



Revisiting Russia's Seizure of Kosovo Airport

OE Watch Commentary: While largely forgotten in the West, the Russian military's attempt to seize a major airport in Kosovo at the tail end of the 1999 conflict between Serbia and NATO forces has become a watershed event in the Kremlin's current narrative. In their account, Russian forces, though vastly outnumbered, were willing to make a daring attempt to seize this critical airport, both to assist their Serbian Orthodox brothers and to demonstrate that Russia was willing to use force to maintain influence in the region. The accompanying excerpt from a Russian regional news source, *Amurskaya Pravda*, describes how Russian and Serbian film producers have teamed together to create a movie titled "Balkan Frontier," which describes "the secret operation of the Russian special forces group that took control of the Slatina airport in Kosovo in the summer of 1999, which was of crucial strategic importance."

According to the author, this incident was "the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, [that] Russia loudly declared its interests in the international arena." While the film is purportedly based on "real events, recreated with great, almost documentary authenticity," the creators did have to "add a few bright and dramatic episodes" to make the story "more spectacular." The film includes all sorts of military equipment and "many pyrotechnic effects," and although production mostly took place in Serbia, much of the weaponry and funding were provided by the Russian Defense Ministry.

The film will be released in Russian next year and according to the article, "negotiations are already under way to show 'Balkan Frontier' in other countries." The article quotes the film's director, who asserts that "participation in this film is part of my love for Russia, a tribute to her significant role in the fate of my Motherland." If the film's trailer is any indication, (see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZUcdtp_w4g) it is clear that the 1999 events in Serbia and Kosovo have been revised to align with the Kremlin's narrative. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

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American and Russian soldiers pass out flyers to the citizens of Kamenica, Kosovo, on July 15, 1999.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Defense.gov_News_Photo_990715-A-6207H-008.jpg Public Domain.

Source: Valeriya Khvashevskaya, "Балканский рубеж: Гоша Куценко и Эмир Кустурица снимаются в фильме о войне в Югославии (Balkan frontier: Gosha Kutsenko and Emir Kusturica in the film about the war in Yugoslavia)," *Amurskaya Pravda*, 13 August 2018. <https://www.ampravda.ru/2018/08/10/083635.html>

In Serbia, the film "Balkan Frontier" with Gosha Kutsenko and Milos Bikovich is in full swing. In the international project dedicated to the war in Yugoslavia, Russian and Serbian actors are involved...

...The dramatic motion picture is based on the real events of the war in Yugoslavia in the late 90s. It tells about the secret operation of the Russian special forces group that took control of the Slatina airport in Kosovo in the summer of 1999, which was of crucial strategic importance. In the center of the plot are the members of the special squad that captured the airport and secured it until peacekeepers arrive. This operation was preceded by an unexpected "march-spurt" of our peacekeeping battalion from Bosnia in Kosovo. For the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia loudly declared its interests in the international arena. Representatives of all the parties involved in the conflict were perplexed: no one could understand under whose control the strategically important bridgehead for NATO had passed....

...Filming began last year in Serbia. Work on the film goes both in Belgrade and in areas remote from the capital... Part of the filming takes place in Moscow and in unique scenery in the Moscow region. Although the film is shot as a drama, at the core - real events, are recreated with great, almost documentary authenticity, the creators of the project explained.

...In order for the film to be more spectacular, we added a few bright and dramatic episodes in the story, but on the whole this story is based on real events of that secret operation that was conducted in Kosovo.

...Since the "Balkan Frontier" is a military movie, there are many pyrotechnic effects and stunt tricks on the set. "We were very much helped by the Russian Defense Ministry," says the executive producer. "There was an unprecedented amount of military equipment on the set: all sorts of cars, a whole column of armored personnel carriers, helicopters, and much more."

...Kusturica himself admitted that these shootings are of special importance for him. "For me, participation in the "Balkan Frontier" project is part of my love for Russia, a tribute to her significant role in the fate of my Motherland," says the famous director. "We are brothers, and this picture is just about that!" It is planned that the film will be released in Russian next year. In addition, negotiations are already under way to demonstrate "Balkan Frontier" in other countries of the world.