

NATO's role in relation to the conflict in Kosovo

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- [NATO's objectives](#)
 - [Background to the conflict](#)
 - [Support for neighbouring countries](#)
 - [Facts and figures](#)
-

NATO's objectives

NATO's objectives in relation to the conflict in Kosovo were set out in the Statement issued at the Extraordinary Meeting of the North Atlantic Council held at NATO on 12 April 1999 and were reaffirmed by Heads of State and Government in Washington on 23 April 1999:

- a verifiable stop to all military action and the immediate ending of violence and repression;
- the withdrawal from Kosovo of the military, police and paramilitary forces;
- the stationing in Kosovo of an international military presence;
- the unconditional and safe return of all refugees and displaced persons and unhindered access to them by humanitarian aid organisations;
- the establishment of a political framework agreement for Kosovo on the basis of the Rambouillet Accords, in conformity with international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

Throughout the conflict, the achievement of these objectives, accompanied by measures to ensure their full implementation, has been regarded by the Alliance as the prerequisite for bringing to an end the violence and human suffering in Kosovo.

Background to the conflict

Kosovo lies in southern Serbia and has a mixed population of which the majority are ethnic Albanians. Until 1989, the region enjoyed a high degree of autonomy within the former Yugoslavia, when Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic altered the status of the region, removing its autonomy and bringing it under the direct control of Belgrade, the Serbian capital. The Kosovar Albanians strenuously opposed the move.

During 1998, open conflict between Serbian military and police forces and Kosovar Albanian forces resulted in the deaths of over 1,500 Kosovar Albanians and forced 400,000 people from their homes. The international community became gravely concerned about the escalating conflict, its humanitarian consequences, and the risk of it spreading to other countries. President Milosevic's disregard for diplomatic efforts aimed at peacefully resolving the crisis and the destabilising role of militant Kosovar Albanian forces was also of concern.



On 28 May 1998, the North Atlantic Council, meeting at Foreign Minister level, set out NATO's two major objectives with respect to the crisis in Kosovo, namely:

- to help to achieve a peaceful resolution of the crisis by contributing to the response of the international community;
- to promote stability and security in neighbouring countries with particular emphasis on Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1).

On 12 June 1998 the North Atlantic Council, meeting at Defence Minister level, asked for an assessment of possible further measures that NATO might take with regard to the developing Kosovo Crisis. This led to consideration of a large number of possible military options.

On 13 October 1998, following a deterioration of the situation, the NATO Council authorised Activation Orders for air strikes. This move was designed to support diplomatic efforts to make the Milosevic regime withdraw forces from Kosovo, cooperate in bringing an end to the violence and facilitate the return of refugees to their homes. At the last moment, following further diplomatic initiatives including visits to Belgrade by NATO's Secretary General Solana, US Envoys Holbrooke and Hill, the Chairman of NATO's Military Committee, General Naumann, and the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Clark, President Milosevic agreed to comply and the air strikes were called off.



UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) [1199](#), among other things, expressed deep concern about the excessive use of force by Serbian security forces and the Yugoslav army, and called for a cease-fire by both parties to the conflict. In the spirit of the UNSCR, limits were set on the number of Serbian forces in Kosovo, and on the scope of their operations, following a separate agreement with Generals Naumann and Clark.

It was agreed, in addition, that the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) would establish a Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) to observe compliance on the ground and that NATO would establish an aerial surveillance mission. The establishment of the two missions was endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution [1203](#). Several non-NATO nations that participate in Partnership for Peace (PfP) agreed to contribute to the surveillance mission organised by NATO.

In support of the OSCE, the Alliance established a special military task force to assist with the emergency evacuation of members of the KVM, if renewed conflict should put them at risk. This task force was deployed in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1) under the overall direction of NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe.

Despite these steps, the situation in Kosovo flared up again at the beginning of 1999, following a number of acts of provocation on both sides and the use of excessive and disproportionate force by the Serbian Army and Special Police. Some of these incidents were defused through the mediation efforts of the OSCE verifiers but in mid-January, the situation deteriorated further after escalation of the Serbian offensive against Kosovar Albanians.

Renewed international efforts were made to give new political impetus to finding a peaceful solution to the conflict. The six-nation Contact Group (2) established by the 1992 London

Conference on the Former Yugoslavia met on 29 January. It was agreed to convene urgent negotiations between the parties to the conflict, under international mediation.



OSCE vehicles pull out of Yugoslavia on 20 March 1999. (Belga photo)

NATO supported and reinforced the Contact Group efforts by agreeing on 30 January to the use of air strikes if required, and by issuing a warning to both sides in the conflict. These concerted initiatives culminated in initial negotiations in Rambouillet near Paris, from 6 to 23 February, followed by a second round in Paris, from 15 to 18 March. At the end of the second round of talks, the Kosovar Albanian delegation signed the proposed peace agreement, but the talks broke up without a signature from the Serbian delegation.

Immediately afterwards, Serbian military and police forces stepped up the intensity of their operations against the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, moving extra troops and modern tanks into the region, in a clear breach of compliance with the October agreement. Tens of thousands of people began to flee their homes in the face of this systematic offensive.

On 20 March, the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission was withdrawn from the region, having faced obstruction from Serbian forces to the extent that they could no longer continue to fulfil their task. US Ambassador Holbrooke then flew to Belgrade, in a final attempt to persuade President Milosevic to stop attacks on the Kosovar Albanians or face imminent NATO air strikes.

Milosevic refused to comply, and on 23 March the order was given to commence air strikes ([Operation Allied Force](#)).

On 10 June 1999, after an air campaign lasting seventy-seven days, NATO Secretary General Javier Solana announced that he had instructed General Wesley Clark, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, temporarily to suspend NATO's air operations against Yugoslavia. This decision was taken after consultations with the North Atlantic Council and confirmation from General Clark that the full withdrawal of Yugoslav forces from Kosovo had begun.



A US F-15E Strike Eagle takes off.

The withdrawal was in accordance with a [Military-Technical Agreement](#) concluded between NATO and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the evening of 9 June. The agreement was signed by Lt. General Sir Michael Jackson, on behalf of NATO, and by Colonel General Svetozar Marjanovic of the Yugoslav Army and Lieutenant General Obrad Stevanovic of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, on behalf of the Governments of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Republic of Serbia. The withdrawal was also consistent with the agreement between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the European Union and Russian special envoys, President Ahtisaari of Finland and Mr. Victor Chernomyrdin, former Prime Minister of Russia, reached on 3 June.

The NATO Secretary General announced that he had written to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to the President of the United Nations Security Council, informing them of these developments. The Secretary General of NATO urged all parties to the conflict to seize the opportunity for peace and called on them to comply with their obligations under the agreements which had now been concluded and under all relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

Paying tribute to General Clark and to the forces which had contributed to Operation Allied Force, and to the cohesion and determination of all the Allies, the Secretary General stated that NATO was ready to undertake its new mission to bring the people back to their homes and to build a lasting and just peace in Kosovo.

On 10 June the UN Security Council passed a resolution ([UNSCR 1244](#)) welcoming the acceptance by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia of the principles on a political solution to the Kosovo crisis, including an immediate end to violence and a rapid withdrawal of its military, police and paramilitary forces. The Resolution, adopted by a vote of 14 in favour and none against, with one abstention (China), announced the Security Council's decision to deploy international civil and security presences in Kosovo, under United Nations auspices.



Russian envoy Viktor Chernomyrdin (right) and his EU counterpart, Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari (left) talk to the media at Belgrade airport on 2 June 1999, prior to talks with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic. (Belga photo)

Acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, the Security Council also decided that the political solution to the crisis would be based on the [general principles](#) adopted on 6 May by the Foreign Ministers of the Group of Seven industrialised countries and the Russian Federation - the Group of 8 - and the principles contained in the [paper](#) presented in Belgrade by the President of Finland and the Special Representative of the Russian Federation which was accepted by the Government of the Federal Republic on 3 June. Both documents were included as annexes to the Resolution.

The principles included, among others, an immediate and verifiable end to violence and repression in Kosovo; the withdrawal of the military, police and paramilitary forces of the Federal Republic; deployment of effective international and security presences, with substantial NATO participation in the security presence and unified command and control; establishment of an interim administration; the safe and free return of all refugees; a political process providing for substantial self-government, as well as the demilitarisation of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA); and a comprehensive approach to the economic development of the crisis region.

The Security Council authorised Member States and relevant international organisations to establish the international security presence, and decided that its responsibilities would include deterring renewed hostilities, demilitarising the KLA and establishing a secure environment for the return of refugees and in which the international civil presence could operate. The Security Council also authorised the UN Secretary-General to establish the international civil presence and requested him to appoint a Special Representative to control its implementation.

Following the adoption of [UNSCR 1244](#), General Jackson, acting on the instructions of the North Atlantic Council, made immediate preparations for the rapid deployment of the security force ([Operation Joint Guardian](#)), mandated by the United Nations Security Council.

The first elements entered Kosovo on 12 June. As agreed in the Military Technical Agreement, the deployment of the security force - KFOR - was synchronised with the departure of Serb security forces from Kosovo. By 20 June, the Serb withdrawal was complete and KFOR was well established in Kosovo.

At its full strength KFOR will comprise some 50,000 personnel. It is a multinational force under unified command and control with substantial NATO participation. Agreement has been reached on the arrangements for participation by the Russian Federation. More than twelve other non-NATO nations have also indicated their intention to contribute to KFOR.

Also on 20 June, following confirmation by the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) that Serb security forces had vacated Kosovo, the Secretary General of NATO announced that, in accordance with the Military Technical Agreement, he had formally terminated the air campaign.



A British Lynx helicopter delivers aid on 5 April 1999 to the UNHCR refugee facility in Brazda, which was constructed with the assistance of NATO forces in FYROM (1). (Belga Photo)

NATO forces have been at the forefront of the humanitarian efforts to relieve the suffering of the many thousands of refugees forced to flee Kosovo by the Serbian ethnic cleansing campaign. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1) NATO troops built refugee camps, refugee reception centres and emergency feeding stations, as well as moving many hundreds of tons of humanitarian aid to those in need. In Albania, NATO deployed substantial forces to provide similar forms of assistance. NATO has also assisted the UNHCR with co-ordination of humanitarian aid flights as well as supplementing these flights by using aircraft from member countries. The Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) established at NATO in May 1998 has also played an important role in the coordination of support to UNHCR relief operations.

Of particular concern to NATO countries and to the international community as a whole, from the outset of the crisis, has been the situation of the Kosovar Albanians remaining in Kosovo, whose plight has been described by refugees leaving the province. All indications pointed to organised persecution involving mass executions; exploitation as human shields; rape; mass expulsions; burning and looting of homes and villages; destruction of crops and livestock; suppression of identity, origins and property ownership by confiscation of documents; hunger, starvation and exhaustion; and many other abuses of human rights and international norms of civilised behaviour.

Support for neighbouring countries

The Alliance has fully recognised the immense humanitarian, political, and economic problems facing the countries in the region as a result of the conflict in Kosovo. In particular, Alliance efforts have focused on providing immediate practical assistance in dealing with the refugee crisis by reassigning NATO forces in the region to humanitarian tasks.



A French soldier looks out over the refugee centre built by NATO troops at Brazde, FYROM (1) (April 1999 - Belga photo)

At the beginning of April 1999, the NATO Commander in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1) was given full authority to coordinate NATO's assistance to that country and to establish a forward headquarters in Albania, in coordination with the Albanian authorities and the UNHCR, in order to assess the humanitarian situation and provide support. The North Atlantic Council also tasked the NATO Military Authorities to undertake further planning to this end. Subsequent assistance has included the provision of emergency accommodation and building of refugee camps, and assisting humanitarian aid organisations by providing transport and other forms of help including the distribution of food and aid. NATO countries are providing financial and other support to Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1) and have given reassurances that they would respond to any challenges by Yugoslavia to their security stemming from the presence of NATO forces and their activities on their territories.



Leaders of countries bordering Kosovo meet with Allied leaders at the Washington Summit, 25 April 1999. (Left to right) Bulgarian President Petar Stoyanov, Bosnian Foreign Minister Jadranko Prlic and Albanian President Rexhap Meidani.

NATO Heads of State and Government in [Washington](#) set out their vision for achieving lasting peace, stability and future prosperity, based on increasing integration into the European mainstream, working hand in hand with other institutions towards these goals. They established a process of individual consultations and discussions between the nineteen NATO countries and the countries of the region on a 19+1 basis and undertook to promote regional cooperation within the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). They also agreed to use the resources of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) to provide more direct and focussed assistance in addressing their security concerns. The Alliance also welcomed related measures being taken in other forums, including the European Union proposal to convene a conference on a stability pact for south-eastern Europe at

the end of May 1999, as well as recognising the role of the G7 group of countries and of financial institutions, like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, in the process of reconstruction which would have to follow the end of the Kosovo crisis.

Facts and figures

- Between March 1998 and March 1999, before NATO governments decided upon military action, over 2000 people were killed as a result of the Serb government's policies in Kosovo.
- During the summer of 1998, a quarter of a million Kosovar Albanians were forced from their homes as their houses, villages and crops were destroyed.
- In January 1999, evidence was discovered, by a United Nations humanitarian team, of the massacre of over 40 people in the village of Racak.

- By the beginning of April 1999, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees estimated that the campaign of ethnic cleansing had resulted in 226,000 refugees in Albania, 125,000 in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1), and 33,000 in Montenegro.
- Assistance given by NATO forces to alleviate the refugee situation included providing equipment and building camps to house 50,000 refugees in Albania; assistance in expanding camps in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1); providing medical support and undertaking emergency surgery on the victims of shootings by Serb forces; transporting refugees to safety; and providing transport for humanitarian aid and supplies.
- By the end of May 1999, over 230,000 refugees had arrived in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1), over 430,000 in Albania and some 64,000 in Montenegro. Approximately 21,500 had reached Bosnia and over 61,000 had been evacuated to other countries. Within Kosovo itself, an estimated 580,000 people had been rendered homeless.
- It is estimated that by the end of May, 1.5 million people, i.e. 90% of the population of Kosovo, had been expelled from their homes. Some 225,000 Kosovar men were believed to be missing. At least 5000 Kosvars had been executed.
- NATO forces have flown in many thousands of tons of food and equipment into the area. By the end of May 1999, over 4666 tons of food and water, 4325 tons of other goods, 2624 tons of tents and nearly 1600 tons of medical supplies had been transported to the area.

Footnotes

1. Turkey recognises the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name
2. France, Italy, Germany, Russia, United Kingdom and United States.

Source: <http://www.nato.int/kosovo/history.htm>