



VMUN 2024

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

BACKGROUND GUIDE



VANCOUVER MODEL UNITED NATIONS

The Twenty-Third Annual Session | January 26–28, 2024

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Vanessa Chen and it is my pleasure to be serving as the Director of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization at Vancouver Model United Nations 2024. Currently, I am a sophomore at Crofton House School, and alongside your Chair, Breanna Ho, and Assistant Director, Harry Jiang, we welcome you to NATO.

Ever since tripping twice on my way up to the podium at my very first Model UN conference, I have been enthralled by the world of MUN, sparking my fervent affinity for international relations. Whether it be gasping for air whilst sprinting up 20 staircases after a midnight crisis, losing my placard, name card, and room card all on the first day, or witnessing North and South Korea uniting then divorcing shortly after, MUN has granted me lifelong friendships and invaluable memories in the Hyatt walls. Through its exhilarating nature, Model UN has been the intersection of friendships forged and lessons learned. More importantly, it has helped me discover that diplomacy is far greater than the sum of lines of any backgrounder or resolution paper. Instead, it is about the twists and turns along the way, compelling clashes, and uncovering the middle ground no one knew was possible that uniquely makes diplomacy not a spectator sport. When not raising my placard, I can be found scribbling stanzas of poetry at ungodly hours of the night, gesturing aggressively at debate tournaments, twisting my ankle for the millionth time from hurdling on the track, or explaining my peculiar yet specific dreams.

Over the course of the conference, this committee will discuss NATO's *Presence in the Black Sea* and the *Kosovo-Serbia Conflict*, both of which are critical issues in the geopolitical climate of member states and affect countries from corner to corner of the globe alike. In preparation, I urge all delegates to conduct comprehensive research, to drive fruitful debate.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email me at nato@vmun.com. On behalf of the dais team, I wish you the best of luck in your preparations, and look forward to meeting you!

Sincerely,

Vanessa Chen
NATO Director

Position Paper Policy

What is a Position Paper?

A position paper is a brief overview of a country's stance on the topics being discussed by a particular committee. Though there is no specific format the position paper must follow, it should include a description of your positions your country holds on the issues on the agenda, relevant actions that your country has taken, and potential solutions that your country would support.

At Vancouver Model United Nations, delegates should write a position paper for each of the committee's topics. Each position paper should not exceed one page and should all be combined into a single document per delegate.

For the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, position papers, although strongly recommended, are not required. However, delegates who wish to be considered for an award must submit position papers.

Formatting

Position papers should:

- Include the name of the delegate, their country, and the committee
- Be in a standard font (e.g. Times New Roman) with a 12-point font size and 1-inch document margins
- Not include illustrations, diagrams, decorations, national symbols, watermarks, or page borders
- Include citations and a bibliography, in any format, giving due credit to the sources used in research (not included in the 1-page limit)

Due Dates and Submission Procedure

Position papers for this committee must be submitted by **11:59 PM PT on January 22, 2024**. Once your position paper is complete, please save the file as your last name, your first name and send it as an attachment in an email to your committee's email address, with the subject heading as "[last name] [first name] — Position Paper". Please do not add any other attachments to the email.

Both your position papers should be combined into a single PDF or Word document file; position papers submitted in another format will not be accepted.

Each position paper will be manually reviewed and considered for the Best Researched award.

The email address for this committee is *nato@vmun.com*.

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Presence in the Black Sea

Overview



Figure 1: Map of the Black Sea.¹

The Black Sea, spanning from the Mediterranean to Africa and Eurasia, is a crucial geopolitical point in Europe.² As one of the only warm water ports in Europe, it serves as a conduit for maritime trade and natural oil resources and connects to major shipping routes. This ensures year-round trade that is unrestricted by ice or freezing conditions in the winter.³ These factors have made the Black Sea a focal point on the international stage, where the world's greatest powers have competed for dominance.

¹WorldAtlas. "Black Sea," February 3, 2021. <https://www.worldatlas.com/seas/black-sea.html>.

² Goncharov, Vladimir Petrovich , Fomin, Luch Mikhaylovich and Kosarev, Aleksey Nilovich. "Black Sea". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11 June. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Black-Sea>.

³ Gramer, R. (2023, April 7). *The U.S. and NATO Seek to Blunt Putin's Black Sea Ambitions*. Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/04/07/black-sea-war-geopolitics-russia-ukraine-nato/>

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union (USSR) dominated the Black Sea until Bulgaria and Romania gained independence and joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This resulted in the power over this region shifting to NATO's favour. However, with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia now holds control over previous Ukrainian naval facilities, including the Sevastopol port where it now holds many of its naval ships.⁴ Increased control connected Russia to major trading markets, such as the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. This enhanced its maritime trade strategy, which capitalizes on its position as a major energy exporter. Additionally, it forced the rest of Europe to reconfigure their naval forces, hindering access to the body of water in the wintertime when most other oceans become unfit to sail. This granted Russia the ability to block important trade entries, as shown when stopping the Grain Initiative—a deal that allowed ships to safely export grain and fertilizer—to harm Ukraine's economy.⁵

NATO has already taken action to combat Russia's growing dominance in the Black Sea region. The alliance has increased its naval presence in the sea, conducting regular patrols and exercises as a part of its Enhanced Forward Presence. As well, it has supported littoral countries in building their defence and security capacities through joint initiatives with Ukraine and Georgia. However, the region still faces conflicts and evolving threats that continue to emerge. Russia has been significantly increasing its military presence by expanding the deployment of its naval troops, planes, and coastal defence infrastructure to defend alleged interests in the area, and to provide national security in the event of an East-West conflict.⁶ Additionally, the Black Sea's abundant oil reserves would enable Russia to further dominate the natural energy sector and make other European nations even more dependent on its exports, which adds to the Black Sea's political and economic allure. Thus, NATO must play a larger role in the Black Sea to protect its neighbouring member states and overpower Russian forces.

Timeline

1783 — The Russian Empire establishes the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, Crimea, the first sign of interest in the region in the modern era. This fleet engages in a series of naval operations intended to ensure regional defence strategies and project power.

March 3, 1878 — The Treaty of San Stefano is signed, concluding the Russo-Turkish War. This leads to significant territorial changes in Southeast Europe, liberating multiple Balkan states that neighboured the Black Sea from Ottoman rule.

July 20, 1946 — The Montreux Convention is signed by Bulgaria, France, Great Britain, Greece, Japan, Romania, Türkiye, Yugoslavia and the USSR, posing regulations on vessels passing through the Turkish Straits—the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara and the Bosphorus—and establishing the freedom of passage in times of peace.⁷

⁴Eckstein, Megan, and Tayfun Ozberk. 2022. "What Makes the Black Sea so Strategically Important?" *Defense News*. <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2022/02/25/what-makes-the-black-sea-so-strategically-important/>.

⁵R. (2023, May 8). *Ukraine says Russia has effectively stopped Black Sea grain deal*. Reuters.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-says-russia-has-effectively-stopped-black-sea-grain-deal-2023-05-08>

⁶"A New Black Sea Strategy for a New Black Sea Reality." 2023. *Hudson*. <https://www.hudson.org/foreign-policy/new-black-sea-strategy-new-black-sea-reality>.

⁷Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Montreux Convention." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 4, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Montreux-Convention>.

February 18, 1952 — Türkiye officially joins NATO, significantly bolstering the alliance's southern flank along the Black Sea because of its strategic geographical positioning and proximity to the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits. This serves as a pivotal step in enhancing NATO's presence and influence in the Black Sea area.

June 25, 1992 — The Black Sea Economic Cooperation is formed, bringing together 11 countries surrounding the sea; the organization aims to enhance economic cooperation, trade, and cultural ties among its member states.

April 2004 — Bulgaria and Romania join NATO, expanding the alliance's reach into the Black Sea. This ended Russia's sole control over the Black Sea and marked the beginning of NATO's control.

February 14, 2008 — The European Union launches the Black Sea Synergy, a regional policy framework to enhance cooperation between Black Sea states and resolve mutual issues. It aims to increase stability and sustainability, addressing both the sea's marine life and political and economic benefits.

March 21, 2014 — Russia annexes Crimea, a peninsula on the Northern coast of the Black Sea belonging to Ukraine. This allows Russia to have direct access to the body of water.⁸

June 29, 2016 — Following the annexation of Crimea, NATO announces the formation of a multinational NATO brigade-sized battle group to increase its military presence in the Black Sea region.⁹

March 2, 2017 — The UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force is launched, consisting of Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Norway. This force conducts maritime exercises in the Black Sea to enhance interoperability, deterrence, and hence, regional stability.¹⁰

June 17, 2019 — The European Union's Foreign Affairs Council adopts Black Sea Synergy's Common Maritime Agenda. It advocates for sustainable structures and the preservation of ecosystems in the Black Sea.¹¹

February 27, 2023 — Türkiye titles Russia's attack on Ukraine as a "war" and pledges to enact provisions on an international agreement to limit the presence of Russian warships from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean.¹² The following day, Türkiye closed off the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, restricting Russian warships from passing into the Black Sea.¹³

May 8, 2023 — The Black Sea Grain Initiative, an agreement which exports Ukraine's grains to other countries, is blocked by Russia's naval force.¹⁴

⁸ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Crimea". Encyclopedia Britannica, 22 Jun. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Crimea>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Monaghan, S. (n.d.). *The Joint Expeditionary Force: Global Britain in Northern Europe?* The Joint Expeditionary Force: Global Britain in Northern Europe? <https://www.csis.org/analysis/joint-expeditionary-force-global-britain-northern-europe>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² R. (2022, February 28). *Turkey to implement pact limiting Russian warships to Black Sea*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-implement-international-pact-access-shipping-straits-due-ukraine-war-2022-02-27/>

¹³ Mongilio, H., & posts by Heather Mongilio & rarr;, V. A. (2022, March 1). *Turkey Closes Bosphorus, Dardanelles Straits to Warships - USNI News*. USNI News. <https://news.usni.org/2022/02/28/turkey-closes-bosphorus-dardanelles-straits-to-warships>

¹⁴ *What is the Ukraine grain deal?* (n.d.). BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-61759692>

Historical Analysis

The Black Sea is shaped by historical tensions and century-long rivalries among European powers. In the 1700s, Russian leaders began to search for a warm water port across Europe.¹⁵ This was to overcome the disruptions to trade routes imposed by the frozen ports in northern Russia—the only area where they had access to the ocean—when temperatures dropped.¹⁶ In 1783, when Catherine the Great discovered the Black Sea after annexing Crimea for the first time, Russia held onto the region tightly as it served to be their only warm water port.¹⁷

However, in 1877, a power shift was triggered by Russia's call for war against the Ottoman Empire. Caused by nationalist and religious aspirations of the Christian Balkan peoples under Ottoman rule, the Bosnia and Herzegovina rebellions began. Russia, driven by its desire to expand influence across the region, aided the rebellions that fought for their countries' independence.¹⁸ Their victory led to the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878, which liberated the two regions along with Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro from Turkish influence.¹⁹ As Britain and Austria-Hungary became concerned over Russia's growing dominance, they held the Congress of Berlin with other major European powers including Germany, France, and Italy. After discussing their interests and concerns regarding the outcome of the war, they negotiated territorial adjustments from the former treaty and proposed the Treaty of Berlin. Most notably, the Treaty of Berlin reaffirmed the Ottoman Empire's jurisdiction over the Black Sea region and restricted the number of naval forces Russia could deploy. It also demilitarized the Danube Delta which is connected to the sea, placing a greater focus on trade instead.

Years later, in 1936, jurisdiction over the Black Sea was adjusted again by the Montreux Convention.²⁰ It regulated the presence and passage of naval vessels along the Dardanelles and Bosphorus straits, two entrances to the Black Sea.²¹ The convention's most notable outcomes involve affirming the right to freedom of passage for all ships not at war with Türkiye, and the sovereignty of Türkiye over the Turkish Straits.^{22 23} However, this convention also had its limitations. Ships that pass through the Turkish Strait could carry a maximum of 15 tonnes. In addition, time restraints do not allow ships to travel in the Black Sea for more than 21 days.²⁴ This prevented the prolonged presence of non-Black Sea warships, alleviating concerns about instability in the region. Further, it ensured equitable treatment among all states, effectively preventing any single nation from prolonged

¹⁵ Pike, J. (n.d.). *The Russian Quest for Warm Water Ports*. The Russian Quest for Warm Water Ports. <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/warm-water-port.htm>

¹⁶ Magazine, S., & Harris, C. (n.d.). When Catherine the Great Invaded the Crimea and Put the Rest of the World on Edge. Smithsonian Magazine. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/when-catherine-great-invaded-crimea-and-put-rest-world-edge-180949969/>

¹⁷ The First Annexation of Crimea 1784 : Crimea. (n.d.). The First Annexation of Crimea 1784 : Crimea. <http://www.crimeahistory.org/the-first-annexation-of-crimea-1784/>

¹⁸ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Russo-Turkish wars". Encyclopedia Britannica, 28 Apr. 2014, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Russo-Turkish-wars>.

¹⁹ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Treaty of San Stefano". Encyclopedia Britannica, 24 Feb. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-San-Stefano>.

²⁰ Analysis | Turkey announced it would regulate warship access to the Black Sea. Does that change Russia's strategy? (2022, March 1). Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/03/01/turkey-announced-it-would-regulate-warship-access-black-sea-does-that-change-russias-strategy/>

²¹ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Montreux Convention". Encyclopedia Britannica, 4 Mar. 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Montreux-Convention>.

²² Aliano, Adam, et al. "Ukraine Symposium - The Montreux Convention and Turkey's Impact on Black Sea Operations." *Lieber Institute West Point*, 25 April 2022, <https://lieber.westpoint.edu/montreux-convention-turkeys-impact-black-sea-operations/>.

²³ Acer, Y. (2023, April 14). *Russia's Attack on Ukraine: The Montreux Convention and Türkiye*. U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/ils/vol100/iss1/8>

²⁴ "Implementation of the Montreux Convention / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs." *mfa.gov*, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/implementation-of-the-montreux-convention.en.mfa>.

military advantages. Despite these restrictions, this convention, enforced by Türkiye, established a right to freedom of passage, allowing Soviet access to the Turkish Straits and the Black Sea, as they would no longer be obstructed by the Berlin Treaty.

With the newly acquired authorization to maintain a naval presence in the area, the USSR would fortify its position via the Black Sea Fleet in the decade following the convention. Located in its principal base of Sevastopol, Crimea, this fleet consists of naval assets and defence systems with the duty of protecting the Union's regional interests and advancing its naval influence in the vicinity.

In 1946, the USSR demanded that Türkiye renegotiate the terms of the Montreux Convention so that the Soviets could share ownership over the Turkish straits.²⁵ When Soviet pressure increased, Türkiye began to seek aid from the United States and the United Kingdom, thus resulting in the 1946 Turkish Straits Crisis. The United States and the United Kingdom responded by dispatching a naval task force to the region and publicly denouncing the Soviets' actions as pressure to respect the sovereignty of Türkiye.²⁶ As a result, the USSR withdrew its renegotiation desires but continued to attempt to extend its influence in the area.²⁷ The country later signed the Partition Treaty on the Status and Conditions of the Black Sea Fleet with Ukraine in 1997 to continue leasing Sevastopol as its base for its Black Sea Fleet. The terms under the agreement were initially set for a 20-year-lease period, but were extended to expire in 2042 by the Kharkiv Pact in 2010.²⁸

Several implications of the Montreux Convention continue to hold significance within the current geopolitical climate and the relationships among member states. Most recently, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Türkiye closed off the straits to Russian warships.

Past UN/International Involvement

Standing NATO Maritime Group (SNMG)

Standing NATO Maritime Groups were established in the Cold War era but started focusing on the Black Sea in the 2010s. These groups consist of rotating forces of naval troops from different states tasked with improving NATO's maritime presence and capabilities.²⁹ The SNMG situated in the Black Sea provides a continuous presence that can be rapidly deployed to demonstrate NATO's visible commitment to the area. They conduct training exercises, maintain a regular schedule of planned port visits, contribute to crisis management, foster security and cooperation, and maintain maritime security. Additionally, they engage in joint training exercises alongside NATO partners, enhancing their ability to operate together seamlessly and effectively.

However, the SNMG is inconsistent. As different naval troops come from different member states, there is a disparity between resources and training that is evident in their skill level. Furthermore, SNMG is limited by the Montreux Convention, which restricts the duration and total tonnage of naval deployments. This constraint

²⁵ Toucas, B. (n.d.). *The Geostrategic Importance of the Black Sea Region: A Brief History*. The Geostrategic Importance of the Black Sea Region: A Brief History. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/geostrategic-importance-black-sea-region-brief-history>

²⁶ M. (2014, August 7). 7 August 1946: Turkish Straits crisis reaches its climax. Moneyweekuk. <https://moneyweek.com/332694/7-august-1946-turkish-straits-crisis-reaches-its-climax>

²⁷ *Crisis at the Turkish Straits*. (1988, August 1). U.S. Naval Institute. <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/1988/august/crisis-turkish-straits>

²⁸ Harding, L. (2010, April 21). *Ukraine extends lease for Russia's Black Sea fleet*. The Guardian. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/21/ukraine-black-sea-fleet-russia>

²⁹ "NATO's maritime activities. (2023, August 03). <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/70759.html>

hampers NATO's ability to maintain a continuous and robust naval presence in the Black Sea. Thus far, there have not been any appeals from NATO to remove this limitation.

European Union (EU)

Black Sea Synergy

In 2007, the EU launched Black Sea Synergy to enhance cooperation, strengthen regional development, and address shared struggles in countries neighbouring the Black Sea.³⁰ It uses a bottom-up approach, helping individual countries stabilize and then building up to the region. The Black Sea Synergy has taken on a diverse variety of projects, ranging from combatting human trafficking across borders to regulating maritime transportation. It conducts frequent meetings, conferences, and consultations with country representatives where policymakers discuss regional issues, share perspectives, and hence, resolve conflicts in the region. This has led to the formation of the Common Maritime Agenda (CMA) that works in collaboration with the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.³¹ The CMA supported a sustainable blue economy, which aims to protect marine and freshwater ecosystems to use them for economic benefits.³² From 2015–2018, it funded projects that explored underwater environments to collect marine data. Together, they promote sustainability in the Black Sea, which is especially important due to the increasing amounts of military infrastructure being deployed in the region.

However, it has faced challenges with implementation because it is reliant on reciprocal relations between the EU, Russia, and Türkiye, which have been geopolitically tense due to ongoing conflicts.

Sanctions

The EU has also responded to Russia's aggression through sanctions. In the Spring of 2022, in response to Russia's aggression in its war against Ukraine, the EU imposed individual sanctions, economic sanctions, and visa restrictions. These affected any actors who were involved in launching missile strikes targeting civilians and essential infrastructure, forcibly deporting and adopting Ukrainian children, producing and delivering drones, and plundering Ukraine's cultural heritage. As well, this includes financial institutions, political parties, media corporations that promote propaganda, companies producing aviation equipment, and Belarus for its role in supporting Russia's invasion of Ukraine, to name a few. These individuals would face travel restrictions and asset freezes by Russia's central bank, as the EU froze EUR 21.5 billion worth of assets. The economic sanctions prohibited Russia from further supplying its military aggression. In addition, the EU has been disrupting trade both to and from Russia to drain its economy. On April 16, 2022, it forbade importations of vessels registered under the Russian flag. According to the European Commission, the EU has banned over EUR 43.9 billion in exported goods to Russia and EUR 91.2 billion in imported goods.

³⁰Migration and Home Affairs. "Black Sea Synergy," n.d. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/black-sea-synergy_en.

³¹European External Action Service. n.d. "THE BLACK SEA SYNERGY." ICBSS. Accessed September 3, 2023. https://icbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/1_Ms.-Diana-TASE_Policy-Officer-for-BSS-EaP_THE-BLACK-SEA-SYNERGY.pdf.

³² BSEC-EU Cooperation - BSEC - Black Sea Economic Cooperation. "BSEC-EU Cooperation - BSEC - Black Sea Economic Cooperation," n.d. <http://www.bsec-organization.org/areas-of-cooperation/bsec-eu-cooperation/common-maritime-agenda>.

Current Situation

Russia's Military Presence

The Black Sea region has been a cornerstone in Russia's strategy of asserting influence. In addition to its value in achieving Russia's geopolitical aspiration for global leadership, the region serves as a venue for rivalry with the US and the West.

For these reasons, Russia militarized the region by stationing military bases and installations. In particular, the 2011–2020 State Armaments Programme (SAP), aimed at increasing the level of advanced weaponry, was integral to the Black Sea Fleet. The Black Sea Fleet's naval assets were upgraded numerically and modernized through funding from the SAP.³³ This consisted of updating current structures, and purchasing and refurbishing ships, submarines, and naval aviation. It is predicted that, irrespective of the outcome of the Russo-Ukrainian War, Russia's goals in the Black Sea area will not change; Russia will continue to strike against the regional countries and NATO objectives.³⁴

Gas Dependency

The oil and natural gas found in the Black Sea have been a leading contention for conflict.³⁵ Before the Russo-Ukrainian War, the EU was heavily dependent on Russia's gas imports.³⁶ In 2021, EU countries imported 155 billion cubic metres of Russian gas, accounting for almost 45% of Russia's total gas exports.³⁷ In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the EU cut their gas imports by two-thirds and began importing oil through the Azerbaijan pipeline instead.³⁸ However, as a former leading gas exporter, Russia depends on its energy export as one of its primary sources for the economy. This demand shone a limelight on the natural gas reserves in the Black Sea.³⁹ Russia viewed the Black Sea region's gas reserves as a source of economic leverage.

Although European countries are trying to diversify their gas suppliers, they remain dependent on Russia's imports of natural gases. If Russia's presence in the Black Sea continues to grow, it will achieve its goal of dominating the gas industry and bolster its aggression and naval capabilities.

³³ Steven Horrell, Ivanna Kuz, Ben Hodges, Ben Hodges, Steven Horrell, and Ivanna Kuz. "Russia's Militarization of the Black Sea: Implications for the United States and NATO." CEPA, September 22, 2022. <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/russias-militarization-of-the-black-sea-implications-for-the-united-states-and-nato/>.

³⁴ Rumer, Eugene. "Putin's War Against Ukraine: The End of The Beginning." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 17, 2023. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/02/17/putin-s-war-against-ukraine-end-of-beginning-pub-89071>.

³⁵ Dickinson, Peter. "Why the Black Sea Could Emerge as the World's next Great Energy Battleground." Atlantic Council, March 30, 2021. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/why-the-black-sea-could-emerge-as-the-worlds-next-great-energy-battleground/>.

³⁶ Kardaś, Szymon. "Conscious Uncoupling: Europeans' Russian Gas Challenge in 2023." ECFR, February 13, 2023. <https://ecfr.eu/article/conscious-uncoupling-europeans-russian-gas-challenge-in-2023/>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Washington Post. "Analysis | How Europe Became So Dependent on Putin for Its Gas," July 11, 2022. https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/energy/how-europe-became-so-dependent-on-putin-for-its-gas/2022/07/11/8c5cbe8c-0122-11ed-8beb-2b4e481b1500_story.html.

³⁹ JPT. "Turkey and Russia's Impact on the Black Sea Becoming an Emerging Natural Gas Region," June 23, 2023. <https://jpt.spe.org/turkey-and-russias-impact-on-the-black-sea-becoming-an-emerging-natural-gas-region>.

Grain Deal

Russia's invasion of Ukraine resulted in a suspension of Ukraine's maritime grain shipments, disrupting its role as a significant supplier in the market. This led to internationally increased food prices, sparking signs of an impending global food crisis and potential famine in developing nations. Thus, Türkiye and the UN established the Black Sea Grain Initiative. The new deal prohibited Russia from attacking ships and port infrastructure, guaranteeing safe passage for Ukrainian grain ships. Each of these cargo ships is inspected by Türkiye and the UN to ensure they are under legal usage.

The initiative has exported over an estimated 1 million metric tons worth of Ukrainian wheat to low-income countries.⁴⁰ The release of more grain into the international market reduced wheat prices, starting a domino effect that eventually lowered the cost of other foods to pre-war levels.⁴¹

The Black Sea Grain Initiative was set to expire on May 18, 2023; however, it was extended 2 months to July 17, 2023, under the condition that Russia receives assistance with its own exports. Recently, the Russian foreign minister declared that the initiative will terminate if its current method of operation continues, as Russian fertilizer is currently being seized by European countries at their ports. As a result, Russia has made it clear that it would not allow the grain deal to be extended, posing a threat to the stability of the world's grain market.⁴²

Possible Solutions and Controversies

Capacity Development

Currently, NATO's military forces resources have given the Mediterranean, Atlantic, and North Sea priority; however, three NATO member states—Türkiye, Romania, and Bulgaria—are neighbouring the Black Sea and are in desperate need of these resources.⁴³ To capacity-build in the Black Sea, NATO must have a comprehensive approach that assesses both the quality of equipment and how frequently it is used.

NATO's Defence Posture and Deterrence

Defence posture refers to NATO's protection strategies against potential threats or conflicts. Currently, NATO has a very limited presence with only periodic exercises, limiting their defence mechanisms. Therefore, their presence needs to increase through establishing rotational forces that conduct naval patrols and presence operations for sea, land, and air defence. Increasing naval infrastructure such as ports would also improve

⁴⁰ U.S. Agency for International Development. "The Black Sea Grain Initiative | Food Security | Fact Sheet | U.S. Agency for International Development," n.d. <https://www.usaid.gov/fact-sheet/food-security/black-sea-grain-initiative>.

⁴¹ Prokopenko, Alexandra, "What's in the Ukraine Grain Deal for Russia?" Carnegie Endowment, July 26, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/87576>.

⁴² Reuters. "Russian Officials Say Black Sea Grain Deal Can't Be Extended." Reuters, June 16, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kremlin-aide-says-russia-unlikely-quit-grain-deal-before-july-17-renewal-date-2023-06-16/>.

⁴³ GlobalData. "Growing Nato's Black Sea Presence." Naval Technology, April 5, 2023. <https://www.naval-technology.com/comment/nato-black-sea-presence/>.

NATO's ability to practice maritime security initiatives.⁴⁴ Additionally, to be militarily present and ready in case of an attack, NATO could increase the frequency of patrols.⁴⁵

The success of this solution is contingent on NATO member states meeting their defence spending target, which is 2% of their GDP. However, not all members have consistently met this target. As such, delegates must first address this spending issue to set up better defence structures. Additionally, bolstering NATO's presence might be perceived as a threat by Russia, potentially initiating an arms race. Thus, delegates must find a nuanced balance while adhering to the limitations stipulated by the Montreux Convention.

Peacekeeping operations

Having immediate peacekeeping forces on standby during conflicts enhances NATO's rapid response capabilities and underscores its commitment to promoting peace and stability. This can come in the form of deploying peacekeeping troops that mediate disputes to seek resolutions to prevent the escalation of conflict. In addition, they can provide humanitarian assistance and address issues such as displaced persons, access to basic services, and the protection of civilians after a conflict. By actively engaging in peaceful reconstruction and recovery, NATO contributes to the sustainable development of affected regions, promoting resilience and reducing the likelihood of future instability.

Foreign Aid

As Romania and Bulgaria, who border the Black Sea, are both developing nations, they will benefit from financial aid provided by other NATO member states to build strong infrastructure on their land. NATO members can provide monetary support with accountability metrics or opt to directly send defence infrastructure into the two nations to ensure their resources are properly and effectively in place.

Transparency in Intelligence

The security climate of the Black Sea is constantly fluctuating and requires adjustments to NATO's approach. New threats, such as hybrid warfare tactics, may necessitate a digital method to combat.

Currently, NATO already has a Joint Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance structure where information from surveillance drones and satellites is shared among its member states. In the past, information gathering has been successful for NATO's threat assessments and intervention planning. Notably, NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan from 2001-2014 aimed to stabilize the country in the face of the Taliban insurgency. Enacting a similar initiative in the Black Sea by creating a regulatory body with NATO's surveillance and reconnaissance technology can be vital in defence preparation. Through this platform, NATO member states can pool their intelligence resources together and combine the monitoring of Russian activity in their respective locations to illustrate a holistic picture of Russia's actions. This would enable NATO and other member states, when necessary, to have a greater sense of knowledge of Russian pursuits so they can act effectively and allow for more accurate threat assessments, early warning capabilities, and predictive analysis.

⁴⁴ "NATO's military presence in the east of the Alliance," 2023, NATO, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm.

⁴⁵ Steven Horrell, Ivanna Kuz, Ben Hodges, "Russia's Militarization of the Black Sea: Implications for the United States and NATO." CEPA, September 22, 2022, <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/russias-militarization-of-the-black-sea-implications-for-the-united-states-and-nato/>.

However, this solution is limited by the willingness of member states to share intelligence, particularly countries bordering the Black Sea. Many countries may prefer to maintain a high degree of operational autonomy and control over their intelligence assets, rather than sharing information that could compromise their independence.

Bloc Positions

Türkiye

Türkiye has navigated a strategic equilibrium between its commitment to NATO and its relationship with Russia. Although a member state, Türkiye has continually pursued close ties with Russia, seeking to engage in political and economic cooperation while avoiding disputes with Moscow.⁴⁶ Turkish policy has been aimed to include Russia in the Black Sea while preserving transatlantic ties. For instance, it refused to join the EU in sanctions against Russia.^{47 48} Therefore, Türkiye may approach increased NATO presence in the Black Sea with caution to avoid straining its relationship with Russia. Its relationship with Russia also means that it will support treaties and negotiation, as it is the only NATO country that holds values Russia will consider. Crucially, Türkiye's sovereignty over the Turkish straits means that any NATO initiatives in the Black Sea must align with Türkiye security priorities, and NATO must respect these rights.⁴⁹

States Bordering the Black Sea

Countries like Bulgaria and Romania that share a coastline with the Black Sea have a direct stake in the stability of the Black Sea. In the past, these countries have welcomed NATO's presence and intervention in the region as NATO provides much-needed protection against Russia.⁵⁰ As developing nations, these states view NATO as a crucial alliance for ensuring their security, and they appreciate the support and solidarity the alliance offers.⁵¹

This bloc would support the solution that increases NATO's presence in the Black Sea. A survey done in 2022 shows that over 50% of Bulgarian citizens feel insecure about their nation's security systems and ability to

⁴⁶ Wilson, Grady. 2022. "To Re-Engage in the Black Sea, the US Must Look to Turkey." *Atlantic Council*. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/turkeysource/to-re-engage-in-the-black-sea-the-us-must-look-to-turkey/>.

⁴⁷ "How Turkey Views Russian Naval Access to the Black Sea." 2022. *The Washington Institute*. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/how-turkey-views-russian-naval-access-black-sea>.

⁴⁸ Üstün, Çigdem. 2022. "Turkey in the Black Sea: Is a Balancing Act Still Possible?" *IAI Istituto Affari Internazionali*. <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/turkey-black-sea-balancing-act-still-possible>.

⁴⁹ Coffey, Luke. "Why Türkiye Is Indispensable for NATO in the Black Sea Region and Beyond." *Why Türkiye Is Indispensable for NATO in the Black Sea Region and Beyond*. <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/why-t%C3%BCrkiye-is-indispensable-for-nato-in-the-black-sea-region-and-beyond-64706>.

⁵⁰ A Bulgarian Perspective on the Black Sea Region - Nato Defense College Foundation." Nato Defense College Foundation. <https://www.natofoundation.org/food-for-thought-2021/a-bulgarian-perspective-on-the-black-sea-region/>.

⁵¹ "Bulgaria in NATO: Balkan Security and Black Sea Challenges." 2023. *Wilson Center*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/bulgaria-nato-balkan-security-and-black-sea-challenges>.

promote stability, and that national security can only be upheld by NATO.⁵² As such, this bloc will support substantial capacity building.⁵³

Global Powers In NATO

Global powers in NATO—like the U.S., UK, Canada, France, and Germany—support a growing NATO presence in the Black Sea regions and are often some of the biggest contributors to defence in the region. The U.S. alone has established multiple naval bases along the Black Sea and participates in various security cooperation initiatives.^{54, 55} However, not all global powers have the same capacity and resources as the United States. Some Western nations' limited spending capacity and allocation towards other sectors could be a significant reason for them to hesitate supporting an incredibly strong NATO presence in the Black Sea region.

Increasing NATO's military presence in the Black Sea is perceived by global powers as a way to strengthen deterrence against possible threats to their nation's security. This entails retaliating against Russian aggression and avoiding any acts that would jeopardize the stability and sovereignty of other member states.⁵⁶ Additionally, Western states also may view increasing NATO presence as an opportunity to counter Russia as a whole.⁵⁷ Their motivations can be derived from centuries worth of historical tensions that cause them to advocate for a stronger NATO presence.

NATO States

This bloc contains the majority of NATO member states. Non-littoral states may take very differing stances. While some, like Norway, are more geographically distant and act based on their priorities rather than their stake in the Black Sea, others, like Estonia, may advocate for greater NATO presence due to being paranoid of Russia.

Their stances—the majority of which might be neutral—still differ as each country has a varied approach. For example, Poland and Finland value stability in the region; however, they have different approaches to achieve it. While Poland wishes to deter Russian assertiveness through military means, such as strengthening NATO's deterrence capabilities, Finland hopes to approach with diplomatic means, such as facilitating dialogue and mediation as to prevent further tensions from rising.

⁵² "Bulgaria's Black Sea Dilemma: NATO Ally or Russian Gateway?" 2022. *Jamestown*. <https://jamestown.org/program/bulgarias-black-sea-dilemma-nato-ally-or-russian-gateway/>.

⁵³ "Most Bulgarians See Security Only in NATO." 2022. *Www.Euractiv.Com*. https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/most-bulgarians-see-security-only-in-nato/.

⁵⁴ "A Bulgarian Perspective on the Black Sea Region - Nato Defense College Foundation." Nato Defense College Foundation. <https://www.natofoundation.org/food-for-thought-2021/a-bulgarian-perspective-on-the-black-sea-region/>.

⁵⁵ "U.S. Official Looks to Deter Russia in Black Sea Region." *U.S. Department of Defense*. <https://www.defense.gov/News-Stories/Article%2F3390038%2Fus-official-looks-to-deter-russia-in-black-sea-region%2F>.

⁵⁶ Mongilio, Heather, and View all posts by Heather Mongilio & rarr; 2022. "U.S., NATO Need to Turn Attention to Black Sea, European Policy Experts Say - USNI News." *USNI News*. <https://news.usni.org/2022/09/13/u-s-nato-need-to-turn-attention-to-black-sea-european-policy-experts-say>.

⁵⁷ "US Navy and NATO Presence in the Black Sea Has Fallen since Russia Took Part of Ukraine, Figures Show." *Stars and Stripes*. <https://www.stripes.com/theaters/europe/2022-01-28/sporadic-nato-patrols-in-black-sea-leaving-void-for-Russians-4443921.html>.

Discussion Questions

1. How is your country involved in the Black Sea, and what purpose does it serve?
2. Does your country rely on NATO's protection in the region? If so, what sectors of support do they receive?
3. What can be defined as the balance line between resisting Russian aggression and surging into conflict? How can nations balance the two?
4. To what extent should NATO's presence be increased? Why?
5. How are the countries directly or indirectly affected by conflicts in the Black Sea region? Why?
6. What political and economic consequences does each potential solution bring? Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?
7. What new issues have risen from the Russo-Ukrainian war that differentiates the status quo of the Black Sea from the past?

Additional Resources

Russia's Black Sea Fleet: Toward a Multiregional Force:

https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/iop-2019-u-020190-final.pdf.

Europe's Dependence on Russian Natural Gas: Perspectives and Recommendations for a Long-Term Strategy:

<https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/occasional-papers/europes-dependence-russian-natural-gas-perspectives-and-recommendations-long-term-strategy-0>

Russia's Militarization of the Black Sea: Implications for the United States and NATO:

<https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/russias-militarization-of-the-black-sea-implications-for-the-united-states-and-nato/>

Growing Nato's Black Sea Presence:

<https://www.naval-technology.com/comment/nato-black-sea-presence/>

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Kosovo-Serbia Conflict

Overview



The Economist

Figure 1: Map of Kosovo.⁵⁸

On February 17, 2008, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia. This decision was the culmination of ethnic tensions between the 93% Albanian majority and 5% Serbian minority living in Kosovo. Rooted in the historical disenfranchisement of ethnic Albanians under Ottoman and Yugoslav rule, Kosovo sought to escape Serbian dominance to establish a sovereign state that would guarantee its safety and security. This led to multiple conflicts regarding Kosovo's independence throughout the 1980s to 1990s, suffering mass casualties. However, Kosovo's declaration in 2008 was neither consented by Serbia nor in adherence to Serbian law, although it was justified in

⁵⁸ "Economist, "Why Is There Trouble in Kosovo Again?" June 5, 2023, <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2023/06/05/why-is-there-trouble-in-kosovo-again>.

international law.⁵⁹ Hence, while Kosovo's autonomy is recognized by the United States, United Kingdom, and other countries in the European Union (EU), many others do not recognize it as a sovereign state.⁶⁰

This political impasse has become a critical concern impacting the establishment of governance. Additionally, it has made it difficult to determine the status of Serb-majority communities residing in northern Kosovo. Recently, tensions began to rise again when Serbian citizens boycotted the Kosovo local election in April 2023, plummeting the voter turnout to 3.5 percent and winning the Albanian candidates' mayoralities in multiple Serbian-majority regions.⁶¹ Following this election, many Serbians were frustrated with the results and started protesting outside of municipal buildings. As a result, Kosovan police started taking down Serbian flags and increased their presence in these regions in an attempt to cease the violence.⁶² While Kosovo offered to host a re-election in June, the relationships between Serbs and Albanians remain tense.⁶³

In June 1999, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) first intervened in the Kosovo War in response to the dire humanitarian situation.⁶⁴ Since then, NATO has continued its presence there, stationing 4,500 peacekeeping troops.⁶⁵ 3,800 of them are still actively present, over 10 percent of which have been violently raided by Serbian protesters and Kosovo's police force in recent political strife and civil unrest.⁶⁶

There have been ongoing efforts from the international community and NATO to resolve the tensions between the two regions; however, no final agreement has been reached yet as Kosovo and Serbia are both led by nationalist leaders who hesitate to compromise diplomatically, despite increased dialogue in recent years. This nationalist sense is engraved in both countries to the extent of which the head of Serbia's Orthodox Church declares that recognizing Kosovo as independent is sinful.⁶⁷ NATO must attempt to discover new solutions that can relieve tensions between Kosovo and Serbia, effectively settling the civil unrest.

Timeline

October 8, 1912 – May 30, 1913 — The Balkan League, consisting of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro, fights against the Ottoman Empire for rule over certain states. As a result, Serbia gains control over some parts of Kosovo and northern and central Macedonia.⁶⁸

⁵⁹John B. Allock, John R. Lampe, Antonia Young, "Kosovo - Self-Declared, Independence, Conflict," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, November 30, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kosovo>.

⁶⁰BBC, "Kosovo Profile," June 28, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18328859>.

⁶¹RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, "Amid Boycott, Turnout Meager In Local Elections In Serbian Strongholds Of Northern Kosovo," April 24, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-serbs-special-elections-boycott/32375661.html>.

⁶²BNN, "Kosovo Police Clash With Serbs, Triggering Army Alert in Serbia - BNN Bloomberg," May 26, 2023, <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/kosovo-police-clash-with-serbs-triggering-army-alert-in-serbia-1>.

⁶³Florent Bajrami and Llazar Semini, "Kosovo's Prime Minister Offers to Hold New Elections in Tense Serb-Majority Municipalities | AP News," AP News, June 29, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/kosovo-serbia-tense-north-violence-election-1a97b0dcd6dca78794f28a08a756f12>.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵NATO, "Operations and Missions: Past and Present," July 10, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52060.htm.

⁶⁶Al Jazeera, "Serbia Blasts NATO Forces over Inaction during Kosovo Clashes," May 27, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/27/serbia-blasts-nato-forces-over-inaction-during-kosovo-clashes>.

⁶⁷TRT World, "The Entire History of Kosovo Explained," February 16, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1XPEn_CU90.

⁶⁸Encyclopedia Britannica, "Balkan Wars," October 1, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Balkan-Wars>.

November 26, 1997 — The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) is formed to oppose the Serbian regime. It calls for Kosovo to secede from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and gain independence. This call is met with backlash from Serbian Police which engage in open confrontation and fighting with the KLA.⁶⁹

March 24, 1999 — Operation Allied Force is launched by NATO to counter the ethnic cleansing of Albanians as a part of the Kosovo War. While the force did not receive authorization from the United Nations Security Council, it successfully put a halt to the humanitarian crisis that resulted in over 13,500 deaths and 1.45 million displaced persons.⁷⁰

June 11, 1999 — The Kosovo Force is launched by NATO to deliver peace-keeping operations in the aftermath of the Kosovo War. Aimed to demilitarize the Kosovo Liberation Army and perform humanitarian operations, KFOR assists in the return of displaced individuals and strengthens border security.

March 17–19, 2004 — Three Albanian youths drown in the Ibar River allegedly due to Serbian forces chasing after them. Following the incident, speculation led to an increase in violence against the Serb communities.⁷¹

March 26, 2007 — The UN Special Envoy for Kosovo, Martti Ahtisaari, presents the Comprehensive Proposal for a Kosovo Status Settlement, otherwise known as the Ahtisaari Plan, which addresses the long-standing dispute between Kosovo and Serbia regarding Kosovo's political status. The plan proposes that Kosovo should become an independent state, highlighting the importance of protecting cultural heritage sites—particularly Serbian Orthodox monasteries and Albanian mosques—and calls for international supervision during this process.⁷²

February 16, 2008 — Responding to the UN's call for international support in Kosovo's transition of independence, the European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) is formed. EULEX aims to support and strengthen law and justice institutions in Kosovo, provides training and technical assistance for legal professionals, aids in enhancing the professionalism of law enforcement agencies such as the police, and supports the rights of the Serbian ethnic minority in Kosovo.

February 17, 2008 — Kosovo declares independence from Serbia. Serbia and Russia both express anger, refusing to recognize Kosovo's independence, while the United States is one of the first countries to recognize it.⁷³

July 22, 2010 — In response to Serbia's appeal against the legitimacy of Kosovo's declaration, the International Court of Justice announces that Kosovo's declaration of independence is legal under international law.⁷⁴

April 19, 2013 — The Brussels Agreement is signed between Kosovo and Serbia. It leads to the formation of an Association of Serb municipalities with economic development, broad autonomy, and integration into the Kosovar legal system. Further, under this agreement, both parties commit to not obstructing each other's accession to the European Union.⁷⁵

⁶⁹C. Sullivan, "Kosovo Liberation Army," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 4, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kosovo-Liberation-Arm>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Al Jazeera, "Kosovo to Bury Albanian Children," March 21, 2004, www.aljazeera.com/news/2004/3/21/kosovo-to-bury-albanian-children.

⁷² "Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement (S/2007/168/Add.1) - Serbia." *ReliefWeb*, 26 Mar. 2007, reliefweb.int/report/serbia/comprehensive-proposal-kosovo-status-settlement-s2007168add1.

⁷³ Office of the Historian, "A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, since 1776: Kosovo," n.d., <https://history.state.gov/countries/kosovo>.

⁷⁴ "Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo," *International Court of Justice*, <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/141>.

⁷⁵ "Brussels Agreement," The Government of the Republic of Serbia, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/specijal/en/120394>.

August 2015 — Kosovo applies for membership in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; however, Serbia and its close ally Russia heavily oppose the decision. Out of the 142 countries that participated in the vote, 92 supported the motion, 50 opposed it, and 29 chose to abstain, making the offer 3 votes short of the two-thirds majority requirement.

September 4, 2020 — An economic normalization agreement, mediated by the European Union, is signed between Serbia and Kosovo. Both countries agree to promote economic normalization and diplomatic dialogue.⁷⁶

Historical Analysis

Origins of Kosovo's Fragmented Population

While Kosovo was initially a part of Bulgaria, Serbia eventually seized power over Kosovo in the 12th century. At this same time, the Ottoman Empire was seeking expansion. Under the rule of Sultan Murad, the Ottoman Empire had successfully extended their influence from Anatolia to the Balkans, and its next biggest rivalry was Serbia.⁷⁷ Its war against Serbia eventually led to the Battle of the Maritsa River, where Ottoman Turks successfully conquered South Serbia and Macedonia. This battle destroyed a previously-unified South Serbian kingdom. It divided the authority among competing princedoms and granted the Turks control over the Maritsa River, a passage into the Balkans.⁷⁸ However, the Ottoman campaigns against Serbia did not stop. In June 1389, the Battle of Kosovo erupted. Despite receiving assistance from Albania, Serbia's army was estimated to be half the size of the Ottoman Empire's.⁷⁹ As a result, Turkish soldiers overpowered the Serbian troops, leading to yet another Ottoman victory, which gave them ownership over the entire Serbia and Kosovo region. Moreover, under the new Turkish rule, Christian Albanians began adapting to Islamic culture, and Kosovo became a diverse region where people from all backgrounds were welcome.⁸⁰

As the Ottoman Empire's rule continued for decades, the Albanian population in Kosovo grew tremendously. However, at the turn of the 20th century, nationalist sentiments began to rise, causing the Ottoman's prominence to decline.⁸¹ The Balkan Wars (1912–1913) hastened the decline of the Ottoman Empire as it lost much of its European territory.⁸² Triggered by nationalist aspirations and territorial disputes, the then-Ottoman-controlled regions of Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, and Greece established a Balkan League. It aimed to drive away the Turkish empire and divide its territories among themselves.⁸³ The Ottoman Empire lost power over many states

⁷⁶Vivian Salama, "Serbia and Kosovo sign economic normalization agreement in Oval Office ceremony," CNN, September 4, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/04/politics/serbia-kosovo-agreement/index.html>.

⁷⁷Bunting, T. "Battle of Kosovo." Encyclopedia Britannica, June 21, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Kosovo-1389-Balkans>.

⁷⁸Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Battle of the Maritsa River." Encyclopedia Britannica, September 19, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-the-Maritsa-River>.

⁷⁹"The Balkans: Kosovo." *The Balkans: Kosovo*. <http://www.cotf.edu/earthinfo/balkans/kosovo/KVtopic3.html>.

⁸⁰"The Balkans: Kosovo." *The Balkans: Kosovo*. <http://www.cotf.edu/earthinfo/balkans/kosovo/KVtopic1>.

⁸¹"Readings - The Roots Of War | War In Europe | FRONTLINE | PBS." 2015. *Readings - The Roots Of War | War In Europe | FRONTLINE | PBS*. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/readings/roots>.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

in the aftermath of the First Balkan War. Most notably, Kosovo was liberated from Ottoman rule and placed under the newly established Republic of Serbia within the emerging federal nation of Yugoslavia.⁸⁴

Kosovo War (1998–1999)

The Kosovo War was fought between the ethnic Serbs under the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and ethnic Albanians in the Kosovo Liberation Army from February 1998 to June 1999. Ignited by religious tensions, the war unfolded when Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milošević refused to accept the prominent Albanian population.⁸⁵ He enacted exclusionary policies that aimed to remove Kosovo's status as an autonomous region of Yugoslavia, restrict its citizens' political rights, and deprive them of Albanian-language and cultural educational resources. As a result, ethnic Albanians resisted and formed The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), a separatist organization seeking independence from Serbia. As Serbian forces quelled on their peaceful protests, the Kosovo War intensified. Milošević launched ferocious military campaigns, and the growing opposition between Kosovo Muslim Albanians and their Christian Serbian counterparts led to one of the deadliest periods in European history.

During the war, the Serbian military brutally targeted ethnic Albanians to ethnically cleanse the population.⁸⁶ This caused over 1.5 million Kosovar Albanians—over 90 percent of the Albanian population in Kosovo in 1998—to be violently expelled from their homes. Additionally, massacres, summary executions, sexual assault, human rights abuses, and looting were common occurrences.⁸⁷ Serbian forces took extreme measures such as burning and destroying Albanian bodies, and then burying them to conceal the evidence of such crimes. While the war only lasted a little over a year because NATO intervened with airstrikes, its consequences were far-reaching, impacting the political, security, and humanitarian spheres in Kosovo and the broader Balkans.

Case Study: 2004 Unrest in Kosovo

Situated in Northern Kosovo, Mitrovica is a town that is divided by the Ibar River, separating the two ethnic groups: the Serbian population north of the river and the Albanian population lives south of it.⁸⁸ On March 16, 2004, three young Kosovo-Albanian boys were playing near the Ibar River before they reportedly fell in and drowned. Following the incident, rumours and speculation began spreading within the Kosovo-Albanian community that the boys had been chased or attacked by Serbian forces, causing them to fall into the river.⁸⁹ As accusations continued to spread, large-scale riots and violence erupted in various towns and cities across Kosovo. These incidents targeted Serbian communities, homes, and religious and cultural sites, including the Serbian Orthodox Church, a precious monument of Serbian history. It was estimated that around 51,000 individuals

⁸⁴Malcolm Edward Yapp, Stanford Jay Shaw, "Ottoman Empire - Decline, Reforms, Fall," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, November 30, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottoman-Empire>.

⁸⁵ Ian Traynor, "Obituary: Slobodan Milosevic," *The Guardian*, March 13, 2006, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2006/mar/13/guardianobituaries.warcrimes>.

⁸⁶PBS, "Ethnic Cleansing And Atrocities," 2015, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/cleansing/>.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸Euronews, "In Mitrovica, a Bridge That Separates Albanians and Serbs," March 14, 2021, <https://www.euronews.com/2021/03/14/in-mitrovica-a-bridge-that-separates-kosovo-s-albanians-and-serbs-extract>.

⁸⁹UN News, "Lack of Evidence Stalls Probe into Drowning of 3 Kosovo Children, UN Mission Says," April 28, 2004, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2004/04/101782>.

participated in the 33 large-scale riots in Kosovo.⁹⁰ NATO and the United Nations (UN) attempted to halt the escalation of conflict through security structures such as the Kosovo NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR), the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), and local police services. However, it became increasingly difficult to contain the volatile situation and these forces nearly lost all control.

Moreover, despite urgent calls for international help, UNMIK and KFOR failed to rescue the individuals in immediate danger.⁹¹ In multiple instances, the Serbian minorities under attack were left without protection; when Albanians were burning down the homes of Serbians, none of the international forces came to intervene. This behaviour incinerated the village of Belo Polje, despite being adjacent to the Italian KFOR base. UNMIK and KFOR's inability to respond adequately to the violence resulted in a significant portion of security responsibilities falling to the Kosovo Police Service (KPS). However, they were ill-equipped and often unprofessional due to the limitations in resources and training in the aftermath of the 1999 war.⁹² While some KPS officers bravely risked their lives to rescue besieged Serbians and other affected minorities, a considerable number of other officers did not intervene when ethnic Albanian crowds engaged in targeted violence.⁹³ Some KPS police officers, clearly biased, turned a blind eye to criminal behaviour carried out by ethnic Albanians, while they arrested Serbs who were defending their homes. In certain instances, KPS officers were even accused of actively participating in the burning of minority homes.⁹⁴

As a result, 19 people died and over 900 were injured.⁹⁵ This case study highlights the many challenges associated with maintaining order in the volatile conditions of an ethnically divided region and the need for an efficacious international alliance.

Past UN/International Involvement

Past NATO Involvement

Operation Allied Force

When the Kosovo War first escalated to a major conflict, the international community was prompted to take action.⁹⁶ When diplomatic efforts failed, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was unable to reach a consensus on authorizing military action due to Russia and China's veto powers, especially considering that Russia was a close ally of Serbia.⁹⁷ NATO finally intervened in 1999 without UN authorization to protect the

⁹⁰Human Rights Watch, "Failure to Protect: Anti-Minority Violence in Kosovo, March 2004," July 25, 2004, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/07/25/failure-protect/anti-minority-violence-kosovo-march-2004>.

⁹¹UN Press, "March violence in Kosovo 'huge setback' to stabilization, reconciliation, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping tells Security Council," April 13, 2004, <https://press.un.org/en/2004/sc8056.doc.htm>.

⁹² "Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo," *United Nations Security Council*, April 30, 2004, <https://unmik.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s-2004-348.pdf>

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵Milica Stojanovic, "'We Don't Forget': Serbs Commemorate Deadly 2004 Unrest in Kosovo," *Balkan Translational Justice*, March 17, 2023, <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/03/17/we-dont-forget-serbs-commemorate-deadly-2004-unrest-in-kosovo/>.

⁹⁶ "The International Community Responds to the Kosovo Crisis," April 28, 1999, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/kosovo/stm.htm>.

⁹⁷Avare, Derek, "From Pristina to Tskhinvali: The Legacy of Operation Allied Force in Russia's Relations with the West on JSTOR," n.d. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27695032?typeAccessWorkflow=login>.

civilian population in Kosovo and attempted to conduct peacekeeping efforts through Operation Allied Force.⁹⁸ From March to June, the operation conducted 78 days of airstrikes against Yugoslavia to protect ethnic Albanians, who were victims of ethnic cleansing.⁹⁹ By targeting infrastructure and transportation systems, the campaign aimed to degrade Serbia's military capabilities and disrupt its ability to conduct offensive operations in Kosovo.¹⁰⁰ As well, the force was involved in humanitarian operations, offering medical care, food, and designated safe zones to protect targeted Albanian civilians.¹⁰¹

Operation Allied Force was suspended when Milošević eventually capitulated.¹⁰² The Kumanovo Agreement was then formed through diplomatic efforts and signed by Yugoslavia and Serbia to withdraw their troops from Kosovo.¹⁰³ To this day, Operation Allied Force is considered one of the most successful in contemporary military operations.¹⁰⁴

Kosovo Force (KFOR)

The KFOR is a NATO-led multinational military force deployed in Kosovo to ensure peace, stability, and security.¹⁰⁵ Established after the Kosovo War and the UNSC's adoption of Resolution 1244, the force seemed identical to UNMIK in principle; however, the two carried out different practical outcomes. While UNMIK was geared towards civil administration and governance, KFOR dealt with security and military aspects, though the force's actions have evolved with the changing demands of Kosovo citizens.¹⁰⁶

Following the Kosovo War, KFOR assisted with the return of displaced individuals and refugees, helped increase border security to prevent the smuggling of weapons, and the protected previously damaged cultural sites.¹⁰⁷ This was successful and important to the political and economic climate of Kosovo since security was integral for UNMIK to successfully conduct administrative tasks that built stable political and economic institutions.

The KFOR is still present in Kosovo and actively engages in security initiatives. In retrospect, the initiative successfully assisted in capacity building, improved security in the region by a large margin, and facilitated dialogue between ethnic groups and international organizations such as the European Union to formulate

⁹⁸ Air Force Historical Support Division. "1999 - Operation Allied Force," n.d. <https://www.afhistory.af.mil/FAQs/Fact-Sheets/Article/458957/1999-operation-allied-force/>.

⁹⁹ NATO, "Kosovo Air Campaign (March-June 1999)," May 17, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49602.htm.

¹⁰⁰ Larson, Eric V., and Bogdan Savych. "Operation Allied Force (Kosovo, 1999)." In *Misfortunes of War: Press and Public Reactions to Civilian Deaths in Wartime*, 63–124. RAND Corporation, 2007. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mg441af.11>.

¹⁰¹ Walters, Mary Elizabeth. 2021. "A Tantalizing Success: The 1999 Kosovo War." *The Strategy Bridge*. <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2021/7/9/a-tantalizing-success-the-1999-kosovo-war>.

¹⁰² Benjamin S. Lambeth, "Operation Allied Force: Lessons for the Future," 2001, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB75.html.

¹⁰³ Rees, Nicholas. "The Kosovo Crisis, the International Response and Ireland." *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 11 (2000): 55–70. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30001912>.

¹⁰⁴ "Readings - Kosovo/Operation Allied Force After-Action Report | War In Europe | FRONTLINE | PBS." 2015. *Readings - Kosovo/Operation Allied Force After-Action Report | War In Europe | FRONTLINE | PBS*. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/readings/summary>.

¹⁰⁵ Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, "NATO Mission in Kosovo (KFOR)," n.d, <https://shape.nato.int/ongoingoperations/nato-mission-in-kosovo-kfor-.aspx>.

¹⁰⁶ NATO Multimedia, "What Is NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR)?" August 12, 2022, <https://www.natomultimedia.tv/app/asset/675687>.

¹⁰⁷ & Mehmet Burak ÇAKIN-Sema LEVENT, Ramazan BÖLÜK. "Turkish Studies-Social Sciences." *Turkish Studies-Social Sciences*. <https://turkishstudies.net/social?mod=tammetin&makaleadi=&makaleurl=fbb60902-c9a7-4788-8901-1c99352b3c3c.pdf&key=40168>.

reconciliation initiatives.¹⁰⁸ However, its limitations are evident in its peacekeeping operations. The heightened tensions in Kosovo exacerbate the dangers that peacekeepers face in their operations.¹⁰⁹ In May 2023, KFOR deployed multiple peacekeeping forces in Kosovo, but all of them were violently raided by hostile Serbian crowds and Kosovo's police force, leading to more than 30 injuries.¹¹⁰ Regardless, KFOR continues to deploy more peacekeepers in Kosovo as there are no alternative actions.¹¹¹ This incident makes it clear that delegates must find alternative solutions to promoting peace for both the well-being of Kosovo citizens and KFOR peacekeepers.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)

Merely a day after the air operation ended, the UNSC formed the UNMIK to enact Resolution 1244, which was a framework to manage the transition of governance of Kosovo and the departure of Serbian forces after the war.¹¹² The resolution authorized international civil and military presence and called for military deployment to establish an international transitional administration and security presence.¹¹³ This force would supervise the repatriation of refugees, the withdrawal of military forces from Kosovo, and facilitate a political process to ascertain the future status of Kosovo.¹¹⁴

The UNMIK administered government functions in Kosovo by establishing interim administrative structures to govern the region and build democratic institutions during the transitional period. Most notably, it facilitates civil administration, reforms law through capacity building, and helps improve security systems. UNMIK rebuilt Kosovo's internal systems, successfully brought justice and safety to Kosovo, and laid the foundational parameters for policy-making. However, the organization's biggest flaw is its inability to settle ethnic disputes between Serbs and Albanians, a necessary prerequisite to developing a diverse and multi-ethnic society. Moreover, UNMIK's intended mission to protect and sustain human rights, such as prosecuting war criminals and assisting with the return of displaced persons, was ultimately unsuccessful due to its precarious structure.¹¹⁵

In 2008, following Kosovo's establishment of independence, UNMIK returned governmental authority to Kosovo but remains active to this day to follow its Resolution 1244 mandate by maintaining peace and facilitating inclusivity among ethnic groups.

¹⁰⁸ Skeppström, Emma, and Anna Weibull. "Security Force in the Making: Capacity Building in Kosovo," October 2011, <https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R--3276--SE>.

¹⁰⁹ "Condemning Violence Against KFOR and Escalatory Actions in Northern Kosovo - United States Department of State." 2023. *United States Department of State*. <https://www.state.gov/condemning-violence-against-kfor-and-escalatory-actions-in-northern-kosovo/>.

¹¹⁰ Niha Masih, "NATO Peacekeepers Injured in Kosovo: What to Know about the Clashes." *Washington Post*, May 31, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/05/31/kosovo-serbia-nato-kfor-troops/>.

¹¹¹ Al Jazeera, "NATO Deploys More Forces to Kosovo after 30 Peacekeepers Injured," May 30, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/30/nato-deploys-more-forces-to-kosovo-after-30-peacekeepers-injured>.

¹¹² Government of Canada, "UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)," October 9, 2019, www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/medals/medals-chart-index/un-interim-administration-mission-kosovo-unmik.html.

¹¹³ UN Peacemaker, "Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) on the Situation Relating Kosovo," June 10, 1999, <https://peacemaker.un.org/kosovo-resolution1244>.

¹¹⁴ Better World Campaign, "Kosovo | UNMIK," March 22, 2023, <https://betterworldcampaign.org/mission/kosovo-unmik>.

¹¹⁵ Peter Ondrovič, "A Fatal Defect of Interim Administration? Case Application: Kosovo," *Central European Political Studies Review*, n.d., journals.muni.cz/cepsr/article/view/4521/5244.

Ohrid Agreement (2023)

The Ohrid Agreement was verbally accepted on March 18, 2023, as a result of the efforts of the EU. Following the quid pro quo model, which is an agreement with a reciprocal exchange, Serbia will not explicitly recognize Kosovo's independence but will implicitly acknowledge the state's sovereignty and not hinder Kosovo's membership in international organizations like the UN.¹¹⁶ In return, Kosovo must also not interfere with Serbia's membership in international organizations and ensure that the Serbian community in Kosovo demonstrates an adequate degree of self-management, as stated in Article 7 of the deal.¹¹⁷ This required Kosovo to create a union of municipalities in the 10 Serb-majority regions that would be semi-autonomous, meaning that Serbs would have control over policies in their communities.¹¹⁸

Opštine Kosova po zakonima samoproglashene Republike Kosovo

imena opština su data po zvaničnim nazivima koje koriste institucije samoproglashene Republike Kosovo

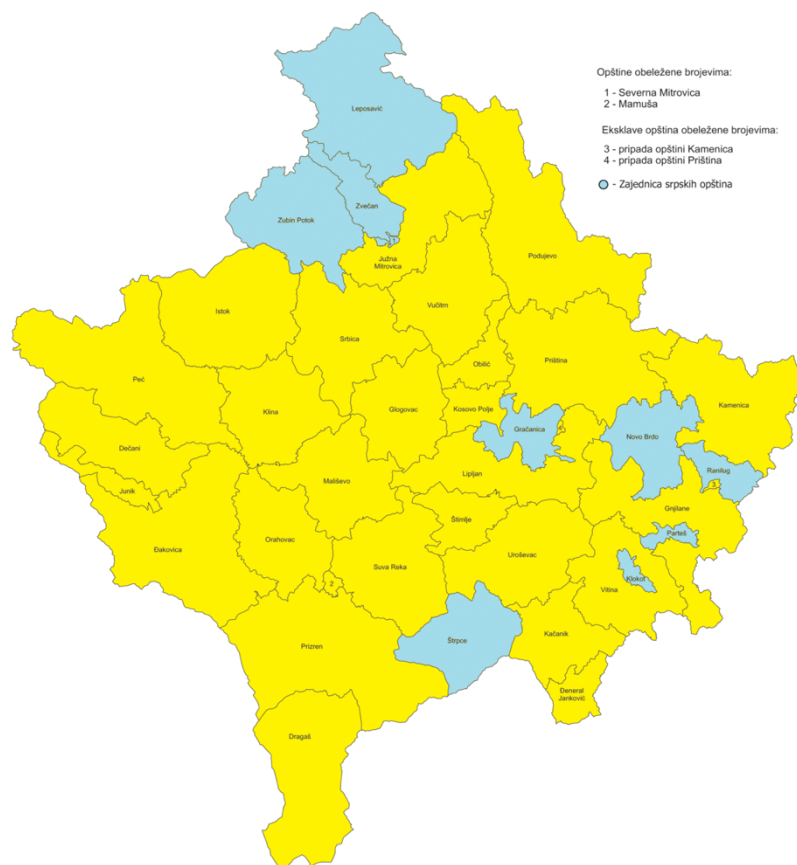


Figure 2: Municipalities in Kosovo.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ "Why Kosovo and Serbia Are Fighting (Again)." 2023. *YouTube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8_clNYdKHg.

¹¹⁷ EEAS, "Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: EU Proposal - Agreement on the Path to Normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia," February 2, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-eu-proposal-agreement-path-normalisation-between-kosovo-and-serbia_en.

¹¹⁸ EIU Digital, "Serbia-Kosovo Border Change Unlikely," n.d., <https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=777151461&Country=Serbia&topic=Politics>.

¹¹⁹ "Kosovo-Serbia Relations - Wikipedia." 2023. Kosovo-Serbia Relations - Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kosovo:Zajednica_srpskih_opstina.png.

Although Serbia and Kosovo have verbally agreed to this deal, neither has officially signed it or taken action toward it.¹²⁰ The Serbian population was enraged when Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti publicly stated that the deal was unfair and impossible in May.¹²¹ Kurti argued that the Kosovo constitution dictates that Kosovo must be called multi-ethnic altogether, so a separate union of Serbian municipalities would violate that.^{122 123} Moreover, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić never followed through nor implemented the tasks outlined in the deal.¹²⁴

Current Situation

Kosovo Mayoral Election

In April 2023, a local election in Northern Kosovo—a region primarily inhabited by ethnic Serbs—was boycotted by the Serb population, primarily due to their promised demands for their autonomous municipalities were not met.¹²⁵ As a result, only 1,567 people had voted out of 45,000 eligible voters, making the election's voter turnout extraordinarily low at 3.5 percent.¹²⁶ Given that the only voters were the relatively small Albanian population in Northern Kosovo, only Albanian candidates won mayoralties in these Serb-dominated communities. Dissatisfied Serbs began protesting outside municipal buildings to prevent the newly elected mayors from entering office. The violence persisted even when Kosovar police replaced Serbian flags with Kosovar ones, and their increased police presence in Serb-majority regions was met with Serb resistance.¹²⁷ After the Kosovo police fired tear gas to stop the following chaos, the Serbian protesters began to throw rocks and other objects at the officers.¹²⁸ This triggered a backlash from Serbia, whose army was placed on high combat alert and ordered armed forces to advance towards Kosovo's border.¹²⁹ As a result, the tensions between the two states have continued to rise.

As a result, NATO peacekeepers dispatched approximately 4,000 soldiers outside municipal buildings. They constructed barbed wire barriers and fences to contain the Serbian violence on the outside. However, the Serbs continued responding with violence by attacking the peacekeepers. Nearly 30 peacekeepers were injured in the

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ "Kosovo PM Says EU Proposal on Ohrid Deal Is 'Unbalanced.'" 2023. *Albania Daily News*, <https://albaniandailynews.com/news/kosovo-pm-says-eu-proposal-on-ohrid-deal-is-unbalanced->.

¹²² Kristi Ceta, "EU's Approach on Pristina-Belgrade Deal is Unbalanced; Kosovo Speaker," *Albanian Daily News*, September 15, 2023 <https://albaniandailynews.com/news/eu-s-approach-on-pristina-belgrade-deal-is-unbalanced-kosovo-speaker>.

¹²³ The Government of the Republic of Serbia, "Pristina Does Not Want to Fulfil Its Obligation and Form Community of Serb Municipalities," May 2, 2023, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/206172/pristina-does-not-w>.

¹²⁴ Talha Ozturk, "Forming Serb Municipalities Body in Kosovo Is Not Possible, Says Premier," *Anadolu Agency*, February 2, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/forming-serb-municipalities-body-in-kosovo-is-not-possible-says-premier/2804902>.

¹²⁵ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Serbs' Boycott Impacts Local Elections in Northern Kosovo," YouTube, 23 Apr. 2023, www.youtube.com/watch?v=x96DkxD673I.

¹²⁶ Fatos Bytyci, "Serbs in North Kosovo Boycott Local Elections," *Reuters*, April 23, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/serbs-north-kosovo-boycott-local-elections-2023-04-23/>.

¹²⁷ RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, "Ethnic Serbs Again Gather In North Kosovo As West Pushes Diplomatic Solution To Crisis," June 2, 2023. <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-serbs-protest-mayors-diplomatic-solution/32442014.html>.

¹²⁸ "25 NATO-Led Peacekeepers Injured in Kosovo in Clashes with Serbs Outside Municipal Building," 2023. *AP News*. <https://apnews.com/article/kosovo-serbia-tension-eu-us-cf2637072cd88f3bcf0d902236d3631b>.

¹²⁹ Misha Savic and Jasmina Kuzmanovic, "Kosovo Police Clash With Serbs, Triggering Army Alert in Serbia," *BNN Bloomberg*, May 26, 2023. <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/kosovo-police-clash-with-serbs-triggering-army-alert-in-serbia-1.1925330>.

skirmish, many of whom suffered burns and fractures as a result of explosions.¹³⁰ In response, KFOR sent 700 more troops into the region for further peacekeeping.¹³¹

Due to this civil unrest, Kosovo has expressed a willingness to host re-election in the Serb-majority regions; however, there have not been follow-up discussions since the offer in June, and municipal governments are unclear whether or not Serbs will continue to boycott elections.¹³²

License Plates

Since Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, Serbia has mandated Kosovar drivers to hide or replace their license plates upon entering Serbia in an attempt to avoid giving extra recognition to Kosovo or its independence. In September 2021, Kosovo enacted a similar rule that requires citizens to hide their Belgrade-issued license plates and purchase temporary ones upon entrance into Kosovo.¹³³

This immediately triggered a negative reaction from ethnic Serbs who follow Serbia's orders more than Kosovo's, with approximately 100,000 Serbs in Kosovo using license plates authorized by Serbia, which are considered illegal within Kosovo.¹³⁴ In November 2022, authorities began stopping cars with Serbian license plates from entering Kosovo. In response, Serbs residing in Kosovo began protesting by blocking roads with trucks and other large vehicles for four days.¹³⁵ The level of resistance escalated significantly as the use of explosive devices, gunfire, and attacks on a vehicle registration facility resulted in injury to a police officer.¹³⁶ Many ethnic Serbs resigned from their occupations, and police officers went on strike to protest the violence.¹³⁷

Negotiations with the EU led to a diplomatic solution in late November that de-escalated tensions.¹³⁸ This deal requires Serbia to terminate the issuance of license plates featuring Kosovo cities' names, and, in turn, Kosovo will refrain from taking additional steps concerning the re-registration of vehicles.¹³⁹ Further, NATO troops will replace Kosovar police units stationed at the border, and both nations will affix special stickers to car license plates to eliminate national symbols. However, these are temporary solutions that sustainable ones will replace when they are established.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Zhinipotoku Zenel, and Lllazar Semini, "NATO to Send 700 More Troops to Kosovo to Help Quell Violent Protests | AP News," *AP News*, May 31, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/kosovo-ethnic-serbs-kfor-clashes-western-powers-0cb33f5396d3f16eb4a6325c61802f04>.

¹³² Vinnell, Kim. "Exclusive: Kosovo President Open to New Elections in Serb-Majority Municipalities." *Reuters*, June 7, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kosovo-president-open-new-elections-serb-majority-municipalities-2023-06-07/>.

¹³³ TLDR News, "How License Plates Led to a Border Conflict: Serbia & Kosovo Explained," October 1, 2021, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qa9VfAHuhc>.

¹³⁴ Wilhelmine Preussen, "Kosovo, Serbia reach deal over car plate dispute, EU says," *Politico*, November 24, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/kosovo-and-serbia-reach-last-minute-deal-over-car-plates-dispute-josep-borrell-aleksandar-vucic-albin-kurti/>.

¹³⁵ The Guardian, "Kosovo Serbs Block Road to Main Border Crossings in Volatile North," December 10, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/10/kosovo-serbs-block-road-to-major-border-crossings-in-volatile-north>.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ DW News, "Tensions at Kosovo-Serbia Border over License Plate Rules – DW," 09/21/2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/kosovo-new-restrictions-on-serbian-license-plates-spark-protests/a-59246024>.

¹³⁸ Welle, Deutsche. "Kosovo and Serbia Reach Deal to End License Plate Row — EU." *dw.com*, November 23, 2022. <https://www.dw.com/en/kosovo-and-serbia-reach-deal-to-end-license-plate-row-eu/a-63866881>.

¹³⁹ Al Jazeera, "Kosovo, Serbia Agree Deal to End Border Tensions," September 30, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/30/kosovo-serbia-agree-deal-to-end-border-tensions>.

Banjska Attack

On September 24, 2023, two unlicensed trucks were parked on a bridge, blocking the entrance to Banjska, a Serb-majority village of northern Kosovo. The Kosovar police were alerted of the incident, and three police units responded to the scene. 30 armed men met these officers and attacked them from all fronts.¹⁴⁰ In the ensuing confrontation, the Kosovar police successfully prevented the initial attack; however, three officers sustained injuries and were subsequently transported to a nearby hospital. One of the injured officers died upon arrival.¹⁴¹

Following this attack, the armed offenders barricaded themselves in the Banjska Monastery, a Serbian Orthodox monastery, before more Kosovar police arrived. Gunshots were fired back and forth between the gunmen and police, leaving at least three more dead in the fight.¹⁴² Police made multiple arrests, and NATO's KFOR mission stationed forces outside the monastery to prepare for further escalation, but they were unsure if they caught all of the gunmen.

Following the incident, Kosovo's Prime Minister Albin Kurti accused Serbia of politically, financially, and logistically supporting the gunmen, suggesting that Serbia supplied the gunmen with weaponry.¹⁴³ Kurti also claimed that this attack was part of a larger scheme to seize the northern regions of Kosovo and create a passage to Serbia for the transport of weapons and troops. This incident has been deemed the worst ethnic tension outbreak since the Kosovo War of 1999, with around 30 NATO peacekeepers and 50 Serbian protestors injured, and four people dead.¹⁴⁴ However, leaders from both respective countries have not displayed a cooperative stance, with each side blaming the other.

Possible Solutions and Controversies

Military Presence

UNMIK and the subsequent KFOR are both groups that continue to actively station troops in Kosovo to maintain security and peace. However, to yield the maximum success, NATO must first consider improving its military presence, infrastructure, and equipment. In the past, NATO-led troops have often been insufficiently trained and protected.¹⁴⁵

The first improvement method is capacity building for local security forces. Often, local forces, such as the Kosovo Security Force (KSF), do not have substantial training and development. Capacity-building programs provided by NATO focus on enhancing technical and operational skills of security personnel, such as crowd control, intelligence gathering, and crisis management. Moreover, increasing funding for these programs raises

¹⁴⁰Euronews, "‘Terrorist Act’: Kosovo Blames Serbia for Deadly Monastery Shootout," September 24, 2023, www.euronews.com/2023/09/24/kosovo-police-officer-killed-and-another-injured-in-attack.

¹⁴¹Florent Bajrami and Lllazar Semini, "Kosovo Mourns a Slain Police Officer, Some Serb Gunmen Remain at Large After a Siege at a Monastery," *AP News*, 25 September 2023, apnews.com/article/kosovo-serbia-gunmen-tension-mourning-monastery-attack-4c381bcd34374d81d59adb3a473925b4.

¹⁴²Marita Moloney, "Kosovo Monastery Siege Ends After Heavy Gun Battle," *BBC News*, 24 Sept. 2023, www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66905091.

¹⁴³Al Jazeera, "Kosovo Demands Serbia Hand Over Escaped Serb Gunmen After Deadly Shootout," September 25, 2023, www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/25/kosovo-demands-serbia-hand-over-escaped-serb-gunmen.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵Isobel Koshiw, "NATO Training Leaves Ukrainian Troops ‘Underprepared’ for War," *Open Democracy*, August 8, 2023, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/ukraine-russia-training-nato-west-military/>.

the weaponry budget for on-duty officers, providing more equipment for different situations. For example, countries may opt to redirect NATO's current Security Investment Program's resources into Kosovo and provide funding for infrastructure for collective defence. Increasing the capacity of security institutions also creates stronger and more effective structures in the internal security sector. As a result, enhancing their training and equipment enables them to respond more efficiently to crises, reducing the impact on civilians. Additionally, these measures of capacity-building can also apply to NATO-led forces. Troops such as the KFOR or UNMIK are better protected by better equipment, reducing the likelihood of casualties during incidents. However, not all member states will support such large-scale capacity building due to its high cost.

In addition, while peacekeeping missions are important, there have been many examples where they have done more harm than good, such as their response to the election protests. While the scale of these conflicts is often unpredictable at the beginning, regulations on determining appropriate rules of engagement can be useful in striking a balance between robust action to protect civilians and avoiding unnecessary use of force. This may look like mandating troops to use force that is proportionate to the threat faced, instead of immediately resorting to violent means. Therefore, peacekeepers can assess the situation and determine whether their level of force is appropriate or productive against the danger they are faced with, reducing the likelihood of casualties in either party.

Community Engagement

Building trust and understanding with citizens on the ground is crucial to the success of peacekeeping operations. Without support from Serbian citizens, resistance will continue to escalate, and it will be easier for the government to sway their perspectives of NATO. Currently, some degree of trust is implied by the EU's request for NATO peacekeepers instead of the Kosovo police force when conflict arose; however, more mutual understanding is needed to further improve NATO's defence posture.

Community engagement can take place through implementing projects that provide tangible benefits to local communities, such as humanitarian aid, infrastructure development, and capacity-building initiatives. Additionally, establishing open lines of communication with citizens that incorporate their perspectives and address their concerns is pivotal to fostering trust. This can look like town hall meetings or forums where citizens can share their perspectives. Allowing Serbs to express their opinions allows them to compromise with the most favourable solution, balancing Serbian autonomy and Kosovo's national governance. This solution would demonstrate NATO's commitment to improving citizen lives by the immediate and tangible effect it has on the population.

Economic Sanctions

In the past, international sanctions have successfully hampered Serbia's ability to continue funding harmful military operations, and they have forced Kosovo to relieve escalating ethnic tensions.^{146, 147} By restricting Serbia's trade relations, its GDP dropped by 59 percent between 1990 to 1993, from EUR 24 billion to below EUR 10

¹⁴⁶ ReliefWeb, "Sanctions on Serbia: Time for a Review?" March 24, 2000, <https://reliefweb.int/report/serbia/sanctions-serbia-time-review>.

¹⁴⁷ International Relations and Security Network, "Successful Sanctions – Serbia and Montenegro, 1992-1995," November 6, 2012, [web.archive.org/web/20160202090019/http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Special-Feature/Detail/?lng=en&id=154572&tabid=1453376834&contextid774=154572&contextid775=154574](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Special-Feature/Detail/?lng=en&id=154572&tabid=1453376834&contextid774=154572&contextid775=154574).

billion.¹⁴⁸ In Kosovo, after Kurti ignored the EU's requests to alleviate tension after the election, the EU suspended its financial aid to the country. As such, sanctions successfully push urgency toward officials in Serbia and Kosovo, and they are a possible solution in times of conflict.¹⁴⁹ However, if NATO were to implement sanctions, Vučić could use them to fuel anti-Western sentiment in Serbia and leverage more support for himself while decreasing the legitimacy of NATO. Additionally, this economic warfare often targets the weakest parts of the population: the common citizens.¹⁵⁰

Currently, Serbia and Kosovo have had a positive trend of improvement in their image, caring more about their relations with other countries and adhering to demands from the international community. This suggests that sanctions will be even more successful now than before. Effectively, sanctions can send strong messages of condemnation and disapproval to actions and pressure Serbia and Kosovo to follow international law, human rights standards, and respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of neighbouring countries.

Diplomatic Mediation

With rising tensions, direct discussions between Serbia and Kosovo or ethnic Albanians and Serbs may escalate into a violent crisis. As such, NATO can take on the role of a mediator by leveraging its diplomatic influence and facilitating dialogue between the conflicting parties.¹⁵¹ This can come in the form of shuttle diplomacy, in which NATO is the intermediary between the two groups, passing on information and attempting to bridge the gap. While the EU has done this, there has been a lack of enforcement; therefore, NATO would have to introduce metrics—such as timelines, goal setting, or even punishments like sanctions—to hold both sides accountable for their diplomatic promises. These mechanisms ensure that diplomatic talks lead to change.¹⁵²

The primary challenge with this solution lies in the necessity for a substantial level of trust in NATO from both Serbia and Kosovo. Therefore, solutions such as community engagement and capacity building are prerequisites for NATO's involvement in diplomatic dialogues.

Bloc Positions

Western Liberal Democracies

This bloc, consisting of countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada, unequivocally supports Kosovo's right to self-determination and statehood by advocating for official global acknowledgement.¹⁵³ As some of the largest financial contributors to NATO—with the U.S., for example, spending EUR 3.3 billion annually on the alliance—this bloc would emphasize conflict prevention and protection. By funding a strong military presence, this bloc can support measures aimed at preventing any

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Richard Becker, The Role of Sanctions in the Destruction of Yugoslavia, *Internet Archive*, web.archive.org/web/20150304045032/http://www.iacenter.org/bosnia/becker.htm.

¹⁵⁰ Jett, Dennis. "Why Peacekeeping Fails." *American Foreign Service Association*. <https://afsa.org/why-peacekeeping-fails>.

¹⁵¹ Shalini Chawla, "NATO's Response to the Kosovo Crisis," *Strategic Analysis: A Monthly Journal of the IDSA*, n.d., https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/sa/sa_sep00chs01.html.

¹⁵² NATO, "Relations with Serbia," May 23, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50100.htm.

¹⁵³ "Which Countries Recognise Kosovo's Statehood?" *Infographic News | Al Jazeera*, 17 Feb. 2023, www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/17/mapping-the-countries-that-recognise-kosovo-as-a-state-2.

potential escalation between Serbia and Kosovo, and provide military intervention if conflict breaks out. As they recognize the importance of local stability and peace, most efforts will be allocated toward strengthening the regional defence posture.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, as liberal democracies, this bloc will prioritize upholding democratic values in Kosovo, supporting initiatives like the UNMIK that bolster democratic governance in the region. Overall, this bloc takes on a strong stance in building the military and the government.

Balkan Pro-Recognition Countries

Similar to the Western Liberal Democracies bloc, this bloc recognizes and supports Kosovo's sovereignty but takes a softer stance on NATO intervention. Countries like Albania and North Macedonia share close historical, cultural, and regional ties with Kosovo and Serbia. Thus, they may advocate for diplomatic dialogue and community building. For example, Albania, which neighbours Kosovo and has a massive ethnic population there, are opponents to heavy NATO intervention due to the risk of violence resulting in mass civilian casualties. They are more likely to support community engagement projects that bolster trust between the two ethnic groups. Furthermore, considering the closer geographical proximity of countries in this bloc to Kosovo and Serbia, it is unlikely that this bloc would turn to immediate violence, given its potential repercussions on the broader Balkans and, consequently, their nation.

It is important to note that soft stances exist on a spectrum, and some countries under this bloc may seek additional solutions on top of diplomacy. For example, Montenegro peacefully separated from Serbia in 2006 and supports calmer discussions, while Croatia's secession from Yugoslavia led to a civil war, allowing them to recognize the importance of having strong troops and peacekeeping forces as backup.

Anti-Acknowledgement

This anti-acknowledgement bloc consists of Slovakia, Romania, Poland, and other adjacent nations. This bloc prioritizes the principle of territorial integrity and respects Serbia's sovereignty over its borders while recognizing the impact that Kosovo's independence would have on their state. For example, Greece does not recognize Kosovo's independence due to Greece's sensitivity to issues with secession. Recognizing Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence sets a positive precedent for territories inside Greece with separatist aspirations, which is against the government's interests.¹⁵⁵ Thus, it will likely support solutions that manage tensions inside borders, such as community engagement and diplomatic mediation. Additionally, there are also economic factors that may prevent a nation from expressing recognition, as accepting Kosovo's sovereignty risks cutting off trade with Serbia and potentially other allies of Serbia.¹⁵⁶ This bloc would prefer to use dialogue to advocate in favour of Serbia and stress the importance of adhering to international law. They may attempt to promote regional stability by bolstering the military presence to prevent their nation from experiencing collateral damage from the conflicts.

¹⁵⁴International Crisis Group, "Kosovo-Serbia: Finding a Way Forward." May 12, 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/balkans/kosovo-serbia/kosovo-serbia-finding-way-forward>.

¹⁵⁵ Euractiv, "Greek Position on Kosovo's Independence Unchanged," Mar 28, 2023, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/greek-position-on-kosovos-independence-unchanged/>.

¹⁵⁶ "Greece Reiterates Stance on Not Recognizing Kosovo." *Greece Reiterates Stance on Not Recognizing Kosovo*. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/greece-reiterates-stance-on-not-recognizing-kosovo/2857646>.

Discussion Questions

1. Does your country recognize Kosovo's independence? Why or why not?
2. What is your country's stance on the degree of NATO intervention? Why does your country hold this stance, and can they be swayed?
3. In times of conflict, like Kosovo's election incident or the 1999 war, was diplomacy possible? Or was violence the only viable solution?
4. How do issues of ethnic and national identity contribute to tensions between Kosovo and Serbia? How can NATO approach that?
5. How has international involvement, including past NATO intervention, influenced the dynamics of the conflict? What positive developments have emerged? How can the deficiencies be addressed for future improvement?
6. Are there any other ways to approach UNSC Resolution 1244?

Additional Resources

“Why Kosovo and Serbia Are Fighting (Again)”:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8_cINydkHg

The Roots Of War:

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/readings/roots>

Failure to Protect — Anti-Minority Violence in Kosovo:

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/07/25/failure-protect/anti-minority-violence-kosovo-march-2004>

How Milosevic Stripped Kosovo's Autonomy:

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/from-the-archive-blog/2019/mar/20/how-milosevic-stripped-kosovos-autonomy-archive-1989>

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