

Forum: Historical Security Council

Issue: Responding to the Kosovo Crisis Following Escalating Violence in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Its Implications for International Peace and Security

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Introduction:

The Kosovo Crisis in 1999 was a major conflict that raised serious questions about how far the international community should go to protect human rights within a sovereign state. The crisis developed as violence escalated between Serbian forces and ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, leading to widespread displacement, civilian casualties, and accusations of ethnic cleansing. As the situation worsened, it became clear that it was not just a regional issue, but a threat to international peace and stability (United Nations).

One of the main challenges in this topic is the clash between two important principles: state sovereignty and humanitarian intervention. On the one hand, countries are expected to respect the independence and territorial integrity of others. On the other hand, there is growing pressure to act when large-scale human rights violations occur (United Nations). This tension made it difficult for the United Nations Security Council to respond effectively, especially due to disagreements between major powers.

In this committee, delegates will need to place themselves in the position of world leaders in 1999 and respond to the crisis as it unfolds. This means carefully considering diplomatic, military, and humanitarian options while working within the limits of the information and political climate at the time. The focus of the debate will be on finding realistic and effective ways to address the violence in Kosovo while maintaining international peace and security.

Definition of key terms:

Kosovo: Kosovo was a region within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, mainly under Serbian control. It had a majority ethnic Albanian population, many of whom wanted independence, which led to increasing tensions with the Serbian government (Britannica).

Ethnic cleansing: Ethnic cleansing refers to the forced removal of a particular ethnic group from a certain area, often through violence or intimidation (Browne). During the Kosovo Crisis, many ethnic Albanians were forced to leave their homes.

Sovereignty: Sovereignty is the principle that a state has the right to govern itself without interference from other countries. This became a key issue during the crisis, especially when international intervention was considered.

Humanitarian intervention: Humanitarian intervention is when external actors, such as countries or organizations, take action to stop serious human rights violations in another state (Groff). This can sometimes involve the use of military force.

NATO intervention: This refers to the military action taken by NATO in 1999, when it launched airstrikes against Yugoslavia. The intervention was controversial because it did not have clear authorization from the UN Security Council.

Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA): The KLA was an armed group made up mostly of ethnic Albanians who aimed to achieve independence for Kosovo. Their actions contributed to the escalation of the conflict (Sullivan).

Background:

Origins of the conflict

The Kosovo Crisis did not start suddenly in 1999, but developed over several years due to growing tensions between the Serbian government and the ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo. In 1989, the Serbian leadership removed Kosovo's autonomy, which meant that the region lost a lot of its self-governing powers (Britannica). This caused dissatisfaction among ethnic Albanians, who made up the majority of the population.

During the early 1990s, most Kosovo Albanians followed a policy of peaceful resistance, including protests and the creation of parallel institutions like schools and healthcare systems (Britannica). However, these efforts did not lead to significant political change, and frustration continued to grow over time.

Rise of violence

By the mid-1990s, the situation began to change as some groups lost faith in peaceful methods. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) emerged and started carrying out attacks against Serbian police and officials. In response, Serbian forces launched strong military operations in Kosovo (Allcock).

These responses were often excessive and affected civilians, not just armed groups. Villages were destroyed, and many people were either killed or forced to flee their homes (Allcock). As a result, the conflict quickly escalated into a humanitarian crisis, with hundreds of thousands of displaced people.

International concern and failed diplomacy

As the violence increased, the international community became more involved. Organizations like the United Nations and the OSCE tried to reduce tensions and encourage a ceasefire. Several UN resolutions were passed, calling for an end to violence, but they were not fully followed on the ground.

In early 1999, the Rambouillet Peace Talks were held in an attempt to find a political solution. The proposed agreement aimed to give Kosovo more autonomy while still remaining part of Yugoslavia (NATO). However, the talks failed because both sides could not agree on key terms, especially regarding the presence of foreign troops.

NATO intervention

After the failure of diplomacy, NATO decided to intervene militarily in March 1999. It launched an air campaign against Yugoslavia, aiming to stop the violence and pressure the government to withdraw its forces from Kosovo (NATO).

This intervention was highly controversial because it was carried out without direct authorization from the UN Security Council (NATO). While some countries supported the action as necessary to prevent further humanitarian disaster, others argued that it violated international law and state sovereignty.

End of the conflict

The conflict came to an end in June 1999, when Yugoslav forces agreed to withdraw from Kosovo. Following this, the United Nations established an interim administration in the region, and international peacekeeping forces were deployed to maintain stability (United Nations).

Even though the violence decreased, the situation remained complex, and tensions between different groups continued. The Kosovo Crisis left a lasting impact on international relations, especially in terms of how the world responds to internal conflicts and human rights issues.

Timeline of Key Events

Event	Timeline
1989	Kosovo loses its autonomy under Serbian leadership, increasing tensions
1996	The KLA begins armed actions against Serbian authorities
1998	The conflict escalates, with more civilian casualties and displacement (U.S. Department of State)
Oct 1998	The UN calls for a ceasefire through Resolution 1199 (U.S. Department of State)
Feb 1999	The Rambouillet Peace Talks begin to find a solution (Britannica)
Mar 1999	The talks fail, and NATO launches airstrikes (U.S. Department of State)
June 1999	Yugoslav forces withdraw from Kosovo, ending the conflict and the UN establishes an international presence through Resolution 1244.

Major parties involved:

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro): Yugoslavia was the main state in control of Kosovo and wanted to maintain its territorial integrity. Its government, led by Slobodan Milošević, aimed to suppress separatist movements and keep Kosovo under Serbian authority (Britannica). It had full control over military and police forces and acted at a national level. During the conflict, it carried out military operations in Kosovo, which were widely criticized for targeting civilians and causing displacement (Britannica).

Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA): The KLA was an armed non-state group made up mainly of ethnic Albanians. Its main goal was independence for Kosovo. It operated locally within Kosovo and used guerrilla tactics against Serbian forces (Britannica). While it gained support from parts of the Albanian population, its actions also contributed to the escalation of violence in the region.

Ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo: This group made up the majority of the population and was directly affected by the conflict. Their main interest was greater autonomy or independence from Yugoslavia. They were mostly civilians and did not have formal power, but their situation influenced international attention. Many were displaced during the conflict and relied on international support.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO): NATO is an international military alliance that became directly involved in the conflict. Its main interest was to prevent further humanitarian crises and maintain regional stability. It had strong military capabilities and acted at an international level. In 1999, NATO launched airstrikes against Yugoslavia after diplomatic efforts failed, even without clear UN Security Council authorization (NATO).

United Nations (UN): The UN, especially the Security Council, was responsible for maintaining international peace and security. Its role was mainly diplomatic, including passing resolutions and calling for ceasefires. However, its actions were limited due to disagreements between member states. After the conflict, the UN took on an administrative role in Kosovo through a peacekeeping mission (United Nations).

Russian Federation: Russia was a key ally of Yugoslavia and supported its position during the conflict. Its main interest was to protect state sovereignty and oppose foreign military

intervention. As a permanent member of the Security Council, it had significant influence at the international level and opposed NATO's actions (Britannica).

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE): The OSCE was involved in monitoring the situation on the ground. Its main role was to observe and report on human rights conditions. It acted at an international level but had limited power to enforce decisions (Britannica). Its monitoring mission was eventually withdrawn as the situation worsened.

Relevant UN treaties, resolutions, and reports:

UN Security Council Resolution 1160 (31 March 1998): This resolution introduced an arms embargo on Yugoslavia due to the rising violence in Kosovo. The aim was to reduce the supply of weapons, although it did not fully stop the conflict (United Nations).

UN Security Council Resolution 1199 (23 September 1998): This resolution called for a ceasefire and asked both sides to reduce violence. It also highlighted the worsening humanitarian situation, especially the number of displaced civilians (United Nations).

UN Security Council Resolution 1203 (24 October 1998): This resolution supported earlier agreements that allowed international organizations to monitor the situation in Kosovo. It was mainly focused on trying to control the situation through observation rather than force (United Nations).

UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (10 June 1999): This was passed after the conflict and placed Kosovo under UN administration. It also allowed international peacekeeping forces to be deployed in the region to maintain stability (United Nations).

Previous attempts to solve the issue:

Rambouillet Peace Talks (1999): The Rambouillet Talks were an attempt to find a political solution between the Yugoslav and the Kosovo Albanian representatives. They were organized by Western countries and took place in France. The plan was to give Kosovo more autonomy, but still keep it part of Yugoslavia (NATO). It also included the presence of NATO troops in the region. However, Yugoslavia rejected the agreement, mainly because it did not accept foreign

troops on its territory. Because of this, the talks failed. One of the main problems was that both sides had very different priorities, and there was not enough compromise. In the future, negotiations would need to be more balanced so that both sides are more willing to agree (NATO).

UN Resolutions (1998–1999): The UN Security Council passed several resolutions to try and reduce the violence, including calls for a ceasefire and an arms embargo. These were meant to pressure both sides into stopping the conflict. However, in reality, the situation on the ground did not improve much. One reason for this was that the resolutions were not strongly enforced, and there were disagreements within the Security Council itself (United Nations). This made it harder to take stronger action. A possible improvement would be to have clearer consequences if countries do not follow the resolutions.

OSCE Monitoring Mission (1998–1999): The OSCE sent a mission to Kosovo to observe the situation and report on what was happening. The idea was that an international presence might help reduce violence (OSCE). However, the mission did not have real power to stop anything, and as the conflict got worse, it had to withdraw. This shows that monitoring alone is not enough in such situations. In future cases, missions like this would need more authority or support to actually make a difference.

Possible solutions:

Stronger and more balanced negotiations: Future solutions should focus on negotiations where both sides feel their concerns are taken seriously. In this case, that would mean addressing both Yugoslavia's concerns about sovereignty and the Kosovo Albanians' demand for autonomy or independence. More neutral mediation could help make agreements more acceptable to both sides.

Clearer UN action and enforcement: The UN could take a stronger role by not only passing resolutions but also making sure they are followed. This could include clearer consequences if parties do not comply, so that resolutions have more impact.

Peacekeeping or international presence: Instead of only monitoring, deploying peacekeeping forces with a stronger mandate could help reduce violence on the ground and protect civilians. This would also help create a more stable environment for negotiations.

Humanitarian support: Providing aid to displaced people and civilians affected by the conflict should also be a priority. This helps reduce immediate suffering and can improve conditions while longer-term solutions are being discussed.

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