

Kosovo - Chronology

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Background Conditions

History increasingly bestowed on the area of Kosovo great symbolic importance for both Serbs and Albanians, resulting in their strong mutual claims to that territory. As with Macedonia, before 1946, the political status of Kosovo was decided largely by the shifting outcomes of recurrent conflict and competition among waxing and waning great historical empires. After a brief period of Serb rule in the 13th century, the Ottoman Empire gained control of the Balkan region. A battle in 1389 between the Serbs and the Turks in the “field of the Blackbirds” in Kosovo marked the end of the Serbian Empire, thus making Kosovo a hallmark of Serb identity and symbol of their resistance to outside domination.

In 1878, the Serbs revolted against the Ottoman Empire and expelled the Turks during the first Balkan War in 1912. But the Albanians living in the region, fearing partition among Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro, began to agitate for independence. To organize an independence movement, the Albanians formed the League of Prizren in Kosovo. Because this and other events that began the Albanian national awakening took place in Kosovo, present-day Kosovo is seen as the origin place of the Albanian nation as a people. Thus, although the territory of present-day Albania received statehood in 1912, sizeable areas where ethnic Albanians lived remained under the jurisdiction of neighboring states, such as Kosovo in Serbia and the western areas in the Macedonian republic of Yugoslavia.

In 1918, with the end of World War I, the state of Yugoslavia was officially formed as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes out of portions of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. Thus, Kosovo was formally incorporated into Yugoslavia. But except for the a brief period during the Second World War when Kosovo was united with Albania under Italian control, Kosovo has been under Belgrade's jurisdiction and did not achieve status as a political and administrative entity until after World War II. In recent decades, high Albanian birthrates and immigration combined with the emigration of ethnic Serbs to increase the concentration of Albanians in the region. The 1981 census puts the Albanian community at almost 1.6 million, or 77% of the population, and ten years later, they had increased to over 1.9 million, or 82% of the population. Currently, ethnic Albanians comprise approximately 90%. Throughout this history, the cultural, linguistic, and religious differences between Kosovo's Serbs and Albanians (Kosovars) and the mutual claims of discrimination on both sides fed their respective nationalist sentiments.

Course of the Conflict

Pre-Existing Order

Following World War II, the consolidation of Communist rule in Yugoslavia under the anti-Nazi partisan leader Marshal Tito and the federal Yugoslav army he created inaugurated thirty-four years of a tenuous *modus vivendi* among Kosovars and Serbians in Kosovo under the Yugoslav central government. The 1946 Yugoslav constitution granted Kosovo the status of an Autonomous Region within the Republic of Serbia. The separate Serb Republic constitution also granted Kosovo a measure of self-

rule, and the government in Belgrade relaxed much of its control over the region. Although Kosovo Albanians demanded greater autonomy and ultimate recognition as a republic, they did not challenge the legitimacy of the central government or the Republic of Serbia. In 1974, Yugoslavia adopted a new constitution that granted Kosovo the status of an Autonomous Province, which elevated the region to a status nearly equivalent to that of the republics. The new federal constitution also authorized Kosovo to adopt its own constitution. The Albanians were the third largest ethnic group in Yugoslavia, behind the Serbs and the Croats. But though Tito coopted the Albanian population with concessions such as increased participation in government and the use of national symbols such as the Albanian flag, they were not granted official “Republic” status, as that would imply the right to secession from Serbia.

Thus, as with the other ethnic groups in Yugoslavia, Tito thus sought to facilitate peaceful coexistence between the Kosovo Albanians and Serbians within Kosovo and between Kosovo and Serbia as a whole by means of policies that parcelled out constitutional authority and political control to these ethnic communities and their leaders. Yet Tito could allow such freedoms only to an extent that they did not risk antagonizing the Kosovo Serbs and the Serb government. While the Kosovo Albanians remained frustrated by their inability to achieve formal recognition as a republic, the Serbs deeply resented any concessions granted to the Albanians. Ultimately, the strategy caused resentment among both the Albanians and Serbs and created the potential for the escalation of the conflict upon the dissolution of the Yugoslav state .

Unstable Peace

Tito's death in 1980 set off a cycle of demonstrations by Kosovo Albanians and suppression by the Serb government in the early 1980's. Incidents arose of discrimination by the Albanians against the Serb minority in the territory. Beginning in 1987, a communist party official, Slobodan Milosevic, assumed leadership of the Serbian Socialist Party in part by playing upon Serb nationalist sentiments in order to rally support. In fact, possibly the single most divisive act for the break-up of the Yugoslav federation occurred in Kosovo in April, 1987, when a committed socialist, Slobodan Milosevic, embraced the Serb backlash being expressed at a huge Serb nationalist rally, televised to the nation, against the privileges being gained by the Albanians and other rising ethnic groups. Over the next two years, he and his clique assumed control of the Serbian Communist Party and most federal institutions. The disintegration of the Yugoslav communist state with a weak federal structure provided Milosevic with an opportunity to gain and consolidate power by acknowledging the deep-seated resentments of Serbs. They saw the state they had long sought to dominate begin to be challenged and to dissolve through the assertion of Albanian, Slovene, Croat, Macedonian and then Bosnian muslim ethnic nationalisms. The rampant inflation and severe economic decline that were facing Yugoslavia during the 1980's, and especially Serbia and Yugoslavia's poorer republics -- in part due to IMF austerity programs -- provided fertile ground for Milosevic's nationalist rhetoric, which was aimed initially and primarily at the Kosovo Albanians. The rising Serb resentment of the authority enjoyed under Tito by the minority enclaves in Serbia, including Vojvodina and Sandjak as well as Kosovo, led the Serbs to demand the abrogation of their autonomy. In 1989, Milosevic officially revoked

Kosovo's autonomous status and fired the local Albanian and Serb officials, substituting new ones who supported greater Serbian domination of Kosovo.

While Serbs were increasingly viewing the Kosovo's demands for autonomy as illegitimate, the anti-Albanian statements and actions further undermined the Kosovar's perception of the legitimacy of Serbia's authority. Mass demonstrations by Kosovo Albanians in 1989 led Milosevic to declare a state of emergency and deploy Serb security forces in the area. A crack down on the marches and strikes in that year and early 1990 resulted in about 60 deaths. Under martial law, federal police shut down Prishtina University and the media, completely took over the government, and began to push Albanians out of their jobs in the civil service, police, social services and schools. In counter-reaction to their political marginalization by the federal government, the Kosovo Albanians declared Kosovo an independent republic within the Yugoslav state in July, 1990. When Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, the *de facto* leader of the self-declared Kosovo republic, Ibrahim Rugova, announced that the Albanians would not remain within the rump Yugoslav state. In 1992, the main Albanian political organization, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), elected its own parliament and named Rugova as president.

Recognizing the threat of increased violence under these circumstances and the reality of Serbian military superiority, Rugova called for a campaign of peaceful opposition. The Kosovo Albanians formed their own parallel government, economic, and social service systems, operating alongside those of the Serbian government. Neither the Serbs nor the Albanians recognized the state apparatus of the other as having legitimate authority. Thus, the peaceful, albeit tense, coexistence that had characterized the Tito

years was replaced by a hostile coexistence. The LDK's program called for reclaiming their autonomy, which they have expressed as the right to their own republic or independence. Rugova has variously called for an international administration and UN protectorate

During the post-1989 period of communal social and political separation and unresolved constitutional issues, various internal and external efforts were made to reach some settlement. In May 1992, for example, the Serbian government invited representatives of the Albanian shadow parliament to Belgrade for talks on Kosovo's status. The Albanian leaders insisted, however, on a meeting at a neutral site under the auspices of the international community. Although this demand signalled the Albanians increasing effort to internationalize the conflict, Belgrade's insistence that the issue was an internal one and its formal authority over Kosovo dissuaded most international actors from involvement during this period. In August, the United Nations (UN) and the European Community (EC) set up the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia (ICFY). But after initially focussing on Kosovo, its attention was subsumed by more pressing issues in the region. From 1992 through 1995, the war in Bosnia served to divert the attention of the international community largely away from Kosovo, with one important exception.

To buttress the CSCE mission in Kosovo, U.S. President George Bush issued a "Christmas warning" in December 1992 to Serbian President Milosevic against increased Serbian internal pressures in Kosovo. This stated that in the event of conflict caused by any Serbian action, the U.S. was prepared to use military force against Serbian troops in Kosovo or Serbia proper. The message clearly meant air strikes or some other military

response. These warnings were repeated by President Clinton in March, 1993 and by the State Department that October.

Other international involvement came in the form of human rights monitoring or humanitarian assistance. The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) was among the first of the international organizations to address the human rights situation in Kosovo. In late 1992, CSCE observer missions were established in the three minority dominated areas in Serbia as well as Macedonia. Although Yugoslavia was then a member of the CSCE, Milosevic hindered the efforts of these groups by frequently refusing to grant visas to their employees and by restricting NGO access to Belgrade and Kosovo. In part as a reaction to the exclusion of Serbia from the CSCE stemming from the Bosnian war, in 1993, he declined to renew his country's permission for these missions, so they were terminated.

Although the international community was unprepared to undertake any preemptive military action at this time, the humanitarian aid, such as from Oxfam and the CRS, that offset the worst social effects of the crisis probably may have helped to keep the tension in Kosovo from becoming a popular rebellion. However, since it was provided by definition mainly to those who were suffering the most, and thus the ethnic Albanian community, this attention to human rights and provision of basic aid may also have encouraged the Kosovar political elite to continue and intensify their nationalist effort. In any case, though sporadic violence occurred, the Kosovo Albanian's adherence to Rugova's peaceful policy prevented further escalation of the conflict.

Crisis

By 1996, Rugova and his policy of non-violent opposition were becoming increasingly discredited. The Kosovo Albanians had hoped to win international support for their cause through their use of peaceful means. But the fact that the November 1995 Dayton Accords accepted Croatian and Bosnian ethnically-defined borders achieved in battle, but failed to require Milosevic to address Kosovo human rights issues, was interpreted by many in the Kosovar political elite that Rugova's peaceful tactics were failing. This put pressure on the established LDK leadership to show the value of its strategy of peaceful parallelism. On his part, Milosevic's party was coming up for re-election in November, and he earnestly sought access to World Bank and IMF funds for Yugoslavia (removal of the "outer wall of sanctions").

Thus, in September, 1997, some progress appeared to have been made with the signing of an education agreement between Milosevic and Rugova. Facilitated by the Italian Roman Catholic NGO *Comunita di Sant'Egidio* with support by the European Union (EU) and the United States, this agreement called for the re-opening of all levels of the Kosovo government schools to Albanian students and teachers, including the teacher training colleges and faculties of the University of Prishtina. This marked the first significant attempt by the international community to address the political sources of the Kosovo conflict. The U.S. and Europeans also negotiated to place cultural offices in Prishtina, which U.S. officials saw as a way to establish an official U.S. presence in Kosovo.

The view was that if new avenues of accommodation could be created around basic social and economic needs between the two separate communities, perhaps over

time the larger political and constitutional issues might be addressed in a less confrontational atmosphere and with somewhat less perceived to be at stake. But though the hope was it could led to further agreements, the education plan itself never went into effect, as its joint Serb-Albanian implementation commission was fettered by unresolvable procedural issues. Thus, rather than alleviating the tensions and providing a precedent for future relations, the agreement may have served to further aggravate existing tensions. Expectations were raised and then let down, thus confirming the thesis of a failed strategy.

As a result of Rugova's failure to achieve any substantial gains for the Albanians, internal opposition forces began to advocate a more assertive approach. The previously sporadic violence became increasingly frequent and systematic. The first planned attack by Kosovo Albanians took place in April 1996 when four coordinated attacks were carried out in separate locations, Stimlje, Pec, and Kosovska Mitrovica. Two Serb police officers were killed in the attacks and three more were wounded. An initially shadowy covert armed group, known as the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) began to emerge and claim responsibility for further violent attacks, primarily aimed at Serb police forces, but also targeting Albanians loyal to the Serb administration. Reportedly, this clandestine organization has been raising money among the 700,000 Albanians abroad in order to buy arms. The internal instability in Albania in 1997 contributed to the Kosovo Albanian's shift to the use of targeted violence because large amounts of arms found their way across the border into the hands of the KLA. The activities of the KLA reflected how Kosovo Albanians were developing a well-organized force with the will and

capability for carrying out systematic attacks. By late 1997, the KLA exercised virtual control of many rural areas of Kosovo.

War

Beginning in late February 1998, Serb forces responded to KLA actions with a campaign of intimidation, which by the summer was characterized by increasingly bolder attacks against Kosovo Albanian civilians and supposed KLA enclaves, which were met by KLA counter initiatives. The Serb crackdown was led by paramilitary police with support from army and regular forces. The Serb government considered the KLA a terrorist organization, a viewpoint which the United States seemed to support as well, due to a statement made by a State Department official describing the KLA as a terrorist group. Remarkably, the U.S. simply failed to activate the military threat that Presidents Bush and Clinton had issued in 1992 and 1993 against just such Serb military actions in Kosovo. But rather than intimidating the population of Kosovo, the Serb actions instead served to strengthen their resolve and desire for independence.

In short, while Kosovo Albanians had formerly sought republican status within Yugoslavia, they now demanded total independence on the basis of claiming a right to self-determination. The rump state of Yugoslavia under the dominance of Serbia has continued to insist on its rights to sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Although the Bosnian war had turned Kosovo into a potential international issue, it was not until 1998, as the number of armed encounters, displaced persons and abuses of human rights increased, that the conflict began to be perceived as an international crisis rather than an internal matter. In early 1998, members of the Contact Group

(consisting of France, Germany, Italy, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, and the United States) indicated that Kosovo was a matter of high priority and set up working group to address the situation in Kosovo. NATO also expressed concern. Nonetheless, at this stage, internal divisiveness among the western powers and a continuing reluctance to take action beyond condemnation and appeals for dialogue hindered the development of a robust long-term political solution. It was not until the heightened level and the increasingly regularity and destruction of hostilities, exemplified by a particularly brutal Serb attack in Drenica, threatened to undermine the tenuous post-Dayton stability of the Balkans that the international community began to take a more active role.

As is common once a civil war has begun, the international community then made numerous attempts to steer the parties toward a political settlement. In March, 1998, the EU called for the convening of a peace conference in Paris, which would include participation by both parties, as well as the United States and Russia. This attempt proved unsuccessful until NATO threatened a bombing campaign in order to bring both sides to the negotiating table. In October 1998, U.S. envoy, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, and Milosevic reached an agreement calling for a ceasefire, reduction in the level of Serb forces in the region, and a commitment to formal negotiations between the Serbian government and the Kosovo Albanians. This arrangement was to be monitored by an unarmed OSCE mission.

The Kosovo Verification Mission, the OSCE's largest observer mission to date, did take position through the area. But the October agreement proved to be merely a temporary measure, as KLA and Serb forces continued to engage in hostile acts in violation of the ceasefire. The western powers insistence on greater autonomy rather than

independence for the Albanians offered the KLA little incentive to adhere to the agreement. In the face of the disintegration of the agreement, the international community again assembled the parties in an effort to broker a lasting solution.

The new agreement, developed in Rambouillet, France, called for the deployment of a NATO peacekeeping force in Serbia to monitor the situation. This proposal, although eventually agreed to by the Kosovo Albanians, met with resistance from the Serbian government who opposed the deployment of NATO troops on Yugoslav territory. Again the international community employed the threat of force against Serbia. In this instance Milosevic held his ground, causing NATO to launch a massive bombing campaign in March 1999. To date, this campaign, though increasingly destroying vital infra-structure in Belgrade and other major Serbian cities, failed to stop further ethnic cleansing of Kosovo by Serb armed forces or to force Milosevic to agree to a settlement of the war.

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