

MISSION ESSENTIAL HARVEST

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Operation Essential Harvest is consisted of collection of weapons and ammunition from so called NLA voluntarily handed in to NATO's forces, named as a Task Force Harvest. The other tasks include, transportation and disposal of weapons which are surrendered; and, Transportation and destruction of ammunition that is turned in as a part of broader process giving an end to the conflict in Macedonia.

Evolution

NATO Secretary General on 14 June 2001 received a letter from the President of the Republic of Macedonia, requesting NATO's assistance in the implementation of the Plan and Program for overcoming the crisis in Macedonia. NATO responded to the President's request and produced a draft plan for the collection of weapons from the armed insurgents, named Operation "ESSENTIAL HARVEST". The North Atlantic Council approved the plan on 29 June 2001 and NATO's Secretary General was able to submit an early proposal to the President of Macedonia for weapons collection.

At that time NATO and the President agreed to a set of four pre-conditions to be met for the 30-day mission to take place:

1. a political agreement signed by the main Parliamentary leaders;
2. a status of forces agreement (SOFA) with the Republic of Macedonia and agreed conditions for the Task Force;
3. an agreed plan for weapons collection, including an explicit agreement by the ethnic Albanian armed groups to disarm; and
4. an enduring cease-fire.

Framework Agreement, concluded in Ohrid and signed in Skopje on 13 August 2001, by the four leaders of political parties, members of broader coalition, in its introduction under the title Cessation of Hostilities, stipulates the following: "The parties underline the importance of the commitments of July 5, 2001. There shall be a complete cessation of hostilities, complete voluntary disarmament of the ethnic Albanian armed groups and their complete voluntary disbandment. They acknowledge that a decision by NATO to assist in this context will require the establishment of a general, unconditional and open-ended cease-fire, agreement on a political solution to the problems of this country, a clear

commitment by the armed groups to voluntarily disarm, and acceptance by all the parties of the conditions and limitations under which the NATO forces will operate",

Following the signing of the Framework Agreement, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) on 15 August authorised the immediate deployment of the Headquarters of Task Force Harvest (TFH) to the Republic of Macedonia. Maj. General Gunnar Lange, Danish Army, already serving as NATO Senior Military Representative in Skopje, was appointed as TFH Commander. First forces of the Task Force started to arrive on 16 August 2001. On 22 August, the North Atlantic Council, authorized the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), who visited Skopje previous day, to issue the "Activation Order" requesting nations to deploy their troops to TFH for operation Essential Harvest. On 27 August, Task Force Harvest has been authorized by the Commander in Chief, Allied Forces Southern Europe, Admiral James O. Ellis, to begin the immediate collection of arms and ammunition in the Republic of Macedonia.

NLA agreed to the weapons collection plan and to voluntarily hand-in weapons in exchange of amnesty which has already been declared by President Trajkovski. Amnesty do not include those who have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity that are under the authority of International War Crimes Tribunal for former Yugoslavia, in the Hague, the Netherlands.

TFH's only mandate is to collect weapons that are voluntarily turned in by the armed extremists; the responsibility to ensure a safe and secure environment remains with the government of the Republic of Macedonia.

Phases of Operation

The Operation is consisted of 30 days, divided into three phases. The first phase concluded on 30 August. The first phase was followed by the parliamentary voting to start a process of constitutional changes. Following the parliamentary decision, on 7 September 2001, TFH started a second phase of collection of arms and weapons.

In the first phase, 1210 pieces of weapons were collected, as a little more of a third of 3300 weapons expected to be collected by the end of the operation. The collected weapons include: automatic and semi-automatic guns, machine guns, pieces of mortars and anti-tank weapons, air-defense systems, tanks and armored personnel carriers, munitions, mines and rocket-propelled grenades. Collections sites were established in Otlja (Kumanovo), Brodec (Tetovo) and Tanusevci (Debar). Weapons were destroyed unless they are unsafe to move. Ammunition will be destroyed in Macedonia at a site agreed to with national authorities, taking into account the potential environmental impact. If ammunition is unsafe to move it will be destroyed at the collection point. Other collected arms are transported to Krivolak, an air base in southern Macedonia, to be transported to Greece for destruction. In the second face the operational sites are one in Brodec (Tetovo) and one in Radusha (Skopje). The expected final date to finish the operation is 26 September 2001.

The second phase is expected to be finished by the end of the week, where two thirds of the weapons are expected to be collected, that is to be followed by the amendments to the Constitution proposed by the President of RM. Phase three will be the final phase of the collection of arms to be followed by the constitutional changes.

The Concept of the Operation

The Operation falls within the framework of CJTF concept of NATO, adopted at Brussels Summit in January 1994 to give greater role for European allies of NATO.

Results of the Operation

Weapons collected: 1210 weapons (these include assault rifles, light and heavy machine guns, rocket propelled grenade launchers, mortars, anti-tank weaponry, anti-tank mine-launchers), 627 mines and bombs; 118.212 pieces of ammunition.

Expected weapons to be collected: 3300: 2900 guns (rifles, automatic and semi-automatic guns); 210 machine guns, 130 mortars and anti-tank weapons; 6 air defense systems; 2 tanks and armored personnel carriers; 1100 munitions for mortars; 110000 munitions for light weapons; 600 mines and hand grenades.

Number of forces of TFH: about 4800, from whom approximately 3800 are actually dedicated for the Task Force, and the rest are international support elements – logistics, other assets that nations are sending. (1 Sept., NATO press conference in Skopje). Task Force Harvest is composed of following 14 states: Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom; with the United Kingdom leading the operation at brigade level. The brigade consists of four battalions, French, Greek, Italian and British.