

Introduction

The structure and purpose of this book

This volume does not seek to offer a detailed account of the background to and course of the Kosovo crisis, which reached its peak of intensity in 1998–99. A number of highly competent such studies have already been published.¹ Nor are the discussions that follow framed principally as a ‘lessons learned’ analysis. The main objective here, rather, is to examine and assess the impact of the Kosovo crisis on the continuing evolution and development of key issues relating to post-Cold War European security overall.

In measuring this impact the discussions begin, logically, with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). This was the chosen instrument through which its member states sought to achieve their objective of compelling the government of President Slobodan Milosevic in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) to cease and desist from what the former considered to be unacceptable activities in Kosovo province. Further, the FRY was also compelled effectively to cede authority over Kosovo to an international protectorate. NATO thus sits at the nexus of a number of important debates. Perhaps the most controversial concern the nature of its intervention and the circumstances in which such interventions in international affairs may be considered justifiable and legitimate. Reflecting their importance in most assessments of the Kosovo crisis, these issues are examined here in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 considers structural issues and looks at the impact of the conduct of *Operation Allied Force* – the NATO bombing campaign of March–June 1999 – on both the internal workings of NATO and the expansion of its geographical areas of interest and remit within Europe.

This is followed, in Chapter 3, by an assessment of the premises, assumptions and ultimate prospects for success of western-led attempts, through NATO and other international institutions, to bring about social, political and economic reconstruction in South East Europe.² Such efforts are being undertaken on the basis of trying to transplant western norms and values relating to, for example, liberal democracy and an inclusive – or ‘civic’ – national identity.

Relations between NATO and its members, on the one hand, and Russia on the other, represent arguably the single most important set of links in contemporary European security affairs. The Kosovo crisis can be described as a watershed event in the development of Russia–NATO relations in the period since Russia re-emerged as an independent state in December 1991. Chapter 4 of this volume thus offers a detailed account of the difficult, occasionally tortuous, but ultimately essential diplomatic co-operation between the Russians and NATO members which accompanied the ongoing air campaign in the spring and early summer of 1999. The impact of the crisis, and of this co-operation, on the relationship since that time is also considered here.

One of the favourite ‘lessons of Kosovo’ drawn by commentators and observers since 1999 has been to do with the extent to which *Operation Allied Force* painted up a military ‘capabilities cap’ between the European members of NATO and the United States. As a direct result of this, it is often argued, the member states of the European Union (EU) resolved to develop an autonomous collective military capability in order to enable them hopefully to avoid such an embarrassing degree of operational dependence on the US in Europe in the future. The discussions in Chapter 5 argue that the impact of the Kosovo crisis in this area has, in reality, been relatively marginal and certainly less significant than the view sketched out above suggests. To be sure, the intra-EU debates on the issue did get going at the same time as Kosovo was reaching crisis point. However, the prime movers in these debates – France and the United Kingdom – were motivated principally by other concerns.

The discussions in Chapter 6, finally, are concerned with the issue of why NATO and its members took such an interest in Kosovo when they appeared to have few if any conventional strategic or economic interests tied up there. The answer, it is suggested here, lies in considering the enduring importance of the post-Second World War ‘Atlantic Community’ that has developed amongst the NATO members, and the *de facto* extension of its boundaries since the end of the Cold War.

Serb activities in Kosovo, it is argued, represented not a territorial threat to NATO but rather a challenge to the core values for which it claimed to stand. A response was thus deemed essential in order not only to defeat this challenge but, in doing so, to uphold the credibility of the institution itself.

Before embarking on these discussions, a brief recap on the background to and the course of the crisis in Kosovo may be useful. As indicated above, it is not our intention to describe or assess them in detail; that task has been ably accomplished elsewhere. The objective here is to provide a sufficient degree of background information in one convenient place at the outset so as to spare both authors and readers the necessity of having to digress in the main chapters with background material.

Kosovo and the crisis

Kosovo was, for a long time, at the margins of European affairs. The problems relating to it that leapt onto the front pages in 1998–99 were, for many, a ‘quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing’ to quote the now infamous words of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain in 1938.³ The crisis in Kosovo may have been, amongst other things, an indictment of the western public’s knowledge and understanding of South East Europe’s history, politics and geography, but it was far from being a peripheral matter in the evolution of post-Cold War European security. As Roland Dannreuther has observed, the importance of the Kosovo crisis has been that it has acted as a ‘prism through which some of the most contentious and unresolved questions of contemporary international politics have been debated’.⁴

The historical background

It is safe to say that Kosovo is a land that has not been greatly frequented in the past by outside travellers, or in more recent times by tourists on package holidays. Its inaccessibility, however, is less due to challenging topographical features than a political geography characterised by disorder and violence that has made this corner of South East Europe, in periods of its history, a place best avoided. As Ger Duijzings has observed, ‘Kosovo is an example of a poor, peripheral

and conflict-ridden society, where the central authority of the state has been nominal for much of its modern history'.⁵

The physical geography of Kosovo is easy to understand. The mountains ringing Kosovo make it a natural geographical unit. On its southern rim are the *Šar* mountains – the highest range – bordering Albania. On the western side are the *Prokletije* (Accursed) mountains, so called because of the difficulty in crossing them. On Kosovo's eastern side stand the *Skopska Crna Gora* and, in the northern reaches, the *Kopaonik* mountains form the border with Serbia proper. The interior of Kosovo is a kind of high plain divided into two roughly equal parts by a range of hills running from east to west. The rivers in Kosovo either flow north or south from this line of hills. The largest city and administrative capital is Pristina in the northern part of the territory.⁶

As a political unit, Kosovo formed part of the medieval Serb Kingdom. By the second half of the fifteenth century, it had become part of the Ottoman Empire's conquests in the region. It remained in the Ottoman Empire until the First and Second Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, when it became, once again, a province of Serbia. Apart from the period of the Second World War, Kosovo remained in Serbia's 'successor', Communist Yugoslavia.⁷ Whether as part of the Ottoman Empire, Serbia or Yugoslavia, Kosovo was one of the poorer regions of those states. Apart from some mineral wealth, agriculture was the mainstay of economic activity.⁸

Ethnic composition of Kosovo

From the nineteenth century onwards, the competing national movements of the Albanian and Serb inhabitants of the province increasingly shaped the story of Kosovo. For each group, the province was associated with historical events seen as central to the development of their national identities. The Serbs have historically seen Kosovo as the cradle of their medieval Serb Kingdom; a land of monasteries, castles and the resting place of great kings. In terms of Serb national mythologies, there is no more important event than the Battle of Kosovo (*Kosovo Polje*), fought between the Serb Kingdom and the Ottomans in 1389. Less a defeat than a draw, *Kosovo Polje*, however, marked the beginning of the end of medieval Serbia. The legends and myths associated with Prince Lazar, the Serb leader at *Kosovo Polje*, provided an important link between the medieval kingdom and the

emergence of a modern Serb national consciousness from the nineteenth century onwards.⁹ Regardless of its ethnographic composition (discussed below), Kosovo was regarded as a key part of the Serb national patrimony.

For the Albanians, Kosovo also occupies an important place in the development of Albanian nationalism. In one of its southern cities, Prizren, the development of the Albanian national identity received a powerful boost. In Prizren, during one of the innumerable crises of South East Europe that involved the European great powers, the Albanians formed a political organisation called the 'League of Prizren' in 1878 to support the Ottoman Empire's control of the Albanian inhabited parts of the region. One of the leading figures in the League was Abdul Frasherri, who inspired united political action amongst the Albanians of the Ottoman Empire. The aim of the League was to try to prevent the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire by the great powers; particularly the Albanian inhabited territories of South East Europe. Although supporting the Ottoman government, the League of Prizren would eventually be suppressed by Ottoman forces because of its nationalist tendencies. The League, however, marked an important moment in the awakening of an Albanian national identity.¹⁰

With Kosovo thus important to both the Serb and Albanian national identity, it was almost certain to be a contested piece of territory. In nationalist conflicts of this kind, demography plays an important role in formulating claim and counter-claim. The ethnographic composition of Kosovo and its evolution since the nineteenth century, form an important backdrop to the contemporary conflicts between Albanian and Serb for control of it. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the population of Kosovo had an Albanian majority, with the Serbs as a sizeable minority.¹¹ Although statistical data must be treated with some caution in these situations, it is clear that, even allowing for political distortion, the Serb community was diminishing in terms of its overall numbers. After Kosovo became part of Serbia in the twentieth century, colonisation programmes did little to arrest the trend of a growing Albanian majority. During the period of Communist Yugoslavia, the Albanian majority continued to grow as illustrated in Table Intro.1.

On the eve of the 1999 conflict, the Serb minority was estimated as forming about 10 per cent of the population. In the wake of the Serb exodus following the June 1999 withdrawal of FRY military and police forces, the number of Serbs living in Kosovo may have been cut by as much as three-quarters of its pre-conflict total.¹²

Table Intro.1 *Ethnic composition of Kosovo, the censuses of 1961, 1971 and 1981 (%)*

	1961	1971	1981
Albanians	67.1	73.7	77.5
Serbs	23.5	18.3	13.2

Source: M. Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo* (London, Hurst and Co., 1998), p. 318.

Kosovo 1989–99: conflict, diplomacy and conflict

The proximate background to the Kosovo conflict of March–June 1999 was the mounting Albanian–Serb tension and violence of the previous decade. The Albanians, who had enjoyed a measure of autonomy in Communist Yugoslavia; controlling such things as local administration and education, saw this swept away from the late 1980s. This happened in the face of resurgent Serb nationalism and, more particularly, the policies of President Milosevic who exploited it to strengthen his political position in Serbia. The Albanian response was initially non-violent. A semi-clandestine parallel society and political life developed in Kosovo despite intermittent pressure from the Serb authorities.

By the late 1990s, however, non-violent protest began to give way to armed Albanian resistance to what was seen as Serb oppression. This manifested itself in the emergence of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) which, by the late 1990s, was gaining support within Kosovo and international attention, even if its military achievements against the FRY security forces were modest.¹³ As the dispute became violent, it led increasingly to deaths, displacement of Albanians and destruction of property.

Although some outside observers had become concerned about the growing tensions in Kosovo, the initially relatively low level of violence, as compared with that seen in Bosnia in the first half of the 1990s, meant that these did not register high up on the agendas of European security organisations such as NATO. In 1998, however, as fighting intensified between FRY security forces and the KLA, Kosovo did move up the political agenda of a NATO determined to stop the crisis escalating to a level of violence seen earlier in Croatia and, especially, Bosnia.

By autumn 1998, the violence in Kosovo had resulted in a situation where an estimated 250,000 Kosovar Albanians had been ousted from their homes; roughly one fifth of their number lacking proper shelter. In the context of this situation, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution 1199 in September 1998, calling for a cease-fire, withdrawal of most FRY security forces and talks between the parties in conflict. It also issued a warning about a looming 'humanitarian catastrophe' resulting from the fighting.¹⁴ In an effort to increase pressure on the Milosevic government in Belgrade, NATO threatened airstrikes in order to induce his compliance with the terms of the UN Resolution.

A combination of diplomacy and this military pressure persuaded the FRY President to agree to comply in October. An agreement with Milosevic was brokered by US Assistant Secretary of State, Richard Holbrooke. He was the man widely credited with successfully bringing about the negotiation of the Dayton agreement, which had ended the Bosnian civil war three years previously. FRY compliance with the Holbrooke-Milosevic agreement was to be verified by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). This was the only outside monitoring agency that Milosevic was prepared to accept in Kosovo. The OSCE created an unarmed, civilian 'Kosovo Verification Mission' (KVM), which began operating in November 1998. A small, French-led NATO military 'Extraction Force' was deployed to neighbouring Macedonia in case the KVM required emergency evacuation.

By the beginning of 1999, the Holbrooke-Milosevic agreement was beginning to unravel. The FRY authorities began to move forces back into Kosovo claiming, not entirely unreasonably, that their efforts to comply with the UN Resolution had done little but give the KLA a breathing space in which to regroup and occupy positions formerly held by FRY forces. On the Albanian side, allegations were made of fresh killings and atrocities being committed by the FRY forces.

In the face of this deterioration, a final diplomatic effort began in January 1999 when the parties in conflict were summoned to Rambouillet outside Paris. These high-level negotiations sought a general settlement in the manner of the Dayton process for Bosnia. The 'Contact Group', consisting of France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Russia and the United States, aimed for a settlement that NATO was prepared to underwrite with a major peace support force in Kosovo. The proposals at Rambouillet offered substantial autonomy for the Kosovar Albanians and held

out the eventual prospect of a referendum that might lead to independence. The Kosovar Albanians, with some reservations, eventually accepted the formula, but the FRY delegation walked away from the draft proposals.¹⁵ The FRY's refusal to sign, and the deteriorating situation inside Kosovo, led to the withdrawal of the KVM in March and, within a week, NATO's decision to finally use coercive airpower.

Operation Allied Force, March–June 1999

When NATO launched *Operation Allied Force* on 24 March 1999, its members and planners expected air operations to be successfully concluded within a few days. In the event, NATO's military effort lasted for over two months. In this exercise in military coercion, the United States publicly ruled out, at the start, the idea of committing forces to a land invasion of Kosovo. When the FRY refused to be cowed by the air onslaught, this thus called into question NATO's strategy of what some had called 'immaculate coercion'.¹⁶

As in most modern armed conflicts, the media was an important factor, with the protagonists fighting a second battle across the airwaves.¹⁷ NATO's well-publicised targeting mistakes, such as the accidental bombing of Albanian refugees and the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade,¹⁸ illustrated the importance of effective media management in modern conflict and the consequences when this proved difficult or impossible.

As the operation dragged on, NATO increased the numbers of aircraft and widened the targeting list to strike at the heart of the FRY's infrastructure, government and media apparatus. By June 1999, it was increasingly clear that NATO would use whatever level of force was necessary for it to prevail. The use of ground forces was, at last, being seriously considered. There was also mounting evidence that the air attacks were causing serious damage and that unrest was beginning to surface inside Serbia. By then also, NATO's diplomatic pressure was being actively supported by Russia.

In early June, President Milosevic indicated his acceptance of the international demands, compliance with which was necessary to end the bombing.¹⁹ After brief negotiations with NATO, represented by Lieutenant General Sir Michael Jackson, the FRY leadership agreed to withdraw its security forces and accept a NATO-led peacekeeping force and a UN international administration mission in Kosovo. These

points were incorporated into Security Council Resolution 1244, which was passed shortly thereafter. On the question of the future status of Kosovo, the Resolution was deliberately ambiguous. Unlike in the Rambouillet drafts, there was no clear signal that a referendum on eventual independence would be organised.²⁰ Kosovo's future thus remained uncertain.

Notes

- 1 The best are I. Daalder and M. O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo* (Washington DC, Brookings, 2000) and T. Judah, *Kosovo: War and Revenge* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000).
- 2 In this volume, the geographical descriptor 'South East Europe' is preferred to the loaded designation 'the Balkans'. It covers the successor states to the Cold War Communist Yugoslavia: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which embraces Serbia and Montenegro. It also covers their immediate neighbours: Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary and Romania. On the problems of using the term 'the Balkans' see J. Gow, 'A region of eternal conflict? The Balkans – semantics and security', in W. Park and G. W. Rees (eds), *Rethinking Security in Post-Cold War Europe* (London, Longman, 1998), pp. 155–8.
- 3 BBC Radio Broadcast, 27 September 1938.
- 4 R. Dannreuther, 'War in Kosovo: history, development and aftermath', in M. Buckley and S. Cummings (eds), *Kosovo: Perceptions of War and Its Aftermath* (London, Continuum, 2001), p. 13.
- 5 G. Duijzings, *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo* (London, Hurst and Co., 2000), p. 5.
- 6 For full geographical descriptions of Kosovo see N. Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (Basingstoke, Papermac, 1998), pp. 1–21 and R. Osborne, *East Central Europe* (New York, Praeger, 1967), p. 205ff.
- 7 For detailed accounts of Kosovo's history see Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* and M. Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo* (London, Hurst and Co., 1998).
- 8 Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, pp. 4–5.
- 9 B. Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide* (London, Hurst and Co., 1999), pp. 11–31; T. Judah, *The Serbs: History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 29–47 and S. Ramet, 'The Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Ends: Kosovo in Serbian perception', in Buckley and Cummings, *Kosovo: Perceptions of War and Its Aftermath*, pp. 30–3.
- 10 T. Zavalani, 'Albanian nationalism', in P. Sugar and I. Lederer (eds), *Nationalism in Eastern Europe* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1973), pp. 61–6.
- 11 Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, pp. 193–5.

- 12 E. Cody, 'Out of work and hope, Serbs evacuate Kosovo', *Washington Post* (17 February 2000).
- 13 For a comprehensive study of the KLA see A. Heinemann-Gruder and W-C. Paes, *Wag the Dog: The Mobilisation and Demobilisation of the Kosovo Liberation Army (Brief 20)* (Bonn, International Center for Conversion, 2001).
- 14 *Resolution 1199 (1998)*. Website reference www.un.org/Docs/scres/1998/sres1199.htm.
- 15 On the Rambouillet negotiations see M. Weller, 'The Rambouillet conference on Kosovo', *International Affairs*, 75:2 (1999), 211–51.
- 16 For a highly detailed account of NATO military operations see A. Cordesman, *The Lessons and Non-Lessons of the Air and Missile Campaign in Kosovo* (Westport, Praeger, 2001).
- 17 See P. Hammond and E. Herman (eds), *Degraded Capability: The Media and the Kosovo Crisis* (London, Pluto Press, 2000).
- 18 D. Priest, 'NATO concedes its bombs likely killed refugees', *Washington Post* (20 April 1999) and D. Williams, 'Missiles hit Chinese Embassy', *Washington Post* (8 May 1999).
- 19 The nature and evolution of these demands is discussed here in Chapter 4, pp. 100–3.
- 20 *Resolution 1244 (1999)*. Website reference www.un.org/Docs/scres/1999/99sc1244.htm.