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NATO ready to prevent violence in Kosovo, doubts remain

KosovoCompromise Staff

NATO is ready to prevent any outbreak of violence that might follow the next stage in the process of defining the future status of Kosovo, as French and U.S. troops moved closer to the administrative line with central Serbia in an apparent attempt to add a “stabilizing factor” into a rather tense situation in a province, top-ranking NATO commander, General Bantz Craddock said on Tuesday.

However, NATO’s ability to react to sudden outbreaks of violence in Kosovo has been under large scrutiny ever since the rampage of ethnic Albanian demonstrators in early 2004, when thousands of protestors torched more than 800 Serbian houses and religious sites and forced 4,000 Serbs out of their homes.

“American and French units have moved to Camp Nothing Hill in northern Kosovo, just 17 kilometers from the Serbian border. Those units should be a very stabilizing factor,” General Craddock said in Washington.

"There will be those who want to create mischief, and that will be manifested as strife and potentially violence, in Kosovo. There will be, then, those who will respond to that, against the advice of, I think, calmer heads to not respond," he said.

General Craddock also said that NATO has already prepared “extensive plans for nearly any sequence of events, and has rehearsed its responses to various scenarios”, but warned of what he said were newly established Serbian paramilitary groups.

“There is a good cooperation between the Kfor and the Serbian army,” he said.

Unpredictable situation in Kosovo, according to the U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Republican Senator Chuck Hagel, has been the main motive behind Pentagon’s decision to keep its European force intact, despite the urgent need for fresh troops in Afghanistan and Iraq.