

„The availability of heavy weapons allows escalation dominance“

Interview with LtGen Ton van Loon

Are artillerymen suitable to be used as peacekeepers?

Yes, without a doubt, although this does require focus on basic skills and drills which was not always given sufficient attention during the cold war. The adagio: every man a rifle man applies here. The availability of heavy weapons (M109, tanks, AH) allows escalation dominance which I would argue is always preferable. In the early days of KFOR it was helpful that some of the checkpoints clearly showed our resolve (do not mess with us, our guns will always be bigger).

How useful are heavy weapons like M109 within a fragile environment of a city like Orahovac?

The M109 was used to demonstrate resolve. Could we have done without them: probably but having them gave us an edge. Could we have with less: certainly, we would have loved to trade some of them in for (vehicles with) AC or just better shower facilities. Point is: when deploying a peace support unit into an uncertain situation you need to be prepared for everything that means bring the equipment you need for worst case situation (here this meant arty and tanks). When you do not need them however soldiers today need to be flexible and well trained in the entire spectrum.

What are your lessons learned as the commander of an artillery battalion after the KFOR mission?

As a gunner: limited (sure I am proud that the arty did this job but I do not claim we did better than the others). For what we now call comprehensive approach: a lot (see the book you mentioned). I have certainly built on what I (we) had to do in Kosovo for my later deployment to ISAF and also to the corps. Soldiers alone cannot achieve the endstate but they play a big role. It is essential the military understands the other actors and supports them when needed. In an early stage of operations it is also needed to take on some non-military tasks and hand them over to other agencies (specifically mentioned in the KFOR mandate). This requires what I would call "interagency competence" modern soldiers must be able to work in a joint environment (obvious) but more and more also in an interagency environment. This requires training and must be a focus point in our armies (not just the arty).



LtGen Ton van Loon commands the I. German/Dutch Corps in Münster. In 1981, he graduated from the Koninklijke Militaire Academie. For his leadership efforts in the KFOR mission 1999, he received the knighthood of the Order of Orange-Nassau. Later, he also served in Afghanistan for NATO.