

Conducting Vehicle Checkpoints In Kosovo

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Conducting vehicle checkpoints (VCPs) in Kosovo is a standard procedure used in an attempt to catch smuggled weapons or cargo. However, after 20 minutes of standing up a vehicle checkpoint, the VCP is no longer effective. Smugglers today in Kosovo are much smarter than in 1999, and over the years have developed multiple tactics to avoid the Kosovo Force (KFOR) or other law enforcement agencies. This is mainly due to the flood of cell phones used by Kosovars living or traveling in the area of operation. Two distinct tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) are used for vehicle smuggling in Kosovo. One is using a small nondescript car driven by one passenger carrying a cell phone driving ahead of the cargo truck actively looking for any KFOR, United Nations Civilian Police (CIVPOL) or Kosovo Police Service (KPS) checkpoints in the area. This vehicle is typically able to spot the VCP, move through it, and then call back to the truck

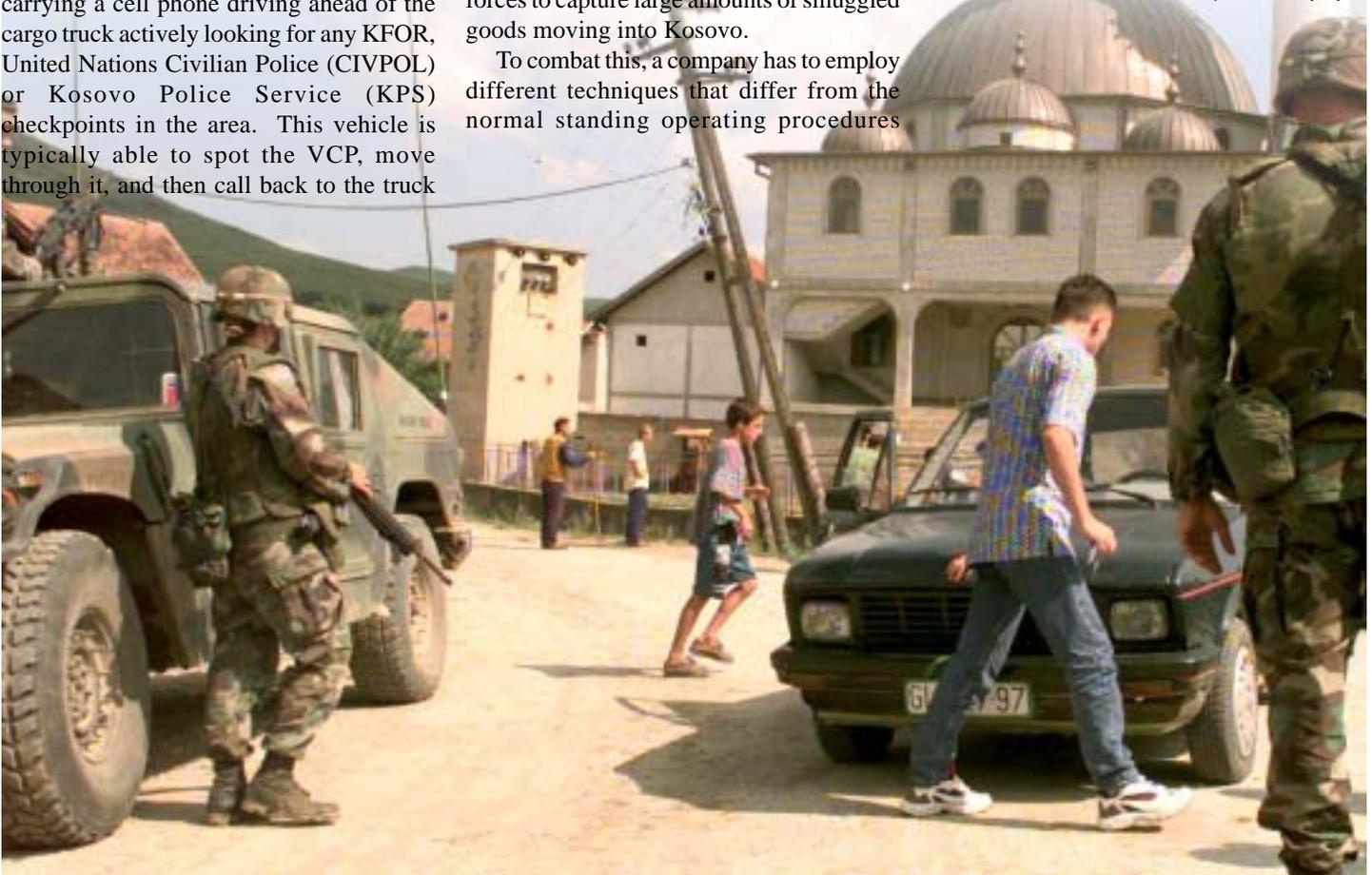
carrying cargo alerting them not to continue moving along the current route. The cargo truck will take one of two actions, either stop movement along that route altogether by halting at a local café and hiding the truck, or it will move to an alternate route, if available, to bypass this VCP. The second TTP used by smugglers in Kosovo is to pay people living on or around smuggling routes to call the smugglers the moment KFOR, CIVPOL, or KPS enters the town or sector. This is relatively easy in some areas since the road networks are relatively limited, and in many border areas there are only one or two routes into the border crossing areas. With these TTPs, it is very difficult for military and law enforcement forces to capture large amounts of smuggled goods moving into Kosovo.

To combat this, a company has to employ different techniques that differ from the normal standing operating procedures

(SOPs) of conducting VCPs. Three distinct types of VCPs worked well at surprising smugglers, and Soldiers were able to seize large amounts of smuggled goods attempting to come into Kosovo illegally. Each type of VCP uses a similar base task organization of a find, fix, and finish force; however, the locations and insertions were unique to each operation. There is one major problem with all three of these techniques — communication. Due to the rugged terrain in Kosovo, dismounted communications using the AN/PRC-119 were very ineffective for communication

U.S. Army Soldiers watch vehicles approach a checkpoint near Vitina, Kosovo.

Specialist Judy Ryan





back to the company command post. This caused a heavy reliance on either the non-secure Motorola STX-3000, which has a repeater network throughout the sector, or it requires a vehicle mounted section to provide relay capability to the squad on the ground.

DISMOUNTED SQUAD INSERTION

This technique was able to easily insert a squad into a known smuggling route using a key light infantry tactic of infiltration. This technique uses a squad as both the find and fix force. The mission would be given to a platoon to insert a squad to observe and stop all cargo trucks, 4x4 vehicles, or vans moving throughout the area. The platoon would insert the squad into the area in one of three methods:

- * A 5-ton truck insertion a few terrain features away allows the squad to enter the suspected smuggling area dismounted, therefore not alerting any of the local inhabitants of the presence of KFOR in the sector.

- * An air insertion of the dismounted squad uses a similar location for insertion as the 5-ton insertion with the available air resources in place of vehicles.

- * A feint could be employed. This would be to move two squads into the smuggling area mounted, set up a VCP for 30 minutes with one squad, while the other squad moves into a hidden location to remain after the squad conducting the VCP leaves the area. This gives the local Kosovars living in the area the impression that KFOR has left the area. In addition, if there is anyone working for the smugglers, they will notify anyone

wanting to enter the area that KFOR has departed and is no longer in the area.

The finish force would be comprised of one squad that remains mounted. This force should be located in the vicinity of the smuggling sector but not too close to where the squad is deterring smugglers from entering the area. The best use for the finishing force is to locate this element in a hidden location a few miles away or on a hilltop as a relay station for the squad on the ground. Once the dismounted squad identifies a suspect vehicle, the squad executes a no notice VCP along the road. This, for obvious reasons, can be a very dangerous task if the squad does not have enough time to present itself on the road and allow the vehicle some room to slow down and stop. In addition, at night each member should wear a road guard vest and either attach a chemlight or a flashlight to their LBV once they reach the road. Once the dismounted squad element halts the vehicle and finds contraband material, the finishing force (the mounted squad) is called forward. The mounted force's role is to take charge of the scene and either transport the captured smugglers and material to the detention facility, or to assist the dismounted squad in securing the scene until CIVPOL and KPS arrive to hand the detainees over to civil authorities for criminal prosecution.



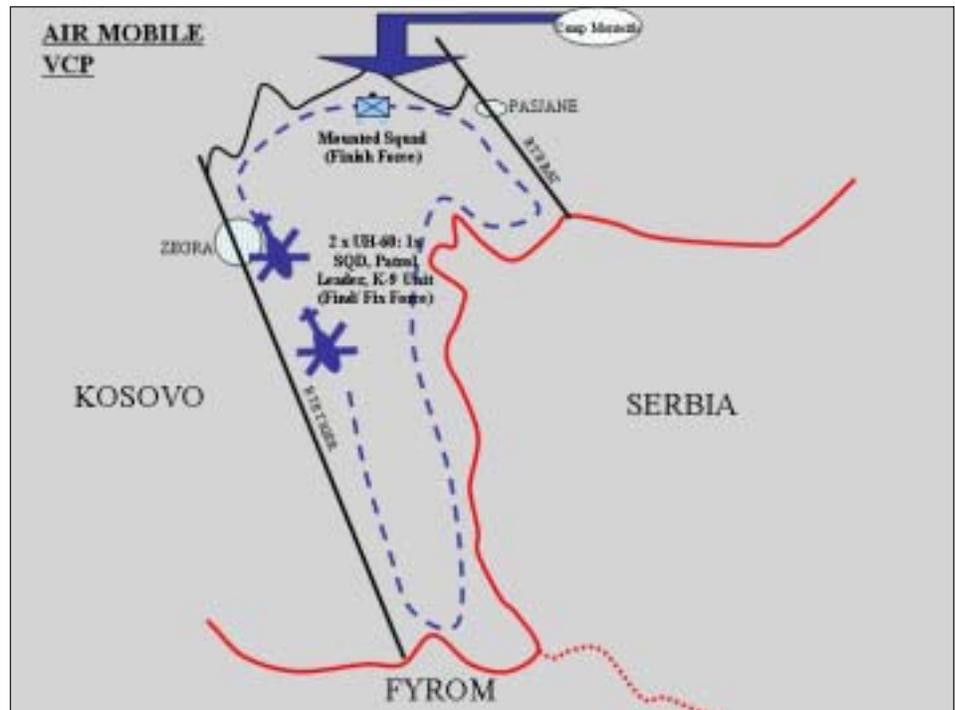
OBSERVATION POST VCP

The observation post VCP is similar to the dismounted squad insertion team method with the exception that the fixing and finishing elements are combined into one squad. This technique uses one forward squad or fire team occupying a concealed observation post monitoring traffic at either a border crossing point, or a known smuggling route. Once a suspicious vehicle is spotted, the squad radios to the mounted element a description of the vehicle, and approximate time of arrival to the mounted element's location. The mounted element, which is hidden off the main road, moves onto the main road and establishes a hasty VCP to stop and search the suspect vehicle. Once a vehicle is caught carrying contraband items, the mounted section will either transport the captured vehicle and personnel to the KFOR detention facility or await CIVPOL/ KPS to arrive and detain the smugglers and vehicles for a criminal violation.

AIR MOBILE VCP

This is the most resource intensive VCP a unit can conduct. The VCP consists of one mounted element (finishing force) placed in a hidden location somewhere along the Air Mobile patrol route. Two UH-60 helicopters (finding force) to fly a fixed route for patrol. One squad and a command and control (C2) element (fixing force) riding in the UH-60s able to land, stop, and search the vehicle. This squad, like any of the VCPs, can be augmented with MP drug or explosive dog teams.

Operation of an Air Mobile VCP is normally restricted in bad weather conditions, but can be very effective if properly executed. The conduct of the VCP involves about three to four hours of flight time, and typically the UH-60s will have to return to base and refuel after two hours of flight. The company would conduct these operations with a nine-man rifle squad and the company commander or executive officer (patrol leader) riding in the lead helicopter. The trail helicopter was normally one narcotics K-9 team, one explosive K-9 team, and the company executive officer or platoon leader (assistant patrol leader). The UH-60s would conduct a flight over specific major roads in a sector known for smuggling (300-500 feet).



During these flights, the company commander or executive officer (patrol leader) would remain in the far right rear seat wearing a headset to talk with the pilots. The UH-60 would maintain a flight path that would keep the road off the right hand side of the helicopter, allowing the patrol leader to watch for suspected smuggling vehicles driving on the road, and alert the pilots of the vehicle. The pilots would then look for a suitable landing zone for the helicopters far enough ahead of the vehicle to allow time for the Soldiers to dismount the helicopter and reach the road to stop the vehicle.

Once on the ground, the squad first dismounts and moves to the road to stop the vehicle. The second helicopter would then land and only dismount the K-9 teams. The assistant patrol leader would remain in the helicopter to assist the squad on the ground and relay any communication to either the company TOC or mounted squad in sector. When contraband material was discovered inside vehicles, the assistant patrol leader would alert both the mounted element in sector and the company TOC. A key element during an air mobile VCP is communication. Establishing communication between the dismount elements in the two helicopters is a critical task. Being able to talk on a private net separate from the pilots allows the dismount squad leader and mission leader to discuss their

plan and acquire targets. The patrol leader would talk the mounted squad into the fixing force's location and if needed request the QRF or CIVPOL/ KPS through the company TOC. The mounted element, already out in sector, would be the fastest element to arrive on scene and would release the Air Mobile section to re-board the UH-60s without wasting blade time of the helicopters. This allowed the Air Mobile VCP to continue mission in other areas of the sector while the mounted element secured the vehicles and personnel until the arrival of either the battalion quick reaction force (QRF) or CIVPOL/KPS depending on the type of contraband found.

Using a combination of each of these VCPs, in addition to standard VCP operations, typically created enough change in tactics to keep the smugglers in sector guessing and provided opportunities to capture numerous amounts of contraband items in sector. These three VCP techniques are not the only ways to operate in Kosovo; however, they differ just enough in execution to catch smugglers when they least expect it.

Captain Erik Krivda is currently serving as the commander of C Company, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division. **First Lieutenant Kamil Sztalkoper** served as a rifle platoon leader with C Co. 2d Bn., 2d Inf. during a nine-month deployment to Kosovo and is currently the unit's executive officer.
