan-style reconstruction of the Balkans, ethnic Albanians hope that the mere sight of Camp Bondsteel may soothe jittery foreign investors.

Ardian Arifaj, news editor of Kosovo's leading daily paper, Koha Ditore, says, "There's a perception here that there are American bases all over the world, and all those countries have prospered with them."

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IN KOSOVO, US TROOPS SENT TO PROTECT ALBANIANS SAFEGUARD SERBS

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The Boston Globe

November 10, 1999, Wednesday, City Edition

By Theresa Agovino, Globe Correspondent

CAMP BONDSTEEL, Yugoslavia -

Camp Bondsteel sits in a 740-acre dust-bowl. Dump trucks and tractors are everywhere as construction continues on offices, a permanent hospital, a movie theater and an ammunition site. The size of the base has led to speculation that the US government is planning to make the facility permanent, but US representatives say that is not the case.

"We just don't know how long we will be here," said Shawn Sullivan, political adviser to General Craig Peterson, Camp Bondsteel's commanding officer.

MISSION'S CLEAR, AN EXIT ISN'T

September 30, 1999 Thursday ALL EDITIONS

By Rachele Cohen

CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo - Some 95 days into the America's peacekeeping mission here one thing is clear - U.S. troops aren't going home anytime soon.

The physical evidence of that is obvious. This 800-acre city - created by lopping the tops off two mountains - is in the process of becoming an enclave that could last a generation if it had to. Already tents are being replaced by sturdy wooden barracks with tin roofs, heat and air conditioning. Nearly all of the camp's

5,000 soldiers are expected to be moved into the SEA-huts (so called because they were first used in Southeast Asia) before the start of the Balkan winter. Roads carved out of the red clay that quickly turns to mud at the first drop of rain are being covered in gravel. Construction of many of the camp's planned amenities and structures will continue right through next summer.

Lt. Col. Ed Donnelly, commander of the base, leaves the exit-strategy questions to others.

"I don't think there is a consensus," he says. "No one here really has a sense of how long we will be here. Ultimately that's up to our congressional officials."

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The Boston Herald

ARMY BASE IN KOSOVO WILL TRY TO GIVE TROOPS TASTE OF HOME

August 26, 1999, Thursday
Huge building project helps local economy

Steven Komarow

CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo -- The U.S. Army base going up here is one of the most startling sights in the Balkans.

The soldier city -- complete with a hospital, a heliport, two chapels, two gymnasiums, a recreation center, a food court and a sewage treatment plant -- is being sculpted out of a hilltop pasture.

The 700-acre community isn't exactly Mayberry, given the bomb shelters and guard towers. But at a time when the Army is having trouble recruiting and retaining enough soldiers, officials say a touch of home and some comforts help. Barracks are being finished inside with drywall. They are fully wired for the soldiers' TVs and boom boxes and have electric heat and air conditioning.

"We need to get these guys pumping iron and licking ice cream cones, whatever they want to do" when not on duty, says Col.

Robert McClure, commander of the 1st Infantry Division engineers. As U.S. government officials come to the realization that Kosovo's recovery from an ethnic war is going to require a long-term commitment,

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USA TODAY

US FORCES KEEN TO SEE 'PAYBACK TIME'

The Times (London)
June 18, 1999, Friday

Stephen Farrell in Ferizaj

"You're good", proclaims the US sentry with the night-vision attachments as he waves you into the muddy field that is now Camp Bondsteel, the new American Nato base in southern Kosovo. What happens if you're "bad", he is not at liberty to divulge.

Once inside the rapidly expanding camp, however, his comrades are only too happy to tell you what they are ready, willing and able to do should the Serbs or KLA misbehave in the countryside around Ferizaj and Gnjilane.

Here, to the bemusement of the T-shirted British liaison team, everyone wears flak jackets and most of the 2,700 or so US forces are keen for action. In one of their first peacekeeping activities, Marines seized weapons from 200 KLA fighters on Wednesday and other American forces picked up and later released three Serbs who were accused by ethnic Albanians of war crimes.

Here, the 1st Infantry Division, is digging in and, yesterday, armoured units carried the first US patrol into the north-

ern sector in three tanks and two armoured fighting vehicles.

"We're talking to the village elders about any mass graves or minefields in the area and also to win the hearts and minds of the locals, which is not hard considering their treatment at the hands of the Serbs," said First Lieutenant Steve Lively, 31, platoon leader of Delta Company, 1/6, the Outlaws. "Hearts and minds" is an emotive phrase for the American military, bearing echoes of Vietnam failures, and it does not take long for the subject to come up again.

"I want to see some action. It's payback time," said Sergeant Alexander Aguilatratt, 24, from Miami.

"The thing that makes me really mad is that Serb units were behaving like they were returning war heroes. They got their asses kicked."

He added: "When we see the leader of the Tigers Brigade saying that, if Americans bring troops to Kosovo, it will be another Vietnam, all we got to say is 'bring it on'."

Beneath the gung-ho, however, there is a serious recognition of the need to be in Kosovo. "If we let this shit escalate, madmen will start 'ethnically cleansing' all over the world," one soldier said.

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