

WWS Case Study 2/00

US Diplomacy toward Kosovo, 1989-99

Brian Katulis

I. Introduction

On March 24, 1999, the United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies unleashed a bombing campaign against the Serb forces of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). Acting without a mandate from the United Nations, NATO justified its intervention as a necessary response to Serb intransigence in the face of numerous diplomatic efforts to defuse the conflict between ethnic Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo.

The US had long recognized the potential for conflict in this small province of the FRY. Tensions between the two ethnic groups had simmered for decades, and the rift between the two groups grew larger after Slobodan Milosevic assumed the reins of power in 1987, using inflammatory rhetoric and riding a wave of Serb nationalism. As early as 1992, the US, concerned about the prospect for violence, had warned leaders of the FRY that it would forcefully respond to hostilities in Kosovo. Almost surprisingly, this small province, cause for much concern before and during the Balkans war, did not erupt into chaos. It was largely untouched by the most serious atrocities that occurred in the Balkans during the early 1990s, and few of the estimated 250,000 people who lost their lives in that war lived in Kosovo. By the late 1990s, however, the situation had dramatically changed. Kosovo's small population of approximately 1.8 million ethnic Albanians and 250,000 Serbs, plunged into ethnic violence reminiscent of the war in Bosnia.

Given these early concerns about the potential for conflict in Kosovo, one necessary question to ask is: Why did the conflict in Kosovo reach a crisis point in 1998, more than two years after the signing of the Dayton Accords that ended the war in

Bosnia? Why did it not happen earlier? One of the answers (and there are many) to this question is found in the rise of a violent separatist movement in Kosovo, represented mostly by the actions of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

After Milosevic instituted his repressive policies in Kosovo, ethnic Albanians largely relied on a non-violent approach advocated by Ibrahim Rugova. The Albanians of Kosovo withdrew from Serb-dominated institutions, created their own shadow government, and conducted non-violent protests that would have made Martin Luther King and Gandhi proud. Serb repression continued, and the failure of the non-violent approach to change Serb policies and gain international attention led ethnic Albanians to turn to the violent alternative offered by the KLA.

KLA operations heated up the conflict and provoked the FRY Interior Ministry Police (known as MUP) to react even more violently than it had in the past, thus causing a downward spiral of violence in the province. Serb repression in Kosovo had lasted for almost a decade (depending on one's perspective and definition of repression, perhaps even longer), and if the Albanians of Kosovo had continued on their non-violent path, the repression may have lasted another decade. Take away the KLA from the picture, and it is likely that NATO's bombing campaign would have never occurred.

The goal of this paper is to describe the rise of the KLA and the dilemmas that it posed for American diplomats. In the aftermath of the war, several retrospective accounts examined the many diplomatic initiatives that preceded NATO's bombing campaign. Tracks of diplomacy that have been examined include US efforts to persuade the FRY to sign an agreement with ethnic Albanians and draw down its troops, diplomacy within the NATO alliance centering on whether or not a UN mandate was necessary for acting in

Kosovo, and US-Russian relations throughout the conflict. Scant attention has been paid to the diplomatic initiatives involving the ethnic Albanians of Kosovo and whether the international community might have done things differently on that track. This paper is intended to fill that gap.

After providing a brief historical background on Kosovo, the first section outlines American foreign policy in Kosovo from 1989 to 1996. The second section describes the origins of the KLA, the KLA's political and financial support, and the actions that it conducted up until the end of 1997. The third section details its meteoric rise in 1998 and 1999 from a rag-tag group of rebels in the farmlands of Kosovo to the hallways of international diplomacy.

II. The Seeds of Conflict in Kosovo

The complex history of the Balkans region can be a stumbling block for those who want to understand why Yugoslavia disintegrated into fierce violence and genocide at the end of the 20th Century. This is particularly true for Kosovo, which maintains a special place in Serb heritage and mythology. Appendix (A) provides a brief summary of the historical context in which the conflict occurred. Additionally, it outlines the most immediate factors that contributed to increased conflict in Kosovo in 1998 and 1999: Serb repression in Kosovo; the failure of the non-violent path led by ethnic Albanian Ibrahim Rugova; and the lack of law and order both in Kosovo and northern Albania in the latter part of the 1990s.

US Policy, 1989-1996

The US response to the rise of Milosevic and the repressive measures that the FRY instituted in Kosovo was mainly to criticize the Serb measures and prevent the

tensions in Kosovo from opening up a wider conflict in the region. When Milosevic first assumed the Presidency, some American policymakers saw him as a potential ally because of the reputation that he had built as a supporter of economic reforms and privatization.

As more and more people in Washington began to see Milosevic as the nationalist demagogue that he was, their perspectives quickly changed. In 1989, President Bush appointed Warren Zimmermann as the ambassador to Belgrade. Zimmermann was particularly forceful in his criticisms of the FRY, so much so that President Milosevic refused to receive him for the first nine months that Zimmermann was ambassador.¹ In addition to Ambassador Zimmermann's criticisms, the US Congress organized a number of fact-finding missions to Kosovo in the mid-1990s to examine the allegations of human rights abuses against ethnic Albanians. Senator Robert Dole was one of the main leaders in these efforts.

Shortly after he lost the Presidential election of 1992, George Bush issued one of the first clear statements of US policy on Kosovo. On Christmas Day in 1992, the Bush administration warned Belgrade that there would be a forceful response if it initiated hostilities in Kosovo. In a letter to Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, US President George Bush wrote, "In the event of conflict in Kosovo caused by Serbian action, the United States will be prepared to employ military force against the Serbians in Kosovo and in Serbia proper."² The Clinton Administration reiterated this policy shortly after taking office. On February 13, 1993, US Secretary of State Warren Christopher said,

¹ Susan Woodward, page 151

² "Statements of United States' policy on Kosovo," The New York Times, April 18, 1999, page A12.

"We remain prepared to respond against the Serbians in the event of a conflict in Kosovo caused by Serbian action."³

US policy in Kosovo, therefore, was to ensure that the tensions in Kosovo did not erupt into open conflict and violence. As one former Bush Administration official described it,

The chief American strategic concern during the Bush administration and later under Clinton was to keep the Yugoslav conflict from spreading southward, where its flames could lead into the Atlantic alliance. Therefore, while the Bush administration was not convinced of the need to intervene in Bosnia, it took a markedly different attitude toward Kosovo. Washington feared that a Serbian assault against the Albanian Kosovars would consume the entire southern Balkan region in a conflagration that would pit one NATO ally against another. Hostilities in Kosovo would probably spill into Albania proper. This in turn could incite the large Albanian minority in Macedonia and lead to Serbian or Greek intervention there. Bulgaria and Turkey would then feel pressure to act in order to prevent Greek control of Macedonia. Whereas the Bosnian war could be contained, conflict in Kosovo most likely could not.⁴

Containing the spread of conflict from beyond the Balkans region became the key focus of US policy in Kosovo, a policy that for most of the Bosnia war was implemented through economic sanctions and diplomatic attempts to isolate the FRY. Military strikes did not come into the picture until 1995, and those strikes were aimed at stopping the war in Bosnia. Kosovo, which had remained relatively quiet during the war, was placed on the backburner. As Susan Woodward described it, the Bush and Clinton administrations did not coordinate the separate commitments regarding human rights and resolving territorial conflicts in the Balkans. She asks,

Would the borders of Serbia take precedence over Albanian demands for the right to self-governance on the basis of national self-determination? US policy had quietly shifted to the position that Kosovo was an internal affair of Serbia, just as

³ Ibid

⁴ David C. Gompert, "The United States and Yugoslavia's Wars," in The World and Yugoslavia's Wars, Richard Ullman (editor), pages 136-137.

it accepted that the independence movement in Chechnya was a Russian internal affair. Efforts to defend the aggrieved and abused human rights of Albanians remained declarations only.⁵

The war that raged in Bosnia was the focus of most diplomatic efforts, and Rugova's attempts to attract international attention to ethnic Albanians' problems in Kosovo were lost in the shadow of this larger conflict. As was mentioned above, the issue of Kosovo was not included in the agenda at the Dayton negotiations that brought an end the Balkan war of 1991-1995. In his account of the 1995 Dayton negotiations, Richard Holbrooke mentions Kosovo only once in the context of those negotiations:

Once, as Milosevic and I were taking a walk, about one hundred Albanian Americans came to the outer fence of Wright-Paterson with megaphones to plead the case for Kosovo. I suggested we walk over to chat with them, but he refused, saying testily that they were obviously being paid by a foreign power, and that Kosovo was an 'internal' problem, a position with which I strongly disagreed.⁶

The Dayton Accords of 1995 effectively partitioned Bosnia-Herzegovina and ended the war in the Balkans, but did nothing to address the underlying tensions in Kosovo. Given all of the other issues on the agenda at the Dayton negotiations, it may not have been reasonable to expect that Kosovo would be included. The US negotiators were largely concerned with maintaining a degree of stability within the three parties that were negotiating at Dayton. To bring up the issue of Kosovo may have had the effect of further undermining the Serbs in the FRY by asking them to make compromises not only on the Bosnian and Croatian fronts, but also in Kosovo, too.

⁵ Susan Woodward, page 399.

⁶ Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War* (revised 1999 edition), page 234. Interestingly, Holbrooke's mention of his strong disagreement to Milosevic's assertion that Kosovo was an internal problem did not appear in earlier editions of the books when it was first published a year earlier in 1998 (see page 234 of the 1998 edition).

The exclusion of Kosovo from the Dayton negotiations made an impression on many ethnic Albanians who had relied on a non-violent struggle in response to Serb repression. According to Xhafer Shatri, a spokesman for the Kosovo government-in-exile in Geneva, Switzerland,

Albanians saw at Dayton that the international community only respects and reacts to the law of the jungle. This had a terrible impact, especially on the new generation that for six years has had little work, little schooling and lived under brutal Serb occupation. We have gone beyond frustration. We speak now of revolt.⁷

The cause of ethnic Albanians was remembered by some US policymakers during this period, and small gestures of support were made during the immediate period following the Dayton Accords. For example, in the summer of 1996, the US opened a United States Information Service Center in Pristina, the provincial capital of Kosovo, and invited both Aleksa Jokic, the top Serbian official in Kosovo and Ibrahim Rugova. The center's opening was largely a symbolic move. The official US embassy to the FRY remained in Belgrade, and the center would contain little more than a library with reference materials and computers. According to US Congressman Eliot Engel (D-NY), who had more than 20,000 Albanians as constituents in his district and had lobbied for the opening of the center, the center's opening was intended to demonstrate to Milosevic that the US had not forgotten about the issue of Kosovo.⁸

But on the whole, the US, focused on implementing the Dayton Accords in Bosnia and working to prevent ethnic tensions in Kosovo from erupting into conflict and sparking regional violence, preferred to contain the tensions between the two ethnic

⁷ Chris Hedges, "Notes From the Underground on Another Balkan Rift," The New York Times, May 11, 1997, page A8.

⁸ Michael Dobbs, "Kosovo's Albanians Look to U.S. for Help; American Office Opening in Serb-Ruled Region," The Washington Post, July 21, 1996, page A26.

groups rather than address them head-on. It was not until the rise of a violent national separatist movement among the ethnic Albanians that the US focused its attentions on Kosovo.

III. The Rise of the KLA, 1996-1997

Spurned by the international community and unsuccessful in its attempts to peacefully engage the Serb leadership in the FRY, ethnic Albanians grew increasingly frustrated with their situation. With the instability and lack of order, the growth of organized crime and the access to weapons made possible by the collapse of the Albanian government, ethnic Albanians began to support another path: the violent separatist movement of the KLA.

Origins of the KLA

According to one account, the KLA was first formed in 1991, and its first armed attack took place in May 1993 in Glogovac, where it killed two Serb police officers and injured several others.⁹ Some KLA supporters had initially been involved in Rugova's peaceful movement and were members of his political party, the LDK. As frustrations grew among ethnic Albanians, some formed a separate party called the Popular Movement for Kosovo (LPK), which later served as a political front for the KLA and helped organize fundraising efforts for the KLA in Europe and the United States. Serb security officials claimed that the core of the KLA was a smaller group called the "National Movement for the Liberation of Kosovo," which was made up of mercenaries who had fought alongside Bosnian Muslims during the war in Bosnia.¹⁰

⁹ Chris Hedges, "Kosovo's Next Masters?" *Foreign Affairs*, May-June 1999.

¹⁰ Chris Hedges, "Resistance to Serbia Turns Violent in Kosovo," *The New York Times*, February 17, 1997, page A3.

The KLA relied on northern Albania as a staging ground for much of its activities, using the territory as a transit point to ship supplies and equipment and as a safe area to conduct training. Rumors abounded about ties between the KLA and officials in the Albanian government, including former President Sali Berisha. However, there is no clear and convincing evidence that the Albanian government had actively supported the creation of the KLA. The Albanian government seemed to understand why ethnic Albanians in Kosovo might turn to violence. In 1998, Ben Blushi, an Albanian government spokesman, said "We're still trying to get to know and identify what the KLA means. It is logical that when you have to face that sort of danger... you have to find a unique answer."¹¹

For much of its existence, the KLA seemed to lack a clear ideology and was by no means a monolithic, hierarchical organization. In the words of one journalist who closely covered Kosovo, "The Kosovo Liberation Army is a state of mind, not a tight organization."¹² As more and more ethnic Albanians turned away from non-violence and began to take up arms against the Serbs, the designation "KLA" was often thrown about, sometimes rather sloppily, by the international media, the diplomatic community and the Serbs. The term "KLA" was used to describe any armed ethnic Albanian in Kosovo from 1996 onwards, even though many of these armed Albanians may have initially been more closely associated with ad hoc village militias. Still, by 1998, the KLA had grown in prominence, and in the midst of hostilities with Serb forces, the KLA spent a good bit of

¹¹ Susan Milligan, "Albanians Start to Side with Kosovo Foes of Serbs," The Boston Globe, June 11, 1998, page A8.

¹² Chris Hedges, "Fog of War: Coping with the Truth About Friend and Foe; Victims Not Quite Innocent," The New York Times, March 28, 1999, page A4.

time trying to coordinate the large numbers of armed ethnic Albanians that had sprung up across Kosovo in the late 1990s.

Among the founding members and major leaders of the KLA, there did not seem to be one clear ideology driving the group. Although some journalists and analysts have tried make the connection between the KLA and other political movements in the region, including fascist militias, communists, and even radical Islamists, it seems that the KLA is an organization lacking a clear, core ideology or world vision. The main "organizing" objective seemed to be independence from the FRY. In 1998, Jakup Krasniqi, a spokesman for the KLA, responded to a question about the KLA's political ideology by saying, "I don't think we have an ideology. And in fact we do not have time for such things even if we were interested in them."¹³

Even though the organization had grown rapidly in the late 1990s, no single clear leader had emerged until late 1998 or early 1999, after reported infighting, purges and even assassinations. As the KLA struggled against Serb forces, there were struggles within the armed group, as well. The most prominent example was that of Ahmet Krasniqi, an ethnic Albanian who had served in the Yugoslav army in battles against Croatia. Krasniqi, with funding provided by Bujar Bukoshi, the prime minister in exile in Rugova's shadow government, started to build an independent Albanian military force in Kosovo. On September 21, Krasniqi was gunned down in the Albanian capital, Tirana. Some observers claim that Krasniqi's murder was part of an overall campaign by KLA leaders such as Hisham Thaci to consolidate power through assassinations and purges in

¹³ Chris Hedges, "Kosovo Rebel Force Will Be Serbian Province's New Power Broker," The New York Times, June 6, 1999, page A1.

their own ranks.¹⁴ By late 1998 and early 1999, Thaci had become the clear political leader of the movement and by 1999 was the focus of most diplomatic contacts with the KLA.

Serious questions existed about the source of KLA's financial support, and there were signs that members of the organization had ties with organized crime and drug smuggling. By the early 1990s, Albania was an important hub for heroin trafficking in Europe, and Germany's Federal Criminal Agency concluded in an intelligence report that "Ethnic Albanians are now the most prominent group in the distribution of heroin in Western consumer countries."¹⁵ In 1997, Interpol reported that 'Kosovo Albanians hold the largest share of the heroin market in Switzerland, in Austria, in Belgium, in Germany, in Hungary, in the Czech Republic, in Norway and in Sweden.'¹⁶

Press reports throughout 1998 and 1999 indicated that numerous Western European countries had their police forces investigate whether drug money was used to fund the rise of the KLA. Interviewed in 1999, Walter Kege, head of the drug enforcement unit in the Swedish police intelligence service, said, "We have intelligence leading us to believe that there could be a connection between drug money and the Kosovo Liberation Army."¹⁷

The question of whether or not the KLA used money from drug smuggling and other organized criminal activities to increase its strength largely remained unanswered definitively, but one source of financial support for the KLA that was clear and widely-

¹⁴ Chris Hedges, "Crisis in the Balkans: The Separatists; Leaders of Kosovo Rebels Tied to Deadly Power Play," The New York Times, June 25, 1999, page A1.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Frank Cilluffo and George Salmoiraghi, "And the Winner is... the Albanian Mafia," The Washington Quarterly, Autumn 1999, page 23.

¹⁷ Roger Boyes and Eske Wright, "Drug money linked to the Kosovo rebels," The Times (London), March 24, 1999.

known was the expatriate Albanian communities in the United States and Europe. The KLA raised money in several Western European countries and the United States, according to numerous press reports. Nearly 400,000 Albanians, 150,000 from Kosovo, lived in Germany at the time, and an estimated 300,000-500,000 ethnic Albanians lived in the US.¹⁸

The split between pacifist and militant ethnic Albanians was reflected in the United States, with some supporters like Rrustrem Ibraj, the president of the New York City chapter of the Kosovo Democratic League, continuing to raise money for Rugova's party. According to Ibraj, who opposed the more militant KLA, "It is very hard for me to tell them to be calm... Are there people who think the KLA is the way to go? Are they helping them? Yes, they have quite a lot of support here." According to Ibraj, in a few months in 1998, KLA representatives raised more than \$500,000 in the United States.¹⁹

Throughout 1998 and 1999, there were numerous press accounts of the fundraising efforts made by expatriate Albanians. On February 11, 1998, the Albanian-American community in Brooklyn, New York held an event that raised \$16,000 for KLA representatives visiting from Switzerland.²⁰ On July 27, 1998, Switzerland police raided the homes of Kosovar Albanians and froze bank accounts that were suspected of being used to fund the KLA.²¹

The KLA used these funds not only to increase its reserves of weapons, but also to engage foreign governments in what became a rather sophisticated public relations

¹⁸ William Drozdiak, "Exiles' Donations Fund Kosovo Rebels," The Washington Post, July 27, 1998, page A16.

¹⁹ Colum Lynch, "Albanians in US Fuel Kosovo Struggle," The Boston Globe, April 12, 1998, page A2.

²⁰ Chris Hedges, "In New Balkan Tinderbox, Ethnic Albanians Rebel Against Serbs," The New York Times, March 2, 1998, page A1.

²¹ R. Jeffery Smith, "Kosovo Albanians Said to Agree on Negotiating Team," The Washington Post, July 28, 1999, page A11.

effort. At one point it was reported that KLA leader Hashim Thaci used the Internet and satellite phones during NATO's bombing campaign to issue a call for every ethnic Albanian man from 16 to 50 to join the KLA.²²

As support for the KLA grew, it began to increase the number of attacks it conducted against Serb forces, particularly the MUP, in Kosovo. In response to these attacks, the FRY government cracked down on ethnic Albanians in Kosovo even more. In January 1997, Serb forces arrested more than 60 suspected members of the KLA, and Milosevic bragged that "terrorism in Kosovo has been cut to its roots."²³

At the time, some ethnic Albanians in Kosovo thought that the KLA may have been a fiction created by Belgrade, something that it could use as an excuse for its brutal, repressive policies against Albanians in Kosovo.²⁴ According to Edita Tahiri, a member of Rugova's political party, "It is the aim of the Serbs to dismantle the peaceful movement of Albanians [in Kosovo]. It justifies their attacks and makes us look bad to the international community."²⁵

However, by the end of 1997, there seemed to be little doubt that the KLA in fact existed, and that it would become an important political force in Kosovo. One of its first open public appearances took place in November 1997 at the funeral of an Kosovar Albanian schoolteacher who had been killed by Serbian police. Dressed in the KLA uniform, three members appeared before the crowd of 20,000 that had turned out to pay

²² Daniel McGrory, "Beleaguered rebels send urgent Internet plea for more weapons and fighters," The Times (London), March 30, 1999.

²³ Holger Jensen, "New Killing Field is Called Kosovo," The Denver Rocky Mountain News, March 10, 1998.

²⁴ Guy Dinmore, "Uneasy Peace in Kosovo May Be Coming to an End," Financial Times (London), November 4, 1997, page 4.

²⁵ Justin Brown, "Do Serbs 'Invent' Terrorists?" The Christian Science Monitor, November 26, 1997, page 6.

their respects. The crowd responded by chanting, "UCK, UCK," the Albanian initials for the KLA (standing for *Ushtria Clirimtare e Kosoves*)²⁶

The Serb crackdown on the KLA continued. In late 1997, in what was criticized as an illegitimate show trial by ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, the FRY tried 17 ethnic Albanians on charges of terrorism, alleging that they were members of the KLA. On December 16, the court sentenced 15 of the accused, along with two others who were tried in absentia, to 20 years in prison for their activities.²⁷ The KLA had arrived on the scene, and it had become a force to be reckoned with in Kosovo.

US Policy in Response to the KLA, 1996-1997

During this period, US concerns focused on the implementation of the Dayton Accords and containing the ethnic tensions between Albanians and Serbs. Path dependence is a common occurrence in US foreign policy, and the case of US policy in Kosovo in 1996 and 1997 was no exception to this rule. US officials continued to meet with Ibrahim Rugova, but no major diplomatic initiatives were undertaken by the United States to directly address the ethnic tensions in Kosovo during this period.

As for the KLA, US officials and US intelligence organizations did not seem to know much about it during this period. According to one news report, "A senior United States official who has read the intelligence reports on the organization said the information was sparse and inadequate. Nonetheless, American officials take the organization seriously and believe it has the potential for serious disruption of the Serbs'

²⁶ Julius Strauss, "Funeral gunmen demand home rule for Kosovo," The Daily Telegraph, December 1, 1997, page 10 and Guy Dinmore, "Kosovo's Albanian rebels take up arms," Financial Times (London), December 20, 1997, page 2.

²⁷ Guy Dinmore, "Court jails 15 from Kosovo," Financial Times (London), December 17, 1997, page 3.

control over Kosovo."²⁸ Serious and focused American diplomatic efforts aimed at the ethnic Albanians of Kosovo were not to be undertaken until well after Rugova's star had declined. By the time the US began to seriously engage ethnic Albanians, the semblance of a united Albanian front presented by Rugova and his non-violent approach had been seriously fractured by the dramatic and popular rise of the KLA.

IV. Reaching a Crisis Point: US Policy Dilemmas in Kosovo and the KLA, 1998-1999

Leaders of the KLA seemed to take a two-pronged approach to achieving their ultimate goal of independence from FRY: 1) increase the level of violence against Serbs and expand its targets beyond Serb police and military; and 2) increase public outreach, fundraising and diplomatic efforts. As the KLA moved forward on these two fronts, it further undermined the non-violent path advocated by Rugova and gained more and more ethnic Albanian support for its goal of complete independence. By the time that the Clinton administration became aware of the danger of the situation in Kosovo, the KLA's violent tactics had become more popular than the peaceful path of Ibrahim Rugova. The KLA's rise in prominence complicated US efforts to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

Spring 1998: Increased Conflict in Kosovo

Becoming increasingly concerned about the level of violence in Kosovo and alarmed by a series of Serb raids in the Drenica region of Kosovo, the US began to issue statements condemning the violence in the region. In one of the first public condemnations of KLA activities, Robert Gelbard, the President's special envoy to the

²⁸ Chris Hedges, "Notes From the Underground on Another Balkan Rift," The New York Times, May 11, 1997, page A8.

Balkans in charge of implementing the Dayton Peace Agreement, on February 23, 1998, said at press conference,

The great majority of this violence we attribute to the police, but we are tremendously disturbed and also condemn very strongly the unacceptable violence done by terrorist groups in Kosovo and particularly the UCK -- the Kosovo Liberation Army. This is without any question a terrorist group. I refuse to accept any kind of excuses. Having worked for years on counterterrorist activity I know very well that to look at a terrorist group, to define it, you strip away the rhetoric and just look at actions. And the actions of this group speak for themselves.

Later in the same press conference, in response to a question on the KLA, Gelbard said, "... we in particular have condemned and have made it clear how we feel about the UCK, the Kosovo Liberation Army, and certainly opposed it in every way possible."²⁹

Two weeks later, Serb forces conducted one of their most brutal attacks against ethnic Albanians in early March. Targeting KLA leaders from the Jashari clan, Serb forces killed more than 50 ethnic Albanians (nearly half of them women and children) in the town of Prekaz. This massacre was to become a defining moment in the conflict. Responding to this and other attacks, more than 30,000 Kosovar Albanians marched in protest in Pristina, and Serb police responded strongly, using tear gas and water cannons against the protestors and attacking journalists.³⁰

Some analysts questioned the wisdom of Gelbard's open condemnation of the KLA in late February and saw a link between his branding the KLA a terrorist organization and an increase in Serb reprisals against armed ethnic Albanians in the early part of 1998. Some felt that even though the KLA was clearly using questionable tactics and had been linked to the murders of innocent Serb civilians, Gelbard's statement may

²⁹ Complete transcript at: http://www.state.gov/www/policy_remarks/1998/980223_gelbard_belgrade.html

³⁰ Chris Hedges, "Serbia's Police Crush Protest by Kosovo's Ethnic Albanians," [The New York](#)

have been interpreted by the Serbs as a license to fiercely lash out against the insurrection and destroy it at all costs to human life.

Whether or not there was a link between the statement and the increase in Serb response, US officials began to see the KLA as a force that the US must deal with if it was going to help mediate a solution in Kosovo. High-level contacts between the United States and the KLA were initiated for the first time in May 1998, when Gelbard met with representatives of the KLA in Geneva.

Meanwhile, diplomatic efforts on the other fronts continued. In early March, the UN Security Council had passed Resolution 1160, which condemned the excessive use of force by Serb forces against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. The resolution also established an arms embargo against the FRY. In April, the FRY's response to the resolution was to hold a referendum on whether or not to accept international mediation in Kosovo. An estimated 95 percent of the Serbs voted against mediation. In addition to working to gain support for the use of force through the UN, the US also tried to develop a consensus within another key diplomatic group, the Contact Group for the FRY (the Contact Group included the US, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia).

Back on the Serb and Albanian track, Richard Holbrooke went to Belgrade in May and arranged a face-to-face meeting between Milosevic and Rugova. The talks between Milosevic and Rugova did not achieve any results, mostly because they were overshadowed by KLA attacks and Serb counterattacks. The time for a peaceful compromise between the FRY and ethnic Albanians seemed to have come and gone.

The Serb Offensive of the Summer and Fall of 1998

In a short period of time, the KLA had evolved from a rag-tag separatist force conducting "hit and run" attacks against Serb police and army to a national liberation movement seizing towns and territory in Kosovo and even issuing its own license plates.

By the beginning of the summer of 1998, the KLA had controlled an estimated 40 percent of the entire province. At some point during the late spring and early summer of 1998, the KLA appeared to alter its strategy and widened the scope of its attacks to include Serb civilians living in Kosovo. Previously, the KLA employed "hit and run" tactics against the Serb interior ministry forces and army, and during the summer, these forces began to respond with ferocity, killing not only members of the KLA but also ethnic Albanian civilians, including women and children. The KLA responded in kind, and attacks against Serb civilians in Kosovo became more common and frequent in the first half of 1998.³¹

In late June and early July, senior US officials held more meetings with representatives of the KLA. On June 24, Richard Holbrooke, shuttling in the region between Milosevic and Rugova on a special mission at the request of President Clinton, met by chance with two KLA fighters in a village. In the same week, the State Department's special envoy to the Balkans, Ambassador Gelbard met with KLA officials in Geneva, Switzerland.

Some critics questioned the wisdom of having senior officials meet with the KLA, particularly just months after Gelbard had branded it a terrorist organization. From the

³¹ Chris Hedges, "A New Tactic for Kosovo Rebels: Attacks on Isolated Serb Civilians," The New York Times, June 24, 1998, page A1.

Serb perspective, by meeting with KLA fighters, Holbrooke had "disqualified himself as a serious negotiator."³² The Clinton administration countered by arguing that the meetings did not represent a change in the US position. It made US Ambassador to Macedonia, Christopher Hill, responsible for negotiating with the ethnic Albanians, including the KLA. Shortly after the meetings with the KLA, Gelbard appeared before the House International Relations Committee on July 23. In a prepared statement, Gelbard explained the recent meetings with the KLA, saying,

One aspect of Ambassador Hill's mission has been to work with the Kosovar Albanian side to promote the development of an authoritative negotiating team that represents the full spectrum of political opinion in the Kosovo Albanian community, including extremist elements. Unless the views of those on the Albanian side engaged in the fighting are represented, it is unlikely that either a cessation of hostilities or a comprehensive political settlement can be negotiated. That is why we have opened a dialogue with the UCK. The UCK is a reality on the ground, and however much we condemn the use of violence by either side, they will have to be a party to any cessation of hostilities.³³

The US strategy, then, was to somehow bring the KLA into the process without empowering them and undermining Rugova (Rugova by this point may have already undermined himself). Atrocities committed by the KLA, particularly its attacks against innocent Serb civilians in Kosovo, represented the very same kind of actions that the United States had been fighting to halt in Kosovo and in the former Yugoslavia. At the same time, however, the KLA's attacks and killings made it more popular on the ground, and the United States needed to accept the grim fact that the KLA's brand of violent separatism had made it a force to be reckoned with in Kosovo.

Trying to include the KLA in the process was a risky strategy, given the uncertain

³² Guy Dinmore, "Serbs Hit Back in Kosovo," *Financial Times (London)*, June 30, 1998, page 2.

³³ Entire statement at : http://www.state.gov/www/policy_remarks/1998/980723_gelbard_kosovo.html

nature of the organization and the fact that many of its actions actually had served to undermine stability in the province. Reports of kidnappings of Serb civilians by the KLA prompted the State Department to issue a statement on July 15 condemning such kidnappings, stating, "there can be no excuse for such actions. The civilian population of Kosovo should not be subject to armed attack or intimidation."³⁴ The KLA, or at least ethnic Albanians claiming that they were members of the movement, had begun to commit atrocities against innocent civilians.

Another reason why including the KLA in the process was a risky strategy is that its ultimate goal, complete independence, had the potential for undermining overall regional stability. The United States had consistently opposed complete independence for Kosovo, and it continues to do so until this day. So, bringing in a radical organization that stood for everything that US policy opposed would require some deft diplomatic and political maneuvering. This was particularly true because many ethnic Albanians in Kosovo advocated the notion of a "Greater Albania." On July 11, KLA spokesman Jakup Krasniqi said that the KLA was fighting for "the liberation of all occupied Albanian territories and for their unification with Albania."³⁵

By the end of July, Ambassador Christopher Hill had brokered a tentative agreement between ethnic Albanian political leaders as to the membership of a negotiating team. On July 27, Ibrahim Rugova and members of his party signed off on

³⁴ Entire statement at : <http://secretary.state.gov/www/briefings/statements/1998/ps980715b.html>

³⁵ Stefan Halper, "The Solution in Kosovo: Milosevic Must Go," The Weekly Standard, July 27, 1998, page 24.

the deal, which had not been approved by the KLA.³⁶ The status of the KLA and whether or not it would take part in talks would remain unclear for some time.

During the summer of 1998, Serb forces had mounted an offensive that had succeeded in taking back much of the territory that the KLA had seized in the previous months. By early August, the KLA adopted a defensive posture and tried to maintain a hold on whatever territory it could. Some KLA fighters took to the hills of Kosovo or fled across the southern border to Albania, to re-group in the face of losses. These losses forced the rebels to re-think their strategy.

The October 1998 Agreement

In the wake of the major losses suffered by the KLA, Richard Holbrooke came to the region once again in an effort to broker some sort of agreement. The basis for Holbrooke's mission was a UN Security Council Resolution adopted on September 23. Resolution 1199, passing 14-0 with China's abstention, called for an immediate cease-fire in Kosovo, an international presence to monitor it, the withdrawal of "security units used for civilian repression", and dialogue on the future of Kosovo.

In the deal, Milosevic pledged to fully comply with UN Security Council Resolution 1199. Additionally, Milosevic agreed to complete access for humanitarian workers and the international tribunal investigating war crimes in the former Yugoslavia. An important part of the agreement was pledge of general amnesty for "crimes related to the Kosovo conflict."³⁷ Finally, Milosevic agreed to grant access to an international team

³⁶ R. Jeffrey Smith, "Kosovo Albanians Said to Agree on Negotiating Team," The Washington Post, July 28, 1998, page A11.

³⁷ R. Jeffrey Smith, "Ignoring Pledge, Serbs Try Ethnic Albanian Suspects," The Washington Post, December 3, 1998, page A33.

of 2,000 monitors organized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to monitor the troops withdrawals and the overall security situation in Kosovo.

The United States did not closely consult with the KLA during the nine days of talks with President Milosevic, as some in the Clinton administration did not view consultations with the KLA as essential. Shortly after Milosevic signed the October agreement, Deputy Secretary of State Thomas Pickering said that the "overwhelming use of military power on the part of Milosevic has driven most of the armed fighters either underground or out of the country or out of the picture."³⁸ Some US officials thought that the KLA was down and out for the count.

Just in case it was not, Secretary of State Albright warned the KLA not to take advantage of the situation. Speaking on October 27, Albright said,

Politically, the Serbs and Kosovar Albanians have resumed a dialogue with the goal of an interim agreement that would give Kosovars democratic self-government, including their own police, and elections supervised by the international community. To support those negotiations, we have also delivered a clear message to the leadership of the Kosovo Liberation Army: there should be no attempt to take military advantage of the Serb pull-back. Neither side can achieve a military victory in Kosovo. This message is starting to have an effect. In recent days, we've seen a new degree of restraint on the part of the Kosovo Liberation Army, which has been willing to negotiate the disengagement of forces in several key areas. Future progress will be enhanced if Kosovars have confidence that the international community is engaged and determined to prevent a return to repression and terror.³⁹

The KLA did not heed the Secretary's warning. Immediately after the accord was signed, the KLA rejected the accord, saying "All solutions but independence are not acceptable to the KLA."⁴⁰ The KLA viewed the agreement reached with Milosevic as

³⁸ R. Jeffrey Smith, "Kosovo Rebels Plan for Renewal of War," The Washington Post, October 22, 1998, page A30.

³⁹ See statement at: <http://secretary.state.gov/www/statements/1998/981027.html>

⁴⁰ Roger Cohen, "In Balkans Again, Promises, Promises," The New York Times, October 14, 1998, page A10.

buying them a little more time and giving them a little more space to re-group in the wake of the Serbs' devastating attacks in the summer and early fall of 1998. A senior KLA member who had served in the Yugoslav army, Naim Maloku, said during this period, "We made tactical, organizational and propaganda mistakes. But now we are trying to institutionalize and give the forces a reasonable political leadership."⁴¹ As Serb troops withdrew from the region, the KLA guerillas took over their vacated positions. The "cease-fire" achieved in the October 1998 agreement actually lasted for a few weeks, ending in early November 1998.

Slowly, the KLA began to re-group and become better organized, and it seems that they had received even better military arms and equipment. A member of the diplomatic observer mission, a former Western military officer, was surprised to see the new range of weaponry in the KLA's possession, including powerful American-made Barret sniper rifles.⁴² Additionally, the KLA reportedly received new uniforms, more modern communications gear (including satellite phones), submachine guns, and even lightweight body armor. Some key KLA outposts were protected by Chinese-made anti-armor mines, reportedly imported from Albania.⁴³ For the most part, though, the source of this new equipment was largely unknown.

Around this time in early November, the KLA started to interfere with the work of the international monitors working in the Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission (KDOM).⁴⁴ KDOM filed numerous complaints to ethnic Albanian leaders about the

⁴¹ Jane Perlez, "Guerillas in Kosovo Rebound, Provoking Concern," The New York Times, November 11, 1998, page A3.

⁴² Jane Perlez, "Guerillas in Kosovo Rebound, Provoking Concern," The New York Times, November 11, 1998, page A3.

⁴³ R. Jeffrey Smith, "A Turnaround in Kosovo," The Washington Post, November 18, 1998, page A1.

⁴⁴ KDOM was replaced by the OSCE's Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) in early January 1999.

limitations placed on them by the KLA. Also, Ambassador Christopher Hill met with KLA political leaders on November 6 to ask them to respect the cease-fire and OSCE agreement.

In early December, British and other European diplomats in Kosovo criticized a US policy of providing escort vehicles to Serb police convoys, citing concerns that the policy raised the chances for conflict between international monitors and the KLA. Duncan Bullivant, the OSCE spokesman in Pristina, said, "I think we should watch the police convoys and patrols from a distance, but not become more involved than that."⁴⁵ US officials argued that sending monitors with the Serb convoys served to discourage the KLA from firing on the Serbs and thus re-igniting the conflict.

Although not widely reported in the US press, the KLA continued its attacks throughout the winter. The US condemned both Serb military action and attacks by the KLA throughout this period. In a statement released by a US State Department spokesman, the United States condemned "all breaches of the cease-fire and other violations of applicable UN Security Council resolutions in Kosovo, including provocative attacks committed by element of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Belgrade's disproportionate and indiscriminate reaction, however, cannot be justified."⁴⁶

The October agreement did little in terms of bringing more stability to Kosovo. In reaction to continued KLA attacks, the FRY increased its forces in the province, in contravention to the October agreement. Serb forces and civilians reportedly threatened the lives of members of the international verification missions.

⁴⁵ Tom Walker, "Allies caution US over escort for Serbs," *The Times (London)*, December 7, 1998.

⁴⁶ "U.S. Concerned About Kosovo Violence," Press Statement by M. Lee McClenney, Acting U.S. State Department Spokesman, December 24, 1998.

The defining event that led to a dramatic shift in US policy took place on January 15, when the bodies of 45 ethnic Albanians massacred by Serb forces were discovered in the village of Racak. William Walker, a US diplomat who was head of the Kosovo Verification Mission, the international mission organized by the OSCE, accused FRY forces of perpetrating the attack, and in response, the FRY announced that it was going to expel Ambassador Walker because of his accusation. The horrible massacre at Racak touched off a flurry of diplomatic activity, and by January 29, the Contact Group met in London and issued a statement demanding that the FRY and Kosovar Albanians attend peace talks in France.

Negotiations at Rambouillet

Despite its disgust with Serb atrocities, the US continued to reject Kosovar Albanians' call for independence. In a speech at the US Institute for Peace on February 4, Secretary of State Albright reiterated the administration's stance by saying,

The KLA, as it is known, offers a deceptively simple answer to the tragedy of Kosovo -- independence from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. But there is no guarantee that independence would lead to peace in Kosovo, and ample reason to fear that it could undermine stability elsewhere in the region. The best answer is for Kosovo, and all of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, to adhere to international standards of human rights for everyone, regardless of ethnicity.⁴⁷

As in the Dayton negotiations in 1995, the United States set creating a peaceful, multiethnic entity as the endgame of diplomatic efforts in Kosovo. In no way did it want to be seen as signing off on ethnic cleansing.

By February 2, political leaders in Kosovo, including the KLA, agreed to attend the proposed negotiations in France at Chateau Rambouillet, just outside of Paris. Two days later, the Serbian government also agreed to participate. The negotiations at

Rambouillet began on February 6, under the auspices of the Contact Group and the co-chairmanship of British Foreign Minister Robin Cook and French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine. In addition to these two co-chairs, three co-mediators representing the United States, the European Union and the Russian Federation led negotiation sessions. The negotiations took place in two phases: the first phase lasting from February 6 to February 23, and a second phase lasting from March 15 to March 18.

Unlike the Dayton negotiation, the US mediators (along with their European counterparts) had not ensured the negotiators plenipotentiary power, the full power to sign agreements without having to submit them for approval back home. On the Serbian side, this did not seem necessary because of Milosevic's dictatorial control of the 16-member delegation. On the Kosovar Albanian side, this did not seem possible, given that there was no single individual or entity viewed as the sole "legitimate" representative of the Kosovar Albanians. So, a large part of the mediators' job at Rambouillet was not only arriving at a compromise between the Serbian and Kosovar Albanian sides; it was also to ensure that the Kosovar Albanians arrived at some degree of consensus on a position that would make compromise with Serbia possible.

Sixteen delegates represented the Kosovar Albanians at the negotiations in Rambouillet just outside of Paris, France. The delegates were a virtual "who's who" of Kosovar Albanian political leaders. The most moderate delegates were Ibrahim Rugova and Fehmi Agani, a sociology professor who was a founding member of Rugova's political party. They were willing to compromise the most and presented a transition model that would make Kosovo the third Yugoslav republic for a period of three to five

⁴⁷ Complete text at: <http://secretary.state.gov/www/statements/1999/990204.html>

years. After the transition to independence, Kosovo would still maintain a single market with Yugoslavia and maintain a common defense and foreign policy.⁴⁸ Representatives from the KLA rejected such a position, and during the negotiations, the KLA delegates seemed to pay very little mind to Ibrahim Rugova.

The leader of the KLA delegation and the dominant force in the overall delegation was Hashim Thaci, a 29-year-old leader who had been described unflatteringly as a "gangster" and a "thug" in some press accounts. In his corner were KLA spokesman Jakup Krasniqi and Xhavid Haliti, who allegedly oversaw the flow of arms from Albania into Kosovo.⁴⁹ In addition to these delegates, Bujar Bukoshi, a urologist based in Germany who had led fundraising efforts for Kosovar Albanians, also was present at the talks. Reportedly, there were tensions between Bukoshi and Thaci, who on February 10 had published an open declaration demanding that Bukoshi deliver all funds to the KLA.⁵⁰

So, in many ways, the negotiations between the Serbs and ethnic Albanians were only one aspect of the discussions at Rambouillet. One of the greatest challenges that the mediators faced at Rambouillet was helping to craft a degree of consensus among the ethnic Albanian delegates. Even though US Ambassador Christopher Hill had dedicated much of the previous nine months to developing some sort of common position between the Kosovar Albanians, it was clear that the delegation remained divided.

During the negotiations, State Department spokesman James Rubin found himself

⁴⁸ Paul Watson, "Moderates Key to Kosovo Peace; Balkans: Some Ethnic Albanians See Compromising on Bid for Independence as Only Way to End Bloodshed," Los Angeles Times, October 24, 1998, page A4.

⁴⁹ Jane Perlez, "Uncertainty About Delegates Clouds Kosovo Talks," Jane Perlez, The New York Times, February 10, 1999, page A3.

⁵⁰ Jane Perlez, "Uncertainty About Delegates Clouds Kosovo Talks," Jane Perlez, The New York Times, February 10, 1999, page A3.

serving as a key interlocutor with KLA leader Thaci. According to Rubin, "...Secretary Albright was advised that he (Thaci) was the person she needed to work on to get agreement there. We spent a lot of time with him, and I became the person he talked to when he was not talking to her. He had probably seen me on television."⁵¹

One of the conditions was disarmament of the KLA, something that was not a given at any point during the Rambouillet negotiations. During the first round of negotiations, many observers doubted that the KLA would agree to give up their arms. "If they disarm, it means that the KLA will not exist anymore. It's quite a sensitive issue," Ard Arifaj, an editor of an Kosovar Albanian newspaper in Pristina was quoted as saying.⁵²

Adem Demaci, a long-time Kosovar Albanian activist who was sometimes known as the Balkan Nelson Mandela because he had spent 29 years in Yugoslav jails, was against signing a peace deal. Not a member of the Kosovar Albanian delegation to the Rambouillet talks, Demaci argued NATO would not help Kosovar Albanians achieve their ultimate goal: independence: "In the end we should not rely on their promises and threats. We should rely on our forces and have confidence in our liberation army and in victory."⁵³ According to press reports, Secretary of State Albright phoned Demaci during the negotiations, seeking to gain his support and encourage the KLA to compromise. He reportedly hung up on her.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Jim Hoagland, "Gangsters or Good Guys?" The Washington Post, August 19, 1999, page A21.

⁵² Susan Milligan, "Kosovo foes still spoiling for a fight," The Boston Globe, February 26, 1999, page A2.

⁵³ Julius Strauss, "War threat as Kosovo chiefs unite behind KLA," The Daily Telegraph (London), February 25, 1999, page 18.

⁵⁴ Paul Watson, "Dispatch from Kosovo: His Convictions Keep a Separatist from Fleeing," Los Angeles Times, May 26, 1999, page A1. Also mentioned in Charles Krauthammer, "Empty Threats, Useless Gestures," The Washington Post, March 5, 1999, page A33.

At the close of the first phase of negotiations on February 23, the ethnic Albanian delegation agreed "in principle" to sign the political accord, but requested some time to go back to Kosovo to consult with other ethnic Albanians not taking part in the negotiations. The Serbian delegation voiced its support for a political agreement, but opposed provisions in the military annex of the draft agreement that included provisions for a NATO-led force in Kosovo.

The break in the two phases of the Rambouillet negotiations was a period of fierce lobbying and attempts to convince both sides to reach an agreement. On March 8, former Senator Robert Dole, who had long-standing ties with ethnic Albanians, met with members of the Kosovo Albanian delegation in Macedonia and encouraged them to sign the agreement (Dole met the ethnic Albanians in Macedonia because the FRY refused to give him a visa). Richard Holbrooke and Christopher Hill met President Milosevic in Belgrade in an effort to persuade him to accept the accord.

During this break in the Rambouillet negotiations, Demaci resigned from his position as "political representative" of the KLA.⁵⁵ With his resignation, Hisham Thaci became the most senior political representative of the KLA. Reacting to the change in leadership, US mediator Christopher Hill said that he was more optimistic than ever that the Albanians would sign the agreement.⁵⁶

Vetton Surroi, another Kosovar Albanian delegate who presented himself as politically independent from the other factions, said that Demaci's opposition would not prevent a deal. Surroi basically called Demaci an "armchair quarterback," saying, "You

⁵⁵ Steven Erlanger, "Champion of Free Kosovo Now Urges Moderation," The New York Times, August 10, 1999, page A9.

⁵⁶ Kevin Cullen, "A Kosovo rebel reshuffle revives hopes; New leader described as more pragmatic," The Boston Globe, March 4, 1999, page A2.

can always have somebody on the sidelines saying the quarterback could have thrown the ball better. But the only one[s] who can really play the game are those on the field. We know where we are and by March 15, we'll have a signed agreement."⁵⁷

The delegation of Kosovar Albanians finally signed the agreement on March 18, 1999. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright hailed the signature, saying that it demonstrated "their commitment to a peace settlement and for a future of democratic self-government."⁵⁸ Getting the Kosovar Albanians to sign off on the agreement was a diplomatic coup, and it marked a success in Washington's strategy of including the KLA in the diplomatic process and getting them to moderate its demands, at least at the diplomatic table. The work was not over, because the United States still had to secure the FRY's commitment to the agreement, and it still had to ensure that the KLA would stick to its word. "I think the strategy is to make them understand there is life after the KLA," said US envoy Christopher Hill.⁵⁹

The FRY delegation refused to accept the terms of the proposed agreement, and the talks at Rambouillet were suspended. From this point, the situation deteriorated, with the FRY sending even more troops into Kosovo, and the Kosovo Verification Mission withdrawing on March 19.

⁵⁷ David Lynch, "Elder policy leader, young army chief key to Kosovo talks," USA Today, February 26, 1999.

⁵⁸ Susan Milligan, "Albanians sign peace pact; Serbs still refuse", The Boston Globe, March 19, 1999, page A2.

⁵⁹ Paul Watson, "Political Head of Rebels in Kosovo Quits," Los Angeles Times, March 3, 1999, page A4.

V. The War and Its Aftermath

The KLA during NATO's Bombing Campaign

One last-ditch diplomatic effort was made to gain the FRY's signature on the proposed agreement, with US Ambassador Richard Holbrooke delivering a final warning to President Milosevic in Belgrade. After Milosevic's final refusal, NATO began its bombing campaign against FRY targets on March 24, 1999.

In late March, Serb forces shifted their strategy in Kosovo in response to the withdrawal of the international monitors and NATO's bombing campaign. According to "Erasing History: Ethnic Cleansing in Kosovo," a report released by the State Department in May 1999, "In late March 1999, Serbian forces dramatically increased the scope and pace of their efforts, moving away from selective targeting of towns and regions suspected of KLA sympathies toward a sustained and systematic effort to ethnically cleanse the entire province of Kosovo."⁶⁰

In other words, from the State Department's perspective, Serb actions before the end of late March 1999 were not atypical of a counterinsurgency campaign aimed at armed rebels. The ethnic cleansing had not begun until around the same time that the international community withdrew its monitors and NATO began its bombing. Before that time, it seemed that Serb actions were not unlike Russia's recent actions against the rebel insurgency in Chechnya.

As the bombing campaign continued, some members of the US Congress, including Senators Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky), Joseph Lieberman (D-Connecticut), and John Kerry (D-Massachusetts) openly advocated arming the KLA. In a letter to

⁶⁰ Complete report at: http://www.state.gov/www/regions/eur/rpt_9905_ethnic_ksvo_toc.html

Secretary of State Albright, Senator McConnell said that the KLA offers a "credible, capable, and willing alternative to the deployment of Americans."⁶¹ He proposed spending \$25 million. Some KLA representatives suggested that this had already happened, that the US secretly armed them before the start of the bombing campaign, a claim that "US officials in Skopje" denied.⁶² No account available in the public record offered definitive proof of covert military support on the part of the United States for the KLA. There were reports in the media that foreign mercenaries- the "Soldier of Fortune" type crackpots that seem to emerge when there is a conflict somewhere in the world- had helped train the KLA and even fought alongside them. But thus far, there has been no evidence of official military support from any of the NATO countries.

Given the concerns about the KLA and its terrorist activities against civilians, NATO was rather reluctant to arm the KLA. One major factor was the fear that if the NATO started arming the KLA, then Russia might start sending arms to the Serbs. Early in the bombing campaign, the KLA appealed to NATO for heavy weaponry that they could use against the Serbs, but NATO refused. Just before the bombing campaign started, Dr. Jonathan Eyal of the Royal United Services Institute in London predicted that "the moment the KLA smells the cordite from NATO weapons, any inclination they had to sign up to a peace deal in Kosovo will disappear."⁶³

This prediction rang true, and the KLA mounted attacks against Serb forces under the cover of NATO air power. The KLA continued to use Albania as a staging ground

⁶¹ Raymond Bonner, "Crisis in the Balkans: The Rebels; NATO is Wary of Proposals to Help Arm Kosovo Rebels," The New York Times, April 4, 1999, page A8.

⁶² Daniel McGrory, "Beleaguered rebels send urgent Internet plea for more weapons and fighters," The Times (London), March 30, 1999.

⁶³ David Buchan, "Jaw jaw becomes war war," Financial Times (London), March 24, 1999, page 19.

for its troops, and during the war, it appeared that the Albanian army would help the KLA by alerting the rebels to Serb counterattacks.⁶⁴ At some points in NATO's air campaign, observers noted that the KLA had served to draw Serb forces out of their barracks and into the open, making them more vulnerable to NATO's air strikes. On April 17, the US Department of Defense announced that US forces were holding a FRY prisoner of war who was captured by the KLA. So, despite concerns about offering direct military support to the KLA, it seemed that the level of cooperation between NATO and the KLA during the war was quite high.

There were tense moments between the two, however. NATO mistakenly bombed KLA fighters and other ethnic Albanians during its 78-day campaign. One mistaken bombing incident occurred on May 22, on a former FRY hilltop post seized by the rebels in Kosare and took the life of one KLA fighter and injured 15 others. In response to this mistake, KLA leader Hashim Thaci said that it was a "technical mistake" and that despite the error, NATO's bombing must continue and even become more intensified.⁶⁵

Throughout much of the bombing, European Union representative and Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari (Finland is a member of the EU, but not a member of NATO) and former Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin (who had been appointed by Russian President Yeltsin as a special envoy during the war) led the diplomatic efforts to arrive at an agreement with Milosevic. It was largely through their efforts that a cease-fire and a settlement were finally brokered. On June 3, the FRY accepted the terms

⁶⁴ Jonathan S. Landay, "Despite shortfalls, KLA shows muscle," The Christian Science Monitor, April 27, 1999, page 6.

⁶⁵ Michael Kranish and Kevin Cullen, "NATO bombs Kosovo rebels," The Boston Globe, May 23, 1999, page A1.

offered to it, and after some further negotiation, NATO formally suspended its bombing campaign on June 10.

End of the War and Disarming the KLA

When a NATO-led force finally entered Kosovo on June 12, chaos reigned in the province. Earlier that day, Russian troops had unexpectedly entered Kosovo and secured an area close to the Pristina airport, even though Russia had not coordinated its plans to send in troops with NATO. This incident touched off a round of diplomacy with the Russians aimed at ensuring that there would be no clashes between Russian and NATO forces. Ethnic Albanian refugees began streaming back into the province. The bombing campaign had only been suspended, and it was not officially ended until June 20, when Serb forces completely had been drawn down in accordance with the military technical agreement that was signed on June 9.

One major concern at the time was the issue of the KLA and whether it would agree to disarm. The issue remained unresolved when NATO troops entered Kosovo, but US officials predicted that there would be no problem- KLA leader Hashim Thaci would issue the order to give up the arms. On June 16, James Dobbins, who had taken Robert Gelbard's place as the special envoy to the Balkans, said, "Our attitude toward the KLA is to hold them to their commitments."⁶⁶ Even before a formal agreement had been reached between the KLA and NATO on disarmament, US Marines, in one of the first peacekeeping actions following the war, seized weapons from about 200 KLA fighters in

⁶⁶ Jonathan S. Landay, "Kosovo's rebel army: Will it disarm?" The Christian Science Monitor, June 18, 1999, page 1.

the village of Vladovo. The Marines had reportedly threatened the fighters with armored personnel carriers and Cobra attack helicopters.⁶⁷

Several observers worried that even if Thaci issued an order to KLA fighters to give up their arms, many of the guerillas would not do so. The KLA was by no means a disciplined and organized military force, and some worried that even if a disarmament agreement were reached, it would only lead to a symbolic disarmament.

On June 21, Lieutenant General Sir Michael Jackson, the commander of KFOR (the peacekeeping force) in Kosovo signed an agreement with Hashim Thaci. At a ceremony in Pristina to mark the signing, Thaci said, "Today, a new era will start in Kosovo. We are not interested in building a criminal society, but a modern civil society."⁶⁸ In the agreement, the KLA committed to handing over weapons other than pistols and hunting rifles within 90 days to the international peacekeeping forces. It agreed to not carry weapons of any type within a mile of FRY forces, on main roads, or in areas outside the borders of the Kosovo province. It also agreed to close all fighting positions and checkpoints and mark mine fields and booby traps. Finally, the agreement held out the possibility of creating an ethnic Albanian territorial military force, something of a national guard for Albanians in Kosovo.⁶⁹ President Clinton called Thaci to thank him for his efforts and congratulate him on a job well done.

VI. Post-War Kosovo, July 1999-January 2000

After a very tumultuous and chaotic June, when so much that had seemed uncertain and unresolved at the beginning of the month had been resolved by the end of

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Molly Moore, "KLA Chief Appeals to Serbs to Return; Political Leader Says Rebels Support 'Democratic Kosovo,'" *The Washington Post*, June 22, 1999, page A1.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

the month, it seemed that the US strategy had succeeded. Milosevic had capitulated, Serb troops were withdrawn, and the KLA committed to disarmament. Peace had finally come to Kosovo.

Or had it? In the summer of 1999, numerous press reports detailed revenge killings of Serb civilians by ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. Criminal activity and smuggling from Albania into Kosovo continued unabated, and perhaps even increased in the aftermath of the war. "For fifty years our two countries were blocked. Now everyone wants to visit Kosovo and have a little fun," Zylfi Ademi, a border policeman said in August 1999.⁷⁰ The United Nations made plans to set up a customs police that would help control the border, but the likelihood for success in clamping down on illicit activity seemed dim, with concerns about mines along the border preventing international forces patrolling the province from monitoring back roads used by smugglers.

Despite its agreement to disarm and expectations that it would ultimately disband, the KLA took over many towns and municipalities, and even it did not seem to have much control over the situation. Masar Shala, the KLA-appointed mayor of Prizren, painted an ugly picture of Kosovo in the aftermath of the war:

Girls are kidnapped, taken we expect to work as prostitutes in Italy, cars are stolen or hijacked, houses are looted and there are shootings at night. The refugees who are coming home, many of whom have driven from Germany with their families, are systematically stopped just before they enter Kosovo and robbed of all their money. Apartments in the city have been seized by Albanian gangs and rented out. The only thing we lack is drug dealing, but that will probably arrive shortly.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Chris Hedges, "In Kosovo, Gangs Dim the Luster of a 'Greater Albania,'" The New York Times, August 8, 1999, page A1.

⁷¹ Ibid.

On July 2, the United Nations announced plans to set up a mission in Kosovo to serve as an interim administration for the province, with Bernard Kouchner as its head. Kouchner arrived in Kosovo on July 15 and urged both ethnic Albanians and Serbs of Kosovo to work with the UN administration to build a democracy in Kosovo. The international community's stated goal was to rebuild a multi-ethnic Kosovo. On a visit to the region in late July, Secretary of State Albright called on ethnic Albanians to stop the attacks against Serb civilians, saying, "Democracy cannot be built on revenge, and you will lose the support of the international community if you will not be tolerant and you take the law in your hands."⁷²

Despite these moves to create a democratic, multi-ethnic Kosovo- a Kosovo not independent from the FRY- the revenge killings by ethnic Albanians continued through the end of the year and into 2000. Questions about the role of the KLA remained unresolved, and KLA leaders were critical of the UN administration. At the United Nations to meet UN Secretary General Kofi Annan (a meeting that for some reason was cancelled) and Richard Holbrooke, Hashim Thaci called for Kosovo's complete independence from Serbian-led Yugoslavia and representation at the UN. He also criticized Bernard Kouchner, the UN representative in charge of administering Kosovo, as ineffective and non-responsive to the needs of Kosovar Albanians.⁷³

On September 20, the KLA signed an agreement with NATO to formally disband. A Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) would be formed in which ethnic Albanians of Kosovo would play a role in policing the province. NATO Secretary General Javier Solana praised the agreement, saying "This is a milestone for the ongoing peace

⁷² Complete statement at : <http://secretary.state.gov/www/statements/1999/990729.html>

implementation efforts by the international community in Kosovo. As of today, the KLA has ceased to exist as a structured para-military organization."⁷⁴

Even though the KLA signed a disarmament agreement in June and formally agreed to disband in September, it remained an important political actor on the scene in Kosovo. Its former leader, Hashim Thaci became known as the "self-styled" prime minister of Kosovo, and he continued to make his voice heard. In October, Major Roland Lavoie, a NATO spokesman, condemned statements made by Thaci in which he said KPC would have the same leaders as the KLA. Lavoie made clear that Thaci had no role or connection with the KPC.⁷⁵ By the end of 1999, the future status of Kosovo remained uncertain. Plans for setting up a self-governing, autonomous government still not independent from the FRY remained unclear, and no date for elections had been set. Despite the presence of international peacekeeping troops, murders of Serbs still living in Kosovo continued, and even though the KLA had disbanded, some observers speculated that in the long-run, perhaps after several years under UN administration, the KLA's ultimate objective would be achieved: independence from the FRY.

⁷³ Barbara Crossette, "Kosovo Rebels' Political Chief Calls for U.N. Representation," The New York Times, September 18, 1999, page A3.

⁷⁴ Mike Blanchfield, "KLA's Demise a 'Milestone' for Peace: NATO Ministers Hail Agreement to Disband Kosovo Rebels," The Ottawa Citizen, September 21, 1999, page A12.

⁷⁵ "The Week in Review: KLA Leader's Remarks Anger NATO," Jane's Defence Weekly, October 13, 1999.

VII. Conclusion

Questions of how the United States should respond to movements of national self-determination and ethnic separatism had become increasingly frequent throughout the 1990s, and they continue to remain important today. Russia's current conflict against separatists in Chechnya is but one of many examples from around the world of how these questions are still relevant and largely unanswered. When movements of national or ethnic self-determination turn violent, formulating effective policies in response to the conflict becomes more complex. Humanitarian concerns, which have been heightened in an age when news and events are instantly transmitted around the world, often come into conflict with the strategic interests and relationships of the United States.

Clearly, there are no simple answers to the question of how the United States should respond to such movements, and there is no single, set policy that might be applied in every instance. The answer to the question of how the US government might effectively respond to national or ethnic separatism remains quite muddy after the experience in Kosovo from 1989 to 1999.

For years, the Serbs of FRY had repressed ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, implementing discriminatory policies and committing human rights violations. For years, the ethnic Albanians relied on a non-violent approach to arrive at a compromise with the FRY while trying to gain international attention and support for its cause. For years, the United States virtually ignored it. It was not until the ethnic Albanians of Kosovo had introduced violence into the conflict that the United States focused on the problem and tried to address the issue head-on. The years of "benign neglect" on the part of the international community had not paid off, and US policymakers were faced with difficult

decisions about how to deal with the KLA, an organization whose sole stated objective, the independence of Kosovo, ran contrary to US policy in the region.

If a "lesson" might be learned from the US and international community's response to the movement towards self-determination in Kosovo, then it may indeed be a grim one: non-violent approaches by national movements of self-determination will receive no attention from the world. Instead, the situation must reach a crisis point, with the national self-determination movement turning to violence and terrorism and even killing innocent civilians.

After the KLA's rise to prominence, the United States was presented with some particularly difficult questions about how to deal with this movement. At first, in early 1998, the Clinton administration seemed to waver and have no clear policy about what to do about the KLA. It seemed as if one moment the United States was condemning the group as terrorists and the next moment the United States was meeting with it. The arguments for including the KLA in the dialogue centered around the simple fact that it had become perhaps the most popular movement in Kosovo and the US would not have been able to help the parties reach a final settlement if it excluded the KLA. The arguments against including the KLA in the diplomatic process focused on the danger of bringing in a radical movement that had committed atrocities itself and was committed to a final goal of independence, a goal which contradicted US policy objectives.

Ultimately, the United States opted for including the KLA in the process because of its power and political support. This diplomatic process was quite tricky and difficult, and it included efforts to help ethnic Albanians of various political perspectives arrive at a common position that did not contradict US policy objectives. In many ways, this type

of diplomacy was more challenging than the diplomatic track with the FRY. With the FRY, it was always clear who had the final say in the FRY's policy: President Milosevic. On the ethnic Albanian side, it was never certain who had the ultimate decision-making authority, and in many ways, US diplomatic efforts influenced which Kosovar Albanians ultimately gained that power.

The hope was that by including the KLA in the process of finding a peaceful resolution, the KLA would then be co-opted, controlled, and disbanded. The US diplomats who worked on these efforts achieved a moderate degree of success. By early March 1999, the United States had secured a commitment from the KLA to work with the FRY in setting up an autonomous structure. Some analysts note that it may have been naïve to accept the KLA's word and that ultimately it would have broken its word had the FRY signed the Rambouillet agreement. This may or not be the case, but in the end, it seems that including the KLA in the process was a marginal success, particularly after it agreed to disarm and disband. Bringing the KLA into the diplomatic process was a risky move, but it ultimately succeeded, at least in the short-run and from a limited perspective.

However, from a broader perspective, US policy in Kosovo with respect to national separatism has not been a success. In order to achieve "success," the United States had to resort to force, a war that cost the United States at least two to three billion dollars (not to mention the other financial costs associated with peacekeeping and reconstruction and the even higher costs of the loss of human life). The US and its NATO allies may have succeeded in returning ethnic Albanian refugees to Kosovo, but to some extent, the policy has created a new class of refugees: Serbs who had been living in Kosovo before the war. The basic plan in the UN's current administration of Kosovo is to

provide some time and space for ethnic Albanians and Serbs of Kosovo to build their own institutions and governing bodies. At the end of this period of international protection, it is presumed that cooler heads will prevail, and the ethnic Albanians' drive for independence will somehow be satiated by the development of local institutions. Time will tell if this policy will succeed or not. The rules of engagement when dealing with national separatism have never been clear, and US policy in Kosovo has done little to clarify them.

Appendix A: Brief History of Kosovo and the Former Yugoslavia in the 20th Century

To understand NATO's war against Serbia in 1999, it is not essential to be familiar with the details of the entire history of the Balkans and Kosovo's status in the former Yugoslavia.⁷⁶ However, a few pivotal dates and events in the modern history of Yugoslavia and Kosovo are worth highlighting. The first modern Yugoslav state was formed in 1918. Created on the rubble of the collapsed Ottoman and Hapsburg empires following the First World War, it was first named the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. During this period the Serbian dynasty Karadjordjevic ruled the kingdom, until Axis powers invaded and partitioned Yugoslavia in 1941.

Following the Second World War, Yugoslavia was reunited under Josip Broz, a former guerrilla leader better known as Tito, who had fought against the German Nazis, fascist Italians, and Serb monarchists during the war. Tito ruthlessly suppressed all expressions of nationalism on the part of any group living within Yugoslavia's territory. The 1946 Yugoslav constitution, following the Soviet federal model, centralized power and defined the country as a federal state of six sovereign republics. A special arrangement was made regarding the Republic of Serbia: Kosovo was declared an "autonomous region" with local administrative units. These administrative units did **not**

⁷⁶ For background on the former Yugoslavia, its disintegration, international diplomacy in response to those events, and Kosovo, see Richard Ullman (editor), The World and Yugoslavia's Wars, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, 1996; Noel Malcolm, Bosnia: A Short History, New York University Press, New York, 1996; Laura Silber and Allan Little, Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation, Penguin, USA, 1995 and 1996; Julie A. Mertus, Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1999; Noel Malcolm, Kosovo: A Short History, Macmillan, London, 1998; Richard Holbrooke, To End a War, Random House, New York, 1998; Susan Woodward, Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War, The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 1995; and James Gow, Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War, Columbia University Press, New York, 1997.

have decision-making authority independent from the Republic of Serbia. Tito granted this special arrangement for Kosovo mostly because of the large Albanian population that lived in the region.

Kosovo's legal status remained the same until Tito introduced a new Yugoslav constitution in 1974. The 1974 Constitution formally defined Kosovo as a constituent member of the federation and granted it de facto status as a sovereign republic. The only difference between Kosovo (and another Serbian province with the same status, Vojvodina) and a republic was that Kosovo did not have the right to secede from the federation. The constitution did not define precisely what powers Kosovo would have vis-à-vis the Republic of Serbia.

These changes in Kosovo's constitutional and legal status demonstrate how Tito managed to keep the lid on ethnic conflict in Yugoslavia and keep the country intact. By granting Kosovo a special status, Tito was in some form recognizing the national differences that existed on the ground between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. However, Tito did not go so far as to grant Kosovo the full powers of a republic, mostly out of fears that a Kosovo Republic would decide to secede from Yugoslavia and perhaps join Albania.⁷⁷ Combining these legal moves with repressive measures, Tito successfully maintained a balance between Serbs and Albanians and, with some exceptions, prevented open conflict between the two nationalities in Kosovo.

Another important fact to note in addition to Kosovo's legal status is that by the mid-1970s, Kosovo had fallen behind much of Yugoslavia in terms of economic and social development. Out of all the regions in Yugoslavia, it had the highest rates of infant

⁷⁷ Noel Malcolm, Kosovo: A Short History, page 328.

mortality and illiteracy.⁷⁸ Much of its population consisted of poorly educated, impoverished farmers.

Less than a year after Tito's death in May 1980, Albanians rioted against Serb moves to reassert Belgrade rule over the province that had been granted autonomy under the federation's 1974 constitution.⁷⁹ Albanians in Kosovo wanted even greater autonomy from the Republic of Serbia, with some calling for Kosovo's receiving full republic status and others calling for a "Greater Albania" or unity with the Albanian state. Serbs living in Kosovo, only about 10 percent of the overall population of approximately 2 million, felt increasingly vulnerable to the Albanian majority in Kosovo. The nationalist tensions that seemed to lurk beneath the surface were no longer controlled and managed by a weakened regime from above, and Serbian fears soon played into the hands of racists and opportunistic politicians looking to advance their careers.

Serb Repression in Kosovo, 1987-1997

One of the more prominent signs of tension between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo was found in a memorandum written by a group of Serb academics at the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Published in the September 24, 1986 edition of *Vecernje Novosti*, a mass-circulation daily, the memorandum alleged that Serbs had faced extreme political and economic discrimination under the Communist regime. In Kosovo, the academics argued, Serbs faced total genocide at the hands of the ethnic Albanian majority.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, page 202.

⁷⁹ Carol J. Williams, "As Belgrade Takes Away Treasures from Tense Kosovo, Fears of Bloodbath Grow," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1992, page 6.

⁸⁰ Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*, page 31.

Slobodan Milosevic, an opportunistic Serb Communist party leader in Yugoslavia, seized upon this memorandum's themes and rocketed to power. The defining moment in Milosevic's political career took place in Kosovo in April 1987, on a trip to meet with local Serb leaders. When police clubbed thousands of Serbs demonstrating against Albanian repression outside a building where Milosevic was meeting local officials (a demonstration that seems to have been planned by Milosevic), Milosevic appeared before the crowd and cried out, "No one should dare to beat you," which became an instant rallying cry for Serbs.⁸¹ The overall message of his speech to the crowd of demonstrators was that he would protect the rights of all Serbs. Milosevic rode the wave of popularity created by his performance in Kosovo to become President of the Republic of Serbia, pushing out his friend and colleague Ivan Stambolic and assuming power by the end of 1987.

In the years that followed, Milosevic used Kosovo's central place in Serb mythology as a means to build and consolidate his support. In a cleverly staged event on June 28, 1989, Milosevic organized celebrations that brought almost a million Serbs to Kosovo to celebrate the six-hundredth anniversary of Serbia's defeat by the Ottoman Turks on the Field of Blackbirds. Many other important landmarks and symbols of Serbian national heritage existed in Kosovo, including numerous Serbian Orthodox monasteries and churches. Some observers called Kosovo Serbia's "Jerusalem." In addition to these important cultural and national symbols, Serbia had a serious economic interest in maintaining a presence in Kosovo. Described also as Serbia's "Kuwait,"⁸²

⁸¹ Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*, page 38.

⁸² Chris Hedges, "Below It All in Kosovo, A War's Glittering Prize," *The New York Times*, July 8, 1998, page A4.

Kosovo contains several important lead, zinc and coal mines, including the Trepca mining complex, worth at least five billion dollars alone.⁸³

When Milosevic came to power in 1987, he promised to make Serbia "whole" again by ending the autonomy that the 1974 Constitution gave to the provinces.⁸⁴ In response to the growth of Serbian nationalism, in 1988, Kosovar Albanian workers, who made up about 75 percent of the 23,000 employees at the Trepca mine, organized a strike and protested at that site. Their protest included a 30-mile march to Pristina, the provincial capital in Kosovo, in which protestors carried Yugoslav flags and photos of Tito. The strike ended with a promise from Milosevic that Kosovo's autonomy would be respected, a promise that was not kept.⁸⁵

In March 1989, Milosevic's promise of making Serbia "whole" again was fulfilled. The provincial assembly of Kosovo met on March 23 to pass constitutional amendments that effectively stripped Kosovo of its autonomous status. Parked outside the assembly were large numbers of Serb tanks and military vehicles, and inside large numbers of "guests" from the security police and Serb Communist party figures mixed with representatives before the vote was taken. Five days later, the Serb assembly in Belgrade made the final changes- Kosovo's special status was revoked.⁸⁶ In 1990, the FRY dissolved the Kosovo provincial assembly.

After stripping Kosovo of its special constitutional status, Serb officials in Belgrade, under Milosevic's leadership, issued new laws and decrees aimed at enhancing

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Gow, Triumph of the Lack of Will, page 17.

⁸⁵ Chris Hedges, "Below It All in Kosovo, A War's Glittering Prize," The New York Times, July 8, 1998, page A4.

⁸⁶ Noel Malcolm, Kosovo: A Short History, page 344.

the position of Serbs in Kosovo and limiting the rights and freedoms of ethnic Albanians. Under laws passed by the Serb assembly, ethnic Albanians were forbidden to buy or sell property without special permission from Serb authorities. The Serbian Assembly passed "labor relations" laws that made it possible to fire thousands of ethnic Albanians from state jobs. Albanian culture and language were also suppressed- the Kosovo Academy of Arts and Sciences was closed down, and schools in Kosovo no longer taught in the Albanian language. When the war broke out in Bosnia in 1992, Serbian nationalist rhetoric emphasized the "Islamic threat," not only in Bosnia but also in Kosovo, where most of the ethnic Albanians are Muslim.⁸⁷ In essence, Milosevic delivered on most of his promises to "protect" Serbs in Kosovo; he instituted racist policies of repression against ethnic Albanians.

There is one last important point about Serb repression in Kosovo. Some have argued that by the middle of the 1990s, part of Milosevic's objective was to use Kosovo as a place to re-settle Serbs who had been living in the Krajina region, an area taken by the Croatian army in the summer of 1995. In fact, efforts were made to re-settle at least some of these Serbs in Kosovo, and the number of Serb refugees in Kosovo had slightly risen in the mid-1990s. But Kosovo did not seem to be a popular place with many Serbs. In his book, Kosovo: A Short History, Noel Malcolm recounts an incident in which a group of Serb refugees were taken to Kosovo on a bus. Not wanting to live in an impoverished region where Serbs were in the minority, the refugees put a gun to the driver's head and forced the bus back to Belgrade.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Ibid, pages 346-350.

⁸⁸ Noel Malcolm, Kosovo: A Short History, page 353.

Whatever the underlying motives for Serb repression in Kosovo were, it is clear that these policies were one of the main reasons why conflict erupted in the province in the late 1990s.

The Rise and Fall of Ibrahim Rugova's "Non-Violent" Path

After Milosevic revoked Kosovo's autonomy and instituted repressive measures, ethnic Albanians responded to the call of Ibrahim Rugova, a pacifist academic based in Pristina. Rugova formed a political party, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK, its Albanian initials), and developed a strategy to peacefully withdraw from Serb-dominated state institutions and create a parallel government. At the direction of Rugova, ethnic Albanians set up a "shadow" government, with a tax administration that collected money. With this money, they built separate schools that taught in the Albanian language and separate health clinics that served the needs of the impoverished Albanians in Kosovo. In May 1992, the LDK won an overwhelming victory in the election to choose a Kosovo parliament, which served as a main body in the ethnic Albanian shadow government. For the most part, Rugova's strategy of withdrawing from Serb-dominated institutions and creating a parallel structure was largely successful.

What was not as successful was gaining international attention and political support for this movement. In addition to working to create a parallel structure in Kosovo, Rugova spent much time abroad in foreign capitals, trying to garner support for his non-violent path. For the most part, beyond a few innocuous resolutions by the United Nations and the European Parliament, Rugova was unsuccessful in gaining support for his efforts.⁸⁹ As early as 1992, Rugova was warning that without

⁸⁹ Noel Malcolm, Kosovo: A Short History, page 348.

international support, the non-violent efforts might collapse: "We have been waiting for three years for something to happen that will improve our situation. If the world doesn't help us, we may have to do something by ourselves. There could be a national uprising here, which would have tragic results."⁹⁰

When both Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence in 1991, the LDK changed its goal; instead of advocating for gaining republican status in Yugoslavia, it began to call for full sovereignty and independence.⁹¹ By 1992, four of the six original republics had seceded from the FRY (Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina) and only two remained: Serbia (including the Kosovo province) and Montenegro (from this point forward, these two republics continued to use the name FRY).

Rugova's inability to gain substantial international attention and support for his non-violent efforts took its toll on his popularity. The 1995 Dayton negotiations that ended the war in Bosnia did not include Kosovo on the agenda, and this led some ethnic Albanians in Kosovo to wonder about the wisdom of Rugova's strategy. In 1996, Rugova achieved a small degree of success in his efforts to negotiate with the Serbs. Through the mediation of an Italian Catholic charity, Rugova and Milosevic signed an "education agreement" under which state educational facilities would be made available to the parallel education system that the ethnic Albanians had developed under Rugova.⁹² Serb authorities, however, failed to implement the agreement, and in 1997 demonstrations broke out in Kosovo.

⁹⁰ Stephen Kinzer, "Ethnic Conflict is Threatening in Yet Another Region of Yugoslavia: Kosovo," The New York Times, November 9, 1992, page A8.

⁹¹ Noel Malcolm, Kosovo: A Short History, page 350.

⁹² Noel Malcolm, Kosovo: A Short History, page 354.

Unable to achieve any sort of compromise or concessions from the Serbs, and unsuccessful in receiving international support for his cause, Rugova was derided as an out-of-touch academic and ineffective politician. The rise and fall of Rugova's non-violent path was another important reason why ethnic Albanians began to see a violent separatist movement as the solution to their predicament.

Absence of Rule of Law in Kosovo and the Collapse of the Albanian State

In addition to Serb repression in Kosovo and the failure of Rugova's non-violent movement to attract support and attention, a third factor that contributed to the rise of a violent separatist movement was the absence of law and order in Kosovo and northern Albania in the late 1990s. The situation in Kosovo and northern Albania during this period was similar to that described by Hobbes- poor, nasty, brutish and short. Organized crime and random killings between rival Albanian families- some of the conflict blood feuds conducted according to ancient communal codes- plagued the region in the late 1990s.⁹³

One major source of this instability was the collapse of the Albanian government. At the beginning of 1997, hundreds of thousands of Albanians lost their life savings in elaborate pyramid schemes, totaling around one billion dollars, which was about one-third of the country's gross domestic product.⁹⁴ Many Albanians rioted against the government, believing that some government officials benefited from the scandal. The country fell into anarchy, and the Albanian government quite literally collapsed and lost

⁹³ For an account of Albanian blood feuds, see Scott Anderson, "The Curse of Blood and Vengeance," The New York Times Magazine, December 26, 1999, page 28.

⁹⁴ Kevin Done, "Curse of the pyramids: Albania's impressive transition to the free market is threatened by the storm over failed investment schemes," Financial Times (London), March 4, 1997, page 17.

control of the situation. In early March, Albanians began to raid military storage areas, and hundreds of thousands of weapons were stolen.

The easy availability of weapons led to an increase in arms smuggling from Albania, as impoverished Albanians tried to make up some of their losses from the pyramid schemes by selling arms. One market for this arms trade was found just across Albania's northern border in the ethnic Albanian communities of Kosovo. Frustrated by the continued Serb repression and the failure of the pacifist response of Rugova, ethnic Albanians began to take advantage of the lawlessness and easy availability of weapons. With these arms, the KLA was able to transform itself from a clandestine force of disparate fighters into a small army conducting guerilla warfare against Serb targets in Kosovo.

A second source of instability in the area, something that helped make organized crime in Kosovo and northern Albania a growth industry, was the economic sanctions that were imposed against the FRY throughout much of the 1990s. By the late 1990s, smuggling of fuel and other essential goods turned into a prosperous business, involving Albanian cities along the Adriatic coast and northern transit points such as Kosovo. Albanian gangsters, oftentimes working with their Serb counterparts (in a level of cooperation between the ethnic groups similar to the collaboration between Israeli and Palestinian criminals), made money by taking risks to violate the sanctions.

In her criticism of the economic sanctions against the FRY, Susan Woodward notes the disastrous effects that they had on the economy while doing little to achieve peace in the Bosnia war. She also notes that the sanctions

worsened the economic decline and competition over economic resources that had led originally to a disintegration of civil order and a rise of radical nationalists in

Yugoslavia. The political consequences for the new Yugoslavia were therefore counterproductive, as a result of intensified class warfare, a fortress mentality against the outside, and the resort to familial systems of support and the resources of rural households and landholdings outside the cash economy that entails the social obligations and patriarchal culture tied to defense of the land and nation.⁹⁵

This was particularly true in Kosovo. As the economic situation grew more desperate, and Serb repression of ethnic Albanians continued, a violent uprising began to seem like an attractive alternative.

By 1998, Albanians had recognized that the lack of order and rule of law presented a serious problem for them and the entire region as a whole. By the beginning of the summer 1998, Albanian Prime Minister Fatos Nano had issued a plea to NATO countries to send troops to northern Albania in order to secure the border region. Nano did this largely based on the fear that Serb forces might enter Albanian territory to track down KLA members, but he also recognized the concerns that northern Albania may have been used as a transit point for arms trafficking. "We desperately need intervention, the establishment of mechanisms such as 'no fly' zones to halt these attacks. The situation is deteriorating. We do not want another Bosnia."⁹⁶ Nano's calls for assistance largely fell on dead ears in the West.

So, by late 1997 and early 1998, the basic ingredients for instability in Kosovo had already been thrown into the mix- Serb repression of ethnic Albanians, the failure of pacifist ethnic Albanians to achieve concessions from the FRY, and the collapse of order and rule of law in the region.

⁹⁵ Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War*, page 386

⁹⁶ Chris Hedges, "Albania Leader Fears Serbs Will Cross Border," *The New York Times*, June 4, 1998, page A12.