

Jackal Stone '09

Counterterrorism training event is a milestone for Croatia

Croatia hosted its first-ever NATO exercise — Jackal Stone — in September 2009, just five months after joining the now 28-member alliance.

The counterterrorism training was a big step for Croatia, which joined NATO in April 2009. The multinational event, held Sept. 10 to 27, allowed Croatia to showcase the skills of its special operations forces. It was also an opportunity for the country to prove it could work with its new military partners.

It was the “most important international exercise for Croatia” in 2009, said Brig. Gen. Dražen Šćuri, deputy commander of the Croatian Air Force and Air Defense. He said it was also an “opportunity to improve our capabilities for the host nation support concept.”

Šćuri, the exercise deputy commander, said Croatian Special Operations Battalion units and Ministry of Interior special police joined counterparts from the other nations in the exercise. More than 1,500 special operations and police forces from 10 nations conducted joint air, land and sea counterinsurgency operations. Participants came

from Albania, Hungary, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Ukraine and the United States.

Classroom and robust field events took place at various locations in Croatia and off its Adriatic coast. A multinational team comprised the Jackal Stone Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force. Direction for task force actions came from the combined and joint special operations center, which played a crucial role in the operation. The center placed special focus on the information and communication elements needed to conduct successful counterinsurgency operations.

A major exercise goal was to increase the cooperation needed to fight terrorism. Hosting Europe’s biggest special forces drill of 2009 demonstrated the value Croatia places on special operations forces to do that job, Croatian Minister of Defense Branko Vukelić said. He was satisfied with the drill, and said it helped standardize NATO



A Croatian special forces team storms a bus during a Jackal Stone anti-terrorism exercise near Udbina, Croatia.

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A Croatian Mi-171 helicopter lands in a field to pick up a special operations assault force from Croatia, Lithuania and Hungary. The team took part in a Jackal Stone anti-terrorism drill near Udbina, Croatia, in 2009.

counterinsurgency efforts. “This exercise contributes to strengthening regional security and cooperation,” he said.

Another key exercise goal was to improve interoperability. Though participants regularly practice with other countries, this exercise was another opportunity for nations to improve their readiness and build the capacities that will enable NATO to present a more effective joint response to future security challenges, the Croatian Ministry of Defense stated on its Web site.

Other exercise objectives included building mutual respect between participants and the sharing of doctrine and training concepts, tactics, techniques and procedures. And there was emphasis on helping members address risks before they become crises.

The exercise also showed the importance Croatia places on improving international military partnerships. It reinforced the nation’s belief that special forces, although small, play a crucial role in fighting terrorism.

Organizing the exercise was a joint Croatian-United States effort. But putting on such a large event was no easy task. Much effort went into planning the minor details before the exercise took place, said Rear Adm. Zdenko Simičić, the Croatian Armed Forces deputy chief of general staff and exercise director.

A demonstration for distinguished visitors Sept. 15, 2009, “showed how much effort it took” to organize the multinational force, Simičić said. During the demonstration, special forces and police units rescued hostages held by terrorists. Teams from various nations used helicopters and airlift aircraft during rescue missions. It showed “good cooperation and coordination of actions” by both military and civilian forces, he said.

The training provided opportunities for land, sea and air special operations units. Some of the training included

fast-rope insertion/extraction system training; ship visits; offshore board, search and seizure training; helicopter aerial refueling; water drop and free-fall parachute training.

This kind of training will help build a more cohesive NATO counterinsurgency response, Romanian Army Maj. Tocila Doru said. Classes held before the field exercises allowed participants to “harmonize and establish standard procedures” before taking action on the field, he said. The Jackal Stone liaison officer said improvements were evident from the first day, and that led to the success of the exercise.

For Polish 1st Special Forces Regiment Soldiers, the exercise provided the opportunity to operate within a multinational force. More significant was that, for the first time, Poles planned the activities of a special operations task group, said Lt. Col. Pawel Wiktorowicz, chief of training for Poland’s Special Operations Command. This constitutes another stage that readies Poland to command NATO special operations forces, he said.

“Due to this fact, Polish SOF Soldiers will not only perform tasks given by their allies but they will also be on the decision-making staff,” Wiktorowicz said.

Though Croatia is new to NATO, the success of Jackal Stone — and working with an international team — comes as no surprise. Croatia has contributed troops to the NATO-led Kosovo Force, both directly and indirectly. And since 2003, it has sent troops to serve with the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

Gen. Josip Lucić, Croatian Armed Forces chief of general staff, said his nation’s forces gained more with each passing day of the exercise. He said the Croatian military, particularly its special forces, had “implemented all the necessary reforms and proven the ability to work with our allies and partners.” □

Information from the Croatian Ministry of Defense, Polish Special Forces Command and other military Web sites was used in this report.