

2.5 Course and interventions: The actions of the KLA, the Serbian government, the police and the military



Conceptual understanding

Key concepts

- Causation
- Significance
- Perspective

Key question

- Why did diplomacy break down and result in war?

▲ The badge of the KLA (UCK in Albanian)

A chronology of key events in Kosovo and the Balkans, 1999

The Račak massacre: Serb forces kill 45 Albanians

15 January

Operation Allied Force: the Kosovo air war begins

February

The Rambouillet peace talks begin in France

24 March

Operation Horseshoe (*Potkova*): Serbian plan to expel ethnic Albanians

3 April

Central Belgrade is hit by NATO missiles

8 April

NATO bombs the Socialist Party headquarters and television stations in Belgrade

14 April

NATO planes accidentally bomb a column of Kosovar Albanian refugees, killing at least 60

21 April

US Senator Jesse Jackson secures freedom for three US soldiers captured in Macedonia

22 April

NATO's 50th anniversary celebrations take place in Washington

2 May

NATO attacks destroy Serbian power stations

7 May

NATO planes accidentally bomb the Chinese embassy in Belgrade

24 May

NATO head Javier Solana requests suspension of NATO bombing

27 May

The International War Crimes Tribunal indicts Milošević

10 June



The war started in Kosovo and it will end in Kosovo.

— Shkelzen Maliqi, 1998

The Dayton Accords of 1995 temporarily resolved the Bosnian conflict, but failed to address the issue of Kosovo's status, and many Kosovar Albanians began to look for other solutions. This was a crucial shift for Kosovo, and allowed the development of a more radical approach. Members of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) represented some moderate opinion but their desire for a peaceful solution lost support among much of the population and was replaced by the greater militancy of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

The slide into war, 1996–98

The KLA (or, in Albanian, the *UCK*) emerged in the difficult period of the bloody events in Bosnia and the breakdown of law and order in the former Yugoslavia. It was easy to predict that, sooner or later, Kosovo would again become the focus of attention. The KLA, founded in the early 1990s, was a disorganised collection of disaffected Kosovar Albanians, including intellectuals and those fired by nationalist ardour. Following the conclusion of the peace agreement at Dayton, some members of the KLA began actively to engage in coordinated attacks targeting Serbian individuals, including attacks on a number of Serbian police stations and on public places where Serbians were known to gather. In 1996, three Serbs were killed in a cafe in Priština, and attacks against Serb targets and politicians steadily escalated over the next two years.

For some, enough was enough; it seemed to many that Rugova's pacifist stance had got them nowhere. One of the leaders of the KLA was Adem Demaçi, a Kosovar Albanian writer, intellectual and activist who had been striving for Kosovar independence for many years. The issue of free speech echoed as a cause throughout the 20th century. Adem Demaçi, who won the European Parliament's Andrei Sakharov Prize for his human rights work, was once an admirer of the hardline Stalinist Enver Hoxha but had since moderated his views. Nevertheless, as a prominent Albanian activist, he was imprisoned for 28 years in a communist jail for his promotion of Albanian rights. Many Kosovars see him as the Balkan Nelson Mandela. In 1993, he went on hunger strike, protesting against the closure of the only remaining Albanian language press in Kosovo. Pjeter Arbñori, the speaker of parliament in neighbouring Albania commented,

When dictatorships want to oppress a people, they first try to close their mouth. Writers, journalists, the press, radio and television are the mouth of a people. Now they have closed this mouth

— Arbñori, June 1993, quoted in
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/>

TOK connections

In pairs or small groups, discuss the quotation on the right by Pjeter Arbñori. It suggests that it is wrong to “close the mouth” of a people. Consider the following questions.

- 1 What do you think about freedom of speech? Should it be allowed in principal, even if you do not approve of what someone is saying?
- 2 Give examples of where you might allow complete freedom of speech. Would this include religious opinions, statements about class, sexuality, gender and race?
- 3 Does your opinion mean that you have to listen to what you may not agree with, or that you consider biased? For example, in Rwanda, does that give RTLM “hate radio” the right to preach hatred and racism? Considering what happened in Rwanda with RTLM, should that “mouth” have been closed too?
- 4 The radical Serbian militia leader known as “Arkan” had a sign in his office in Priština saying, “Croats, dogs and Albanians not welcome”. What is your opinion of this?



▲ KLA soldiers carrying the Kosovo flag

In 1996–97, the KLA was a disorganized group of nationalists who took up terrorist methods. Armed confrontation would, in the short term, bring them into conflict with the Serbian authorities and that is precisely what they wanted: to force the hands of Rugova, Serbia and even the international community to deal with the situation of Kosovo. Milošević still continued to be seen as a necessary partner by the West because of the Dayton Accords. However, five years of conflict in the Balkans and elsewhere had exhausted many; it was events in neighbouring Albania that acted as a catalyst for developments in Kosovo in 1998.

In the summer of 1997, Albania descended into chaos. Following a financial collapse, the government of Albania's President Berisha lost control and weapons became easily available, many of which found their way across the border into the hands of the KLA. Priština saw clashes between students and the authorities, and again on Albania's national day in November. Reasonably, the Serbian authorities regarded the KLA as a terrorist organization. The US State Department had listed the KLA on its list of terrorist groups in 1998. As in the case of Rwanda, the use by US spokespeople of the term "genocide" prompted a word game of some significance.

Early in 1998, Robert Gelbard, the US special envoy sent by President Clinton to the region, referred to members of the KLA as terrorists; a month later, he back-pedalled slightly, saying that the group had "committed terrorist acts". In June, the US government initiated talks with members of the KLA. Meanwhile, in March, the Serbian police had tried to arrest Adem Jashari, one of the leaders of the KLA in Prekaz. Jashari was one of the founders of the movement and was called, by some, the "father of the KLA". He was killed in the attempt, along with about 50 of his followers and members of his family, including many women and children. It made a martyr of him and elevated his status to that of a saint in Albanian Kosovo. The National Theatre and Priština International Airport have been named after him.

Ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity

By 1998, the Serbian government's response confirmed that it considered the KLA's actions to be an armed insurrection. The government's heavy-handed reaction only served to increase support for the KLA and, as violations of human rights and massacres became



more frequent, the situation began to spin out of control. Rugova's leadership, still advocating a more moderate position, was out of step with a growing number of Kosovar Albanians who, although they re-elected him as president in 1998, urged him to demand full independence. Violence continued to escalate as Serbian forces attempted to regain control of Kosovo and destroy the KLA. Milošević had always referred to members of the KLA as terrorists, and there was unease among leaders in the West over what was happening in Kosovo. In Kosovo, it was not as clear-cut as simple Serbian brutality against helpless Kosovo civilians. One of the leading spokesmen for the KLA, Hashim Thaçi said:

It was simply a necessity to free and democratize Kosovo. And nothing happened accidentally, neither the organization nor the beginning of the armed struggle.

— Hashim Thaçi, 2001

The KLA was directing its own form of diplomacy using the limited weapons it had at its disposal. After the signing of the Dayton Accords, in which Kosovo was ignored, the lesson learned by the KLA was that violence was the way to get the attention of the West. Ethnic cleansing was taking place, and not just by the Serbs against ethnic Albanians. In parts of Kosovo, a number of Serb and non-Albanians were also being driven out. Some Serb Orthodox monasteries and churches were attacked and looted, and monks deported.

I think Kosovo was maybe the first casualty of the Lewinsky affair.

— Bob Dole, 1998

In the summer of 1998, President Clinton was fighting for his political life. While the attention of the world's media was glued to his supposed affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky, his administration was desperately trying to get a handle on developments in Serbia and Kosovo. In June, Richard Holbrooke – the US government's chief negotiator, who had been involved in the peace agreement at Dayton and in an earlier Yugoslav crisis – was sent to Belgrade for talks with Milošević. He also met representatives of the KLA, which seemed to endorse the group's legitimacy in the process, much to the annoyance of Serbia. With neither side willing to back down, the KLA demanding independence and the Serbian authorities retaliating against attacks on their people, something had to give way.

Once again it was media images, including those of streams of displaced civilians and a bloody doll among the 35 dead in the village of Gornje Obrinje in September, which prompted the UN Security Council to adopt Resolution 1199 in the same month. However, the UN actually did little more than urge those involved to come to a solution.

The UN had passed four resolutions in 1998 concerning Kosovo. In March, as a result of the meeting of the contact group of foreign ministers from leading Western states and Russia, the UN recommended that a comprehensive arms embargo be imposed to include Yugoslavia



▲ US Ambassador Richard Holbrooke meeting KLA representatives in 1998

ATL Communication skills

There are a number of good documentaries on Kosovo and the NATO intervention that can be found on the internet.

- One of these is an award-winning documentary made in 1999, prior to NATO's intervention. Called *The Valley*, it runs for about 70 minutes and focuses specifically on the conflict in the Drenica Valley of Kosovo. Filmed during the bloodiest summer of the war, 1998, it is a powerful documentary containing graphic images. In it, you meet the inhabitants of a Muslim village which was attacked and destroyed by Serbs. You also see a unit of the KLA known as the Black Tigers. Some of the scenes are harrowing and graphic.
- The second documentary is from the *Frontline* series by PBS and is called *War in Europe*. Go to www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/. This is an excellent website containing many very useful resources such as interviews, maps, and timelines, and also access to a two-part documentary on the war and NATO intervention.

and Kosovo. This was Resolution 1160, which encouraged dialogue, and continued to recognize Kosovo as a part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). In September, the second resolution stated clearly that the situation in Kosovo had deteriorated, and that it constituted "a threat to the peace and security of the region" (see unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1199).

This was followed by Resolution 1199, which called for international monitors to be placed in Kosovo to help facilitate the return of refugees, and to allow humanitarian aid to reach those who needed it. Diplomatic initiatives continued and, in October 1998, an agreement was reached between President Milošević and Richard Holbrooke, paving the way for the verification missions that followed. Two further resolutions were adopted in 1998; the second of these, in November, condemned the Yugoslav government for failing to hand into custody individuals wanted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY). UN Secretary General Kofi Annan warned of the deteriorating situation in the region.

Meanwhile, the US government was determined to get the European countries involved in any action to be taken and through NATO, threatened air strikes against Serbia. They prevaricated about the use of force though (as illustrated in Source C, the cartoon "To bomb or not to bomb", on page 182). In October, the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) agreement for a ceasefire was established. Among other things, it provided for unarmed observers to monitor the peace in Kosovo, for aerial surveillance to ensure compliance and for elections in Kosovo within nine months, to offer more representation for Kosovar Albanians. This KVM initiative was to be headed by the US diplomat William Walker.

The Kosovo Pact, October 1998

- A 2,000-member international inspection force will be deployed in Kosovo under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The force will be unarmed and will verify compliance with demands of a UN Security Council resolution, which include the withdrawal of Yugoslav special forces from Kosovo.
- NATO reconnaissance planes, not combat planes, will make flights over Kosovo to verify government compliance. Details of these missions remain to be worked out.
- Yugoslavia also agreed to 11 unilateral steps, including:
 - Partial self-government will be established in Kosovo, and the police force there will be made up of personnel proportionate to the ethnic makeup of the province.
 - A general amnesty will be issued for people accused of criminal acts related to the seven-month conflict, but war crimes can still be prosecuted.
 - The following timetable has been agreed upon:
 - By Oct. 19: Details on the OSCE inspection force to be completed.
 - By Nov. 2: Agreement on procedures to reach a political solution to be completed.
 - By Nov. 9: Agreement on procedures for elections in Kosovo to be completed. Elections to be held within nine months.

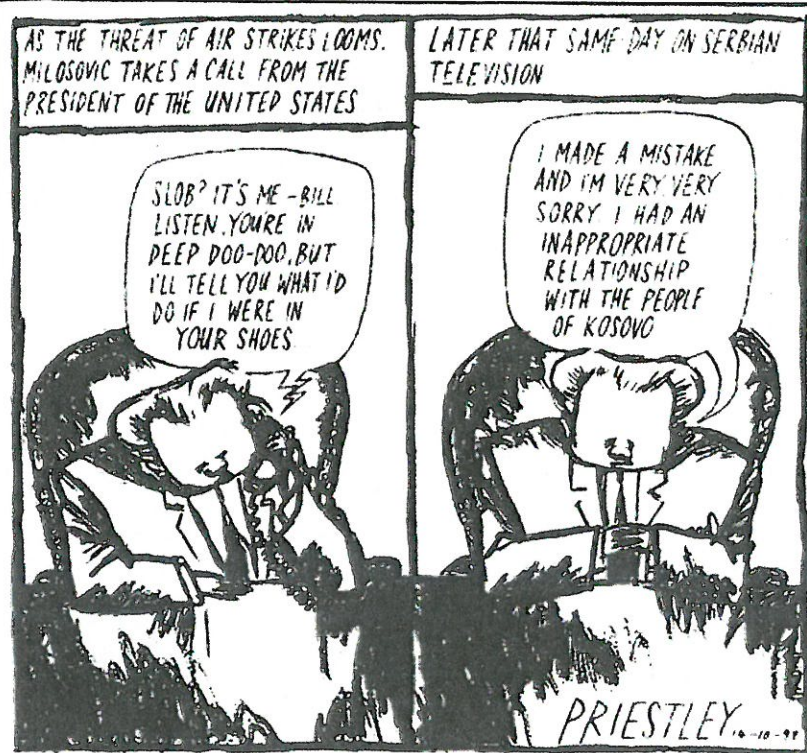
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/balkans/documents/kosovoaccord.htm>



Source skills

Source A

A cartoon by Chris Priestley, "Bill and Slob", published in the UK newspaper, *The Independent*, 14 October 1998.



Source B

A cartoon by Dave Brown showing Milošević and an observer from the KVM, published in the UK newspaper *The Independent* on 28 October 1998.



Source C

A cartoon, "To bomb or not to bomb?", published in the UK newspaper, the *Daily Express*, 13 October 1998.



First question, part b – 2 marks

Explain the significance of the comment in Source A by Milošević regarding having "an inappropriate relationship". Which relationship is "Bill" referring to in the first frame of the cartoon?

First question, part b – 3 marks

In Source B, why is Milošević depicted holding back the tanks? Is the cartoon in any way sympathetic to the Serbian situation? What is the message of the cartoon?

First question, part a – 3 marks

In Source C, what do the words of the NATO soldier allude to? In what ways do you think it may be appropriate?

Despite the agreements made in the Kosovo Pact of October 1998, the KVM mission achieved little, and the violence continued to intensify. Before the end of the year, the decision was made to withdraw the KVM from Kosovo, as military activity was continuing on both sides. In mid-January 1999, international observers reported that Serbian security forces had killed a number of Albanian civilians in a village called Račak. This proved to be a turning point in the whole conflict.