

Introduction

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The three years since the 2001 conflict in Former Yugoslav Macedonia have seen a period of relative stabilisation and progress in the implementation of the Ochrid Accord agreement that formalised the end of the war. Although the economy remains a cause for serious concern and unemployment is very high, open military and paramilitary activity has largely ceased, except for isolated incidents and violence linked to crime and smuggling.

The papers reproduced in this document were originally produced by the Institute of War and Peace Reporting, as part of a project to assess the history of the conflict. They are of considerable interest in indicating the nature of what happened in 2001; and in particular civil-military relationships on both sides of the conflict, and the progress of the Ochrid negotiations. These are historical issues, but have an important bearing on the future of the state.

As such, they are likely to have permanent value in the historiography of the period in Macedonia, and in particular the history of the Kosova Liberation Army (KLA) and associated and successor movements. It is an axiom in the study of popular paramilitary and insurgency movements that such movements often have a long learning curve, and it can take many years of often difficult experience before they attain military efficiency. The paradigm in the history of communist-period insurgencies was perhaps the Long March in China, but there are many other examples. The National Liberation Army (NLA) in the 2001 Macedonian conflict was in some senses a successor organisation to the KLA in Kosova between 1993 and 1999, but the relationship between the two is not always clear and has been a matter of much controversy and often ill-founded and dogmatic political assumptions, where both are seen to be the products of a secretive underground conspiracy.

In reality, the development of both organisations followed patterns which are deeply rooted in local political and military contexts, and had different leadership styles and individual leadership capacity. An important issue for future historians will be the assessment of the extent to which the organisation of the NLA was consciously based on an attempt to avoid some of the weaknesses and political and military errors which affected the Kosova force in that war; for instance, the avoidance of overreaching beyond their military capacity that led to the reverses for the KLA in Milosevic's 'First Offensive' period in spring 1998 in south west Kosova. In turn, this was linked to the attempts of the KLA to take and hold sizeable towns, and to break out of its rural strongholds.

A central question in the history of the 2001 war in Macedonia is likely to be whether NATO in fact 'saved' Skopje from the NLA in its most ascendant period, and if this is the case, whether it led to some of the international community's deals with the NLA leadership that followed, that in time led to the Ochrid agreement. On the other hand, some analysts believe that it was never the intention of the NLA to occupy or partition Skopje and that the leadership had learned from the mistakes of the KLA in Kosova in 1998 and did not over reach at key moments in the war.

Recruitment policy is also likely to be an important issue for historians' consideration. Compared to the KLA, the NLA was quite a difficult organisation to join: it was much better armed and trained and had a different internal paramilitary culture and modus operandi.

On the Slav side of the conflict, important issues are likely to be the determination of the extent to which their political leadership had become fragmented and demoralised by the conflict and as a result led to the militarisation of the Slav community. It will be of interest to future historians to try to assess this, and also to see how far the public positions taken by the more militant Slav leaders were fully shared by their political constituency. This will have an important influence on the future if the Ochrid process breaks down at any point, with the possibility of a reignition of the conflict. Optimists generally believe that the allegedly more 'extreme' leaders such as Interior Minister Boskovski in the 2001 conflict were unrepresentative of majority Slav opinion, which is now prepared to see the implementation of the Ochrid deal, whereas pessimists believe that their outlook was, and is, widely shared amongst the Slav-Macedonians. If this is the case, it is likely to make full implementation of the Accords difficult.

The nature of the Ochrid negotiations has been little understood by the majority of commentators, as has the complex interaction between the different military and political components on the two sides, and in particular the Greek role in determining the limits of the Ochrid remit.

The publication of these papers is put forward in the hope of stimulating informed debate about these and other related issues, and CSRC is grateful to the Institute of War and Peace Reporting for permission to publish them.