

I A M P S

37th International Applied Military Psychology Symposium

Process And Dynamics of the Psychosocial Conditions for Members of KFOR During Their Deployment

**DANIEL ŠTROBL, MA., CAP. KATEŘINA BERNARDOVÁ, PHD., JOSEF FALÁŘ, PHD,
BARBORA PALÁNOVÁ, MA.**

Ladies & Gentlemen,

KFOR is the most recent foreign action of the Czech Army which has been actively engaged in the military operations of UN and NATO since the beginning of the 90's; the participation of our chemical unit in the Persian Gulf was the first mission. This distinctly wartime operation was later exchanged for peacekeeping missions on the territory of former Yugoslavia, which is why our army had sufficient experience with this kind of military actions when it joined KFOR.

Deployment of one KFOR mission lasts six month plus one month of "before – mission" preparation. The whole mission is possible to be divided into three parts:

- 1) before mission
- 2) during deployment
- 3) shortly before return

During these periods are observed interpersonal relationships (among the members of the whole unit or little groups), factors, which influence mental conditions of each individual (level of satisfaction of the basic human needs, sources of stress and relationship with family) and actual mental state in each part of research. This challenging kind of situation affects to a greater or lesser extent the structure of personality, the dynamics of perception, the behavior of everyone involved in the mission to some degree as well as influencing the value system in the deepest part of the personality. The soldiers learn to become confident of their ability to be flexible in any given situation. The emotional aspect of their personalities enables the soldiers to adapt to many rapidly changing scenarios. They also have to cope additionally with their personal and interpersonal problems.

All these facts and data are observed in every part of peacekeeping mission and their connecting together and comparing them each other is possible to realize dynamic picture of the level of psychosocial conditions of the soldiers of the peacekeeping mission in Kosovo. Moreover we may answer the question – what represents the deployment in this foreign mission for the Czech soldier

I A M P S

and find the possibility of improvement of the conditions of their deployment during that hard situation, that peacekeeping mission surely is.

Psychosocial research among members of the Czech KFOR unit arises from the need of the Chief of the General Staff and the headquarters of the Army of the Czech Republic to obtain and evaluate concrete information from the area of the mission and to compare these results each other and with those from previous researches. Some types of problems regularly occur in all missions.

This project is focused on obtaining a complete summary of information demonstrating potential risks. Clear indications of significant frustration among the members of the KFOR unit may lead to the proposal of equal social - technical arrangement that diminishes pressure or eliminates risks and causes.

The sample in every part of the research was not less than 30% of the whole team and people was selected for our research to cover horizontally all occupations of the soldiers and vertically every level from command to the staff. Our collection of the data was carried out in the mission area – I. part on June from 25th to 31st 2000, II. part on October from 27th to 30th 2000 and III., final part on January from 18th to 25th 2001.

If we are thinking about Czech soldier of KFOR, we have to know that his average age is 28 (minimal age was 19, maximal was 54), he is high school educated (approx. two thirds of the samples, about one third has university) , if he is unmarried - is without children, if he is married – has two children.

The structure and dynamic of the mental condition and feelings was checked in all three parts by the SUPOS 7 test, in respect to the interaction of the individual with his social and work environment. Psychosocial screening during the mission is moreover focused on the personal profile of the members of the mission, based on screening, a psycho-diagnostic test battery and a questionnaire by the Czech authors.

The questionnaire that was created for use in the military area was administered for the screening of the psychosocial conditions of the Czech soldiers. Directed interviews were obviously part of our research.

Main areas of our interest are possible to be divided into these issues:

1. relationships and attitudes towards local people
2. motivation factors and the level of satisfaction with the mission
3. interpersonal relationships in the unit
4. acute mental state
5. substance consumption

Relationships of the peacekeeping soldiers towards the local people are very important parts of their qualities. In previous researches the occurrence of dehumanization was proved. That kind of attitudes is growing during mission what may cause various problems from growing of aggressivity to personal problems of whom are involved. On the other hand the Muslim-Albanian population presents greater diversity in social customs, value-systems etc. Problems with recognition of the civilian population and paramilitary units may support these tendencies which occurred among approximately half of the responders. Soldiers with an university education demonstrated lower levels of this kind of attitude. From the tables is clear, that these soldiers, who weren't before

I A M P S

mission sure with their answers, are more endangered of the development of dehumanization. The importance and consequences of the social-cultural preparation of the soldiers are obvious and the Army of the Czech Republic has added it as a part of before-mission training.

Good mental state of the Czech KFOR soldiers was repeatedly proved in every parts of our research, despite the answer “very good” was exchanged mostly for just “good”.

Participation of women in the military mission is the very important topic of the Czech Army. From the results of our research is obvious little disappointment of the respondents who were less sure with participation of women in peacekeeping mission in the middle of the mission, then they were in the beginning.

Considering the economical situation of the Czech Republic the financial benefits head the motivation factors. They are important for two thirds of our respondents. Average income of a member of the Czech KFOR unit is approximately five times higher than his income at home.

Professional reasons to joint KFOR are almost on the same level, but during mission is obvious polarization of motivators.

The importance of financial benefits wasn't changed even at the end of the mission, but their occurrence wasn't so different from the other issues.

Almost same percentage of people for whom was mission especially financial benefits, were satisfied with it.

59% of our respondents answered that their expectation came true. Interesting is one third of the soldiers who weren't satisfied. We will be able to see that the similar group of people had some problems with interpersonal relationships during mission, with the commander and with the members of the staff. We may assume that these issues are closely associated.

Before mission were members of the Czech KFOR unit satisfied with the composition of the unit, but at the end of the mission were relationships evaluated by one third of the respondents as bad. We may assume that this is the normal development of the group. On the other hand the observation and the controlled interview recognized, that the main reason of the problems was the creation of the Czech KFOR company. It was made up from the various military units with a different background – the officers were mostly from artillery, then there were a platoon of logistic and the main part of the unit was made up mostly by the members of the special forces trained to operate in the rearguard of military action. This type of composition caused quite tight relationships in the whole unit and fragmentation of it into several separated groups.

It has impacted the level of satisfaction with the commander and with the staff as it is obvious from the other slides.

The whole group of our respondents tends rather to introvert type of personality, less sociable, mentally and emotionally mostly stable.

During mission is possible to notice growing of the somatic troubles, which is the highest in the middle of their deployment. The biggest increase is with mental fatigue, which could be dangerous for the copying of the duty. It is obvious that short vocation in the middle of the mission is more then necessary.

During mission soldiers more consummate various substance except of alcohol, which is not prohibited but limited. More cigarettes per day was recognized among smokers.

I A M P S

Despite various dynamical developments that were observed from the beginning to the end of the mission, the actual mental state of the Czech soldiers was extremely good for all the time. Every positive issue is above and the negative is under the average population of the Czech Republic.

CONCLUSION

AVERAGE MEMBER OF THE CZECH UNIT KFOR IS MENTALLY STABIL, ACTIVE, RESILIENT AND SELFCONTROLLED. PROFESSIONAL QUALITIES ARE EQUAL WITH THE SOLDIERS OF SOME OTHER COUNTRIES.

On the other hand PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS AFFECT EVERY MEMBER OF THE UNIT AND HIS or HER SUBJECTIVE PSYCHOSOCIAL CONDITIONS ARE DYNAMICALY CHANGING. UNDERSTANDING OF THE DYNAMICAL PROCESSES MAY HELP TO RECOGNIZE NORMAL DEVELOPMENT AND DETECT PATHOLOGICAL SOCIAL OR MENTAL PHENOMENONS as well as to improve "before mission" preparation or to advise psychosocial criteria for make up of the unit.