Committee: North Atlantic Council

Agenda Item: The Question of Military Intervention Regarding the Rising Tension in Kosovo

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Introduction

The question of military intervention regarding the rising tension in Kosovo is a complex issue with roots in past disagreements, and it requires a multifaceted approach addressing the concerns of all affected parties.

The Kosovo conflict arose from deep-rooted historical, religious, and ethnic tensions between the Serbs and the Albanians in the region, which is considered sacred by Serbs due to the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. After World War II, the region where today's Kosovo is situated became a part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, where Albanians faced serious discrimination and were treated as inferior, second-class citizens.

The disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s created an environment conducive to rising nationalism and conflict, as various groups with differing beliefs sought to establish their own independent nations. This led to the creation of a group of countries in the Balkans with similar or opposing objectives, religions, ethnicities, or beliefs. Out of the population divided, there were countries consisting mainly of; Christians, such as Serbia, Muslims, such as Albania and Kosovo, or a mixture of both, like North Macedonia.

The ever-increasing dispute and violent clashes between Kosovo and Serbian forces led to the emergence of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). In response to the escalating violence, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervened in 1999, which resulted in a bombing campaign against Serbia and the establishment of a peacekeeping presence in Kosovo.

In 2008, Kosovo unilaterally declared independence, a move that was not recognized by the Serbian government but has since gained significant international support from countries in NATO.

Tension has persisted in the region despite a signed agreement in 2013 aimed at normalizing the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia. However, the ongoing disputes and protests reflect the fragile political landscape of the region.

As of 2023 until now, the situation remains complex with periodic confrontations and heightened military readiness along the borders, highlighting the enduring challenges of reconciliation and the ability to coexist.

Definition of Key Terms

Ethnic Cleansing: The attempt to create ethnically homogenous geographic areas through the deportation or forcible displacement of persons belonging to particular ethnic groups. Ethnic cleansing sometimes involves the removal of all physical traces of the targeted group through the destruction of monuments, cemeteries, and houses of worship. The term ethnic cleansing, a literal translation of the Serbo-Croatian phrase *etnicko ciscenje*, was widely employed in the 1990s to describe the brutal treatment of various civilian groups in the conflicts that erupted upon the disintegration of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; one of the included groups being the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

Systemic Oppression: Systemic oppression is the mistreatment of a social, ethnic, or racial group, sustained by governments, schools, healthcare systems, and other socioeconomic structures. Oppression that occurs at the institutional level contributes to power imbalances and discrimination. This results in severe disadvantages and worsened social cleavages for specific groups. Some examples of systemic oppression include racism, gender inequality, ageism, ableism, and anti semitism.

Decentralisation: The term decentralisation refers to the trasnfer of powers, resources, and responsibilities from the central government to elected authorities or officials at the subnational level, with some degree of autonomy.

The Prizren League: Also known as the Albanian League, the first Albanian nationalist organization was formed at Prizren, situated in modern Kosovo, on July 1st, 1878. The league, initially supported by the Ottoman Empire, tried to influence the Congress of Berlin, which threatened to divide Albania and transfer some of its districts to Serbia, Greece and Montenegro. Unsuccessful in its appeals to Congress, the league switched to using military force in hopes of protecting its land.

Municipality: A city or town with its own local government, or the local government itself. Some common forms of municipalities include towns, villages, and cities.

Annexation: This refers to the unilateral act of a State through which it proclaims sovereignty over the territory of another state. It usually involves the threat and use of force, as the annexing State usually occupies the territory in question in order to assert its sovereignty. Annexation amounts to an act of aggression, forbidden by international law. International Humanitarian Law provides that in the event that an Occupying Power annexes all or part of an occupied territory, protected persons there shall not be deprived of the benefits and privileges of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Sovereignty: Sovereignty is the right of a nation or a group of people to be self-governing. Countries such as the United States are sovereign political powers because they are completely independent of any other political entity. This situation is often referred to as "absolute sovereignty" by political scientists.

Territorial Integrity: The territorial integrity protects the borders of states from acts of external aggression by other states, and in doing so, the people within such territories are protected from harm. This principle also upholds the sovereign nature of states and prevents interference from external parties.

Association of Serb Municipalities (ASM): The ASM is an idea of a local government for the Serb-majority municipalities in the north of Kosovo, which is expected to satisfy their need for a certain level of political, administrative, and cultural independence while still being Kosovo's territory. The concept came into existence through the 2013 Brussels Agreement aimed at normalizing relations between Serbia and Kosovo, but the enactment of the agreement has been postponed and contested due to the anxiety of Kosovo that it may result in a Serb entity with its own powers operating as if it were a separate state and therefore, Kosovo losing part of its territory.

Marginalization: The act of placing a person or thing in a position of lesser importance, influence or power; the state of being placed in such a position.

Major Actors Involved

Kosovo

In the conflict which has been intensifying, Kosovo is the one at the center of the stage. It is the one claiming to exercise authority over the whole of its territory, whereas the Serb minority in the region is resisting, and also Serbia, which does not recognize its independence since 2008. With the intention of consolidating state power, especially in the Serb-majority north, the government in Pristina is planning the integration of local security structures through measures like law enforcement agencies and the reduction of parallel Serbian institutions by the national police. Such actions, which aim to consolidate Kosovo's statehood, often provoke a response from the local Serbs and marking the rise of diplomatic and security crises. Though supported by the United States and the majority of NATO and EU members, Kosovo, which is cooperating with KFOR to maintain peace, is also quite determined in the talks by asking for mutual recognition and Serbia's acknowledgment of Kosovo's sovereignty.

On the other hand, the international community is urging Kosovo to implement the Association of Serb Municipalities (ASM), a move that Kosovo sees as potentially undermining its territorial integrity. As a newly formed state grappling with internal ethnic conflicts, external diplomatic challenges, and the quest for full international recognition, the actions and policies of Kosovo are the decisive factor in whether the tensions will escalate or move toward long-term normalization.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Through its UN-mandated peacekeeping mission, Kosovo Force (KFOR), NATO is the primary stabilising power in Kosovo. KFOR, which has been present since 1999, is the force that tries to keep the peace, the security and the safety of the population and to avoid the resurrection of a conflict between the Albanian majority and the Serb minority of Kosovo. In response to the rise of tensions, especially in the northern part of Kosovo, NATO has strengthened KFOR with additional troops, changed its force posture, and been instrumental in preventing the situation from getting out of control. The alliance, in fact, still being neutral between Serbia and Kosovo, however, it integrates well with the EU-led political dialogue as a way to move towards normal relations and, thus, its involvement on the ground serves as a deterrent to violence, the maintenance of public order and the peaceful resolution of local disputes preventing them from becoming a more serious type of unrest in the region.

Serbia

As a result of a number of factors, Serbia remains a major player in the conflict in Kosovo. Serbia does not accept the independence of Kosovo declared in 2008 and exerts significant political, economic, and security influence over the ethnic Serbs in the northern part of Kosovo. Belgrade supports the Serb-majority municipalities, challenges the authority of Pristina, and exerts pressure on Kosovo by means of diplomacy, security posturing, and negotiations. In particular, Serbia elevates the level of its military preparedness near the border whenever there are confrontations and presents itself as the defender of Kosovo Serbs, at the same time demanding the implementation of the Association of Serb Municipalities (ASM) which is assured in the previous agreements brokered by the EU.

While Serbia is a party in the normalization dialogue facilitated by the EU, its position is influenced by domestic nationalism, historical grievances, and close relations with Russia, thus it is on the one hand a negotiating partner, a source of political pressure, and an important factor that decides whether the situation escalates or calms down.

The United States of America

The United States is one of Kosovo's biggest supporters. During his presidency, the U.S. President Bill Clinton sent warnings to the President of Serbia, Milosevic, to stop aggression against the Albanian Kosovars. In March, 1998 the U.S. Secretary of State, Madeline Albright condemned Serb attacks on Kosovo. In the meantime, the United States met with the United Kingdom, France, Russia, Germany and Italy in London, to discuss the Kosovo crisis. The actions taken by the United States was to condemn Belgrade, impose economic sanctions and put an immediate ban on arms sales to Serbia. In May of 1998 the President of Kosovo, Rugova, travelled to Washington and requested U.N. and NATO intervention to the situation.

Russia

Russia is one of the major external agents contributing to the escalation of tensions in Kosovo. This is due to its extreme support for the Serb position and denial of recognition to the independence of Kosovo, treating it as a question of observance of international law and respect for the sovereignty of states. The Kremlin utilises the issue of Kosovo to deepen its strategic relationship with Belgrade, gain more leverage over the Balkans, and confront the Western presence in the area.

However, Moscow is not directly engaged in fighting on the ground, especially since security is under NATO's control through KFOR. What Russia does is to offer political support to Serbia at the UN Security Council, where it vetoes recognition-related resolutions, and promotes Serbian narratives by issuing diplomatic statements and through media. The position of Russia also affects Serbia's behaviour in negotiations, as Belgrade counts on Moscow for diplomatic support and energy links, hence Serbia is less likely to make a concession in the EU dialogue.

Therefore, Russia serves as a political counterbalance to NATO, the EU, and the U.S. and its involvement makes it difficult to reach an agreement for the resumption of talks as it links the Kosovo problem to the bigger East–West geopolitical conflict.

General Overview of the Issue

After the collapse of the Roman Empire, the Slavs came into the territory of modern Kosovo, where they created the first known state: the Principality of Serbia. Since that time, Kosovo has become one of the most important parts of Serbian culture and religion. These lands remained predominantly Serbian until the 17th century. After the mass migration of Serbs to the Habsburg Empire in up north, the Albanians came to Kosovo. Starting from the 19th century, they constituted the majority of the population in the region.

Albanians were actively integrated into the Ottoman Society and embraced Islam; however, despite their cooperation with the Turks, the Albanians dreamed of establishing their own state. Their National Revival became associated with the activities of Prizren League. This organization put forward a demand for autonomy against the Ottoman Government but after an unsuccessful rebelion the organization was defeated, failing to achieve its goals.

The beginning of the 20th century gave the Albanians a new chance to establish their own state. After two Balkan Wars Albania gained independence but the new country did not incorporate Kosovo and some other territories with a predominantly Albanian population.

(Map 1: The distribution of Yugoslavian lands)

After the collapse of communism in the early 1990s, the breakup of Yugoslavia followed suit. Independence of Slovenia and Croatia was proclaimed in 1991, and soon after, Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Macedonia did the same. Federated Republic of Yugoslavia, made up of Serbia and Montenegro, was the name of the union that later on, after their separation in 2006, changed to Serbia and Montenegro and kept only the Serbian part.

Kosovo was a province under the Serbian umbrella but the majority of its people were ethnic Albanians. Its political status was more and more questioned when the Serbian government, in an effort to reduce its autonomy, was met with resistance, thus resulting in long-standing disputes.

The Kosovo War which took place between 1998-1999 was a conflict that emerged out of a long-standing ethnic and political discord between the Serb-dominated government of Serbia and the ethnic Albanian majority in Kosovo. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) led the way in the quest of the Kosovo Albanians for independence due to past oppression, discrimination in the use of language and culture, and political marginalization under Serbian rule. Fighting for their rights, the Serbs led by Slobodan Milošević responded with a campaign of terror and repression in which they made mass expulsions, killings, and destruction of villages the main features of the military operations.

The conflict escalated into a full-scale humanitarian crisis, catching the eye of the international community, which consequently made calls for intervention. When diplomatic efforts did not bring any result, NATO started to bomb Serbian targets in 1999. This act, which was not authorized by the UN Security Council, provoked both legality and effectiveness debates. The war ended with the signing of the Kumanovo Agreement that designated Kosovo as a region under the control of the United Nations, while at the same time, Serbia held on to its formal sovereignty, and paved the way for the proclamation of Kosovo independence in 2008.

The war aftermath has been marked by continued unrest in Kosovo. The root causes of conflict in the area are ethnic divisions and political disputes, the latter being the main reason for the troubles of the region. Kosovo Albanians constitute the majority in Kosovo whereas the Serbs living there are a minority. This is the reason why in the Northern part of Kosovo, Serbs have established parallel institutions that are under the control of Belgrade and through them govern their community. Local conflicts revolving around governance, property rights, and police authority are frequent and sometimes escalate to street confrontations. In addition, Serbia does not recognize the independence of Kosovo and is constantly opposing it. There are also international actors who are divided on the Kosovo issue. On one hand, we have NATO, the EU, and the United States which are in favor of Kosovo's security and institutional development while on the other hand Russia and some other states are backing Serbia which in turn is making the geopolitical situation more complex. Points of contention such as border demarcation, license plate regulations, and political statements have been known to enflame protests and clashes thus showing that Kosovo's stability is still quite fragile. The trouble which the region is going through are, therefore, the mixture of the past grievances, ethnic nationalism, and international geopolitics, thereby making any talk about intervention or mediation highly sensitive and complicated.

Timeline of Important Events

Date:	Event:
1389	The Battle of Kosovo
	The Disintegration of Yugoslavia into

1990s	several countries (Bosnia and Herzevognia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro etc.)
1999	Kosovo tried for independence but faced brutal attacks from Serbia due to their 95% Muslim Albanian majority
1999-2008	Kosovo exists in the grey area, which signifies that it's final outcomes will be determined by negotiations between Kosovo itself and Serbia
February 17th, 2008	Kosovo announces their independence, accepting that if they wish to be independent they can not reunite with neither Serbia nor Albania
Present	Although recognized by several countries such as the U.S, Türkiye and Albania many others do not redeem Kosovo as independent

Related Documents

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244

Adopted by the Security Council on June 10th, 1999, UNSCR 1244 was enacted six months after the war in Kosovo ended following NATO's air strikes against the Serbian forces. The resolution made provision for the KFOR, a NATO-led peacekeeping force, demanded the withdrawal of the Yugoslav/Serbian military forces, and gave extensive powers to Kosovo to govern itself within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (which was Serbia and Montenegro at that time). Even though it did not refer directly to the independence of Kosovo, it was the foundation for the international peacekeeping forces and the civilian administration that has been present in Kosovo.

2013 Brussels Agreement

Declares that there should be an association of Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo. Representing a new chapter in the complex relations between Kosovo and Serbia, the agreement was facilitated by the EU. The main point of the agreement was the creation of the Association of Serb Municipalities (ASM) as one of the ways in which the Serb-majority areas in the northern part of Kosovo could gain certain self-governing rights, but it would still recognize Kosovo's sovereignty. Apart from that, the pact dealt with such issues as the police, judiciary, and local government, with the goal of significantly reducing ethnic conflict; however, the progress in putting it into practice has been very slow, and it has been disputed.

2020 Washington Agreement

This US-backed deal was a milestone in the path toward the normalization of economic relations between Kosovo and Serbia. The agreement consisted of the infrastructural projects, investments, and the cooperation in trade, energy, and transportation sectors. While it did not tackle the political problem which is at the core of Kosovo's status, it was set to create the atmosphere necessary for solving the political problem through the economic interdependence and the betterment of the bilateral relations.

2023 Ohrid Agreement

The Ohrid Agreement was planned and facilitated to resolve the ethnic conflicts in the northern part of Kosovo that were mainly those of Serb-majority municipalities. It includes elements of local governance, security cooperation, dialogue mechanisms between Kosovo and Serbia, and also commitment to previous agreements. The goal is not only to de-escalate the conflict but also to increase minority representation and ensure that the peace is maintained in the areas with a history of conflict.

Past Solution Attempts

Various different approaches, military, diplomatic, and legal, have been used in the past to deal with escalating tensions in Kosovo, but none have completely resolved the core issue of the conflict. NATO unilaterally launched a bombing campaign in 1999 against Serbian forces, claiming to act for humanitarian reasons, and later sent KFOR under UN Security Council Resolution 1244 to ensure peace and security. This first action managed to put a stop to widespread violence and set up a neutral peacekeeping force, but it did not resolve the political conflict over the status of Kosovo. Timely, NATO has on occasion boosted KFOR when there have been violent situations, especially in the Serb-majority northern municipalities, thus sustaining a kind of short-lived calm and at the same time warding off the development of these incidents into a big conflict.

Attempts through diplomacy and civics have also been made, with the 2013 Brussels Agreement mediated by the EU being the most significant, which sought to normalize relations between Serbia and Kosovo, including the establishment of the Association of Serb Municipalities. Although the pact eased the tension to some extent, the slow pace of the implementation and the disputes over the autonomy of the institutions left the political issues unresolved. Dialogues organized by the UN and the EU have been providing platforms for negotiation and conflict resolution, however, the progress has been very slow, if not at a standstill, owing to the disputes between Serbia and Kosovo and external geopolitical influences, such as Russia's support for Serbia. Altogether, these efforts reveal a strategy that mixes military deterrence with diplomatic engagement, which has been able to maintain stability only in the short term but has not succeeded in achieving a long-term political settlement.

Possible Solutions

Reinforcing NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) is one of the solutions, both in the number of troops and the clarity of the mandate. This might mean sending extra multinational forces to the areas of northern Kosovo, especially those municipalities populated by Serbs, to rule out the possible conflicts between ethnic Serbs and the Kosovo authorities. Also, the extension of KFOR's mandate could be accompanied by more detailed guidelines for the reaction of the forces in case of an uprising. Moreover, these instructions should facilitate KFOR's rapid engagement in operations if incidents are aimed against civilians or critical infrastructure. Thus, through a consistent neutral international presence, NATO would be able to deter the local outbreaks from escalating to a broader conflict and assure both communities that their safety is secured.

The second proposal resists military intervention and rather supports diplomacy by speeding up the EU-supported Belgrade-Pristina normalization talks. Military action should only be considered if all other options fail, whereas diplomatic initiatives could calm the situation in the north and provide an opportunity to address the Serb community's grievances. It is in their common interest to ratify the agreements that have long been delayed, such as the Association of Serb Municipalities (ASM), which would simultaneously confirm Kosovo's sovereignty and give Serbs a degree of self-governance. The improved political dialogue may contribute to a lowered risk of escalation as the use of force would be viewed less favorably.

A third option turns to confidence-building and mutual cooperation between local Kosovo Serb security forces and KFOR. Regular joint patrols and shared security tasks alongside an open communication channel can eliminate misconceptions which, in many cases, have led to violent clashes. KFOR, while keeping the overall control, may facilitate a feeling among the Serbs that they are involved in security decision-making which, in turn, could lessen their antagonism toward Pristina authorities. The implementation of programs for community liaison officers, discussion platforms, and supervision systems may not only enhance trust but also lower the probability of the KFOR or any other international forces having to employ force to achieve their goals.

The fourth alternative considers the conditional military intervention plan besides international law being followed strictly. This might require the establishment of a set of criteria based on which forces under NATO or UN mandates can decide to intervene if there is a threat for civilians or peace. The intervention of this kind would be very brief, restricted in every way, and in agreement with Kosovo, Serbia, and the international organizations in order not to create the impression that there is a bias against one side. The presence of clear legal and operational directions will not only increase legitimacy, lessen a possibility of the unintended consequence, and ease the concern of local communities but also give confidence to the international community that this intervention is not arbitrary nor is it excessive.

The non-military strategies, ultimately, may work as a supplement to the direct intervention or even as an alternative to it. Northern Kosovo projects, like economic partnership and infrastructure development, education programs for interethnic cooperation, as well as humanitarian aid, fall under this category. By rectifying the socio-economic disparities and offering real benefits to both communities, the tensions may decrease naturally and consequently, there will be a lesser need for the military reinforcement. When non-military measures are combined with a neutral peacekeeping presence, a long-term stability framework can be established which makes future escalations less possible.

Useful Links

This link leads to the NATO's official website, summarizing the KFOR's mission, its United Nations mandate and overall objectives.

- https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/operations-and-missions/natos-role-in-kosovo

This link leads to an 8-minute video which talks about the history of the Kosovo region and the reason why Kosovo became independent.

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XdBFkYrUbFU

This link further explains and details the KFOR's actions, as well as highlighting their recent actions to decrease the tensions in Kosovo.

- https://www.hscentre.org/europe/kfors-mandate-role-2022-tensions/?utm

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