

## **Kosovo: *pre*-UNMIK**

### **Historical Fact, Legends and Speculation**

Much of the present conflict is couched in historical arguments. Each side gives its own view of the political, ethnic and cultural ownership of the region of Kosovo. It is integral for the Peacekeeper to understand the specific historical arguments offered by the various sides in the conflict as justifications for their actions.

Fundamental arguments over the ancient ownership or occupation of the region are intrinsic to both ethnic Serbian and Kosovar claims. In the case of the Kosovars and Albanians, they claim descent from the Illyrians (c.300 BC), who according to Macedonian, Greek and Roman records were the people who occupied the region. By the time of the Roman occupation the Illyrians were a partially Hellenized (Greek) culture. The region of Illyria did extend into the modern region of northern Albania. The ethnic Serbs, however, agree that the region was essentially uninhabited until the Slav migrations of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries (AD). Regardless of the regional history the claims of ancient ownership are tenuous at best on both sides.

The primary sources of ethnic Serbian claims to the region are founded on a local traditional history of the region on the known historical events during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. A local history that is somewhat askew from the accepted medieval history of the region.

The core of the local history lies in heroic terms - best described by Serbian historians as the 'glorious' defeat of Tsar Lazar's army by the Ottoman Turks in 1389, at Kosovo Polje (the Field of Blackbirds). An event that is very much a footnote in Ottoman and European medieval history. Serbian history records the event as a heroic defence against the Moslem invaders, even though the Serb army was defeated.



An interesting historical note is that Serbs fought on both sides and there were Albanians in Tsar Lazar's army. The Ottomans finally conquered Constantinople in 1453, the Serbs were not truly defeated until 1448 during the Ottoman drive through the Balkans towards the centre of the Byzantine Empire. Serb defeat came some hundred years after the Ottoman incursions started.

The next historical note that modern Serbian historians record is that of the 'Great Migration' in 1690. According to Serb historians, some 37,000 Serbian families fled north to the region of Vojvodina, which was Austrian territory, after regional Ottoman victories. Serbian history records that they were led by the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch, Arsenius 111.

Historical records indicate that Arsenius was not present at the time and that the migration, rather than being one huge movement akin to the Exodus, was gradual and was inclusive of Catholic Albanians. It is during this period that the Serb historians claim Albanians moved to the vacated region with tacit support of the Ottoman government. There is no historical evidence for this. What is clear is the Albanians accepted Ottoman rule and over time even converted to Islam, the Serbs on the other hand resisted conversion and the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Given the pragmatic nature of the Ottoman Empire, conjecture can lead to the conclusion that the Ottomans may have indirectly encouraged the growth of the population that did not pose a threat to their rule.

What we do know is that the Albanians became a majority in the region of Kosovo. The Serb population slowly migrated to the Austro-Hungarian region of Vojvodina, where they became a bulwark against further Ottoman incursions into Christian Europe. Again the Kosovars claim they were always in Kosovo regardless of the movements of the Serbs.

Another argument that the Serbian historians offer, and the Kosovars to a lesser extent, is the location, naming and the number of historical buildings and sites in the region which have ethnic ties to one or the other side in the conflict. The Serbs clearly use this as an argument that Kosovo through its historical and archaeological sites is clearly historically linked to the modern Serb state and population.

There has been much academic investigation of these historical arguments, but it is important to keep in mind that the historical record is fragmentary and is subject to being modified by either of the parties to suit their own political needs.

### **The 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

By the early 1900's most of the Ottoman Empire's European provinces had gained some form of autonomy or independence. These new Christian states saw an opportunity to gain further territory from the weakened Ottoman administration. The three Balkan Wars between 1912 and 1913 ultimately led to the independence of the balance of European territory of the Ottoman Empire. Kosovo was reclaimed by the Serbs, but news records from the period indicate that the Serbs had a policy of what we today would call, 'ethnic cleansing' of the

Muslim population, a population which was primarily Albanian. The Great Powers of the day (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, and the UK) intervened to stop these 'little wars' from spreading. Serbia was forced to give up its access to the sea and was also forced, by Austria, to allow the creation of an independent Albania-which created the ember that engulfed the world a year later.

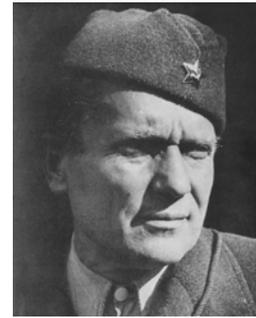
The end of World War I saw the region of the old Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires divided amongst the victorious powers, those regions that gained their independence did so through territorial settlements, which in the case of Serbia fuelled the conflicts to come. Serbia was still denied access to the sea, and the region of Kosovo, though primarily Albanian in population, was ceded to the new Kingdom of Yugoslavia, rather than the new state of Albania. This laid the groundwork for the present day conflict.

The inter-war period (the 1920s and 1930s) saw a systematic policy by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to populate Kosovo with Serbs. In turn, life was made harder for the Kosovar population, in hopes that they would leave. In keeping with these goals, the government of the Kingdom made an agreement with the Turkish government to resettle some 40,000 Kosovars families in Turkey between 1938 and 1941. The plan was never executed as World War II intervened. World War II brought German occupation of the Kingdom, which was subsequently split up, with Kosovo being annexed into Italian occupied Albania.

Germany retained control of the mineral rich northern part of the country. The period of Nazi occupation is complex in its political nature, but a few key points should be kept in mind. First Croatia became a puppet state under Nazi domination and provided troops as occupation forces in the region. Second, many Serbs continued to fight against the Nazi forces. Third, some 33 German divisions were tied down in the region fighting partisan forces - forces which contained all Yugoslav nationalities and were never fully subdued. Three of the German divisions were elite Waffen SS units, which were mainly comprised of Muslim volunteers from Croatia, Albania and Bosnia. The units were Waffen-Gebirgs Division der SS Skanderbeg (Albanians), Waffen-Gebirgs division der SS Karstjager (Bosnians) Waffen-Gebirgs Division Handschar (Croatians) and Waffen-Gebirgs Division der SS Kama (Croatians and Bosnians) - this unit was soon disbanded due to discipline problems. Croatia by 1944 had committed three Wehrmacht foreign volunteer divisions to the anti-partisan war in Yugoslavia. The Germans eventually disbanded many of these divisions as they proved to be of low fighting capabilities and many were more interested in settling scores with the Serb population. These units committed numerous atrocities against the Serbian, Jewish, and Roma Gypsy populations in Yugoslavia and a new hatred was fostered between the

Serbs and Muslims. Finally, due to limited time, terrain, and the tenacity of Serb Forces, the German Army was never truly able to control all of Yugoslavia.

Dramatic changes occurred in the region during the rule of Josip Broz, better known as Tito, from 1945-80. The Yugoslav Federation, under Tito, was comprised of the republics of Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia.



After World War II, Serbia was stripped of Macedonia, a region it had captured during the first series of Balkan Wars in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Macedonia (known as South Serbia during Serbian occupation) became a separate republic. Tito's regime went to great lengths to create a separate Macedonian identity within the Yugoslav Federation. The primary motive was to stymie the claims to the region by Bulgaria.

Another motive was the reduction in land-size of Serbia. Tito clearly did not want a Yugoslav state that was run by the Serbs. Thus Kosovo was turned into an autonomous region, within the Republic of Serbia, and eventually in 1968 into an autonomous province within Serbia. Kosovo's autonomy was, however, clearly under the control of the Communist party in Belgrade.

Under the 1974 Constitution, Kosovo enjoyed as much independence as the six Yugoslav republics (without being a constitutionally recognised republic) and subsequently Kosovar separatist activity increased. After Tito's death in 1980, ethnic tensions came to the surface all over the country. There were major riots in 1981, 1988, and 1990 in Kosovo. Initiated by university students, the riots became a rallying cry for a Kosovo Republic for Kosovars. By 1990, the region was the poorest in Yugoslavia, with an unemployment rate of almost 50 percent, the per capita GNP was €540 compared to Serbia's €1625.

The *post*-Tito period saw a devolution of power to the republics in an attempt to satisfy nationalist sentiments. Kosovo remained a province of Serbia, but in practice became an equal partner. It gained its own representation in Federal institutions on par with that of the existing constituent republics. In addition, Serbia required Kosovo's consent for any legislation that affected the province, while in turn Serbia could not interfere in Kosovo's affairs.

Two key items did not make Kosovo a republic:

1. it could not secede like the other republics, and;
2. the Albanians were not considered a 'nation' of Yugoslavia, but rather a national minority, in effect making the Albanians a second class citizen. The individual republics were considered to be the "nation" and their main ethnic population a recognised ethnic group, i.e. Serb, Croat, Moslem, Slovenian, Montenegrin and Macedonian. These groups had special rights, which were denied to national minorities like ethnic Albanians, Hungarians or the Gypsies.

This scenario certainly led to tension between the Serbians and the Kosovar majority in Kosovo. On the one hand, the Serbs in Serbia no longer controlled a portion of territory they felt was theirs by birthright, and on the other hand, the Kosovars resented what they saw as their status as second-class citizens. In addition nationalists felt that Tito's constitutional changes were unfair, as many had expected that the areas within Macedonia and Montenegro which contained large Albanian populations would become part of Kosovo.

In terms of demographics, the Kosovars population grew, having the highest birth rate in Europe and resulting in a percentage decline of the Serb population. In turn many Serbs left the region as unemployment was high (the highest in all of Yugoslavia). More by default than design, by the late 1980's Kosovo was becoming an ethnically 'pure' region with ethnic Albanians making up 90% of the population, and Serbs 10%. The Federal government paid little heed to ethnic Serb complaints of unfairness and repression of the ethnic Serb minority in Kosovo, until Slobodan Milosevic suddenly found a new interest in Serbian nationalism. Milosevic's inflammatory rhetoric allowed him to gain power in Serbia, this situation arising through the crumbling economic reality of Tito's Federal system, and by the late 1980's inflation was reaching 1000 percent. In addition a so called "Iron Triangle" had formed between the banking sector, the leaders of industry and regional political leaders, like Milosevic.

Those who replaced the Federal communist government proved to be incapable of dealing with the mounting economic crisis that faced the region. These new leaders who had risen to power through building on ethnic rivalries were not interested in a central government or the general good of the people, but rather territorial and ethnic alliances as a power base to rule from. Each tried to advance the interests of his own republic or region, and none more so than Milosevic. In 1989 he was able to remove Kosovo's and Vojvodina's autonomy. Both were now controlled directly from Belgrade.

With the end of the Soviet Union and the 1990 Yugoslav elections the Communists were ousted and were replaced by parties interested in independence. It also had become evident that only Serbia really supported a federal system, since they had the most to gain. Serbia had the least developed regions within the old Federation (Kosovo being the most impoverished, in spite of significant mineral resources) and thus the most to gain from the economic redistribution from the other republics in the Federation. In addition, this economic redistribution also allowed Serbia to maintain the largest military force within the Federation.



Serbia and the UNMIK administered Province of Kosovo  
(30 May 2007, CIA World Factbook)

## **Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA)**

### **Ushtria Clirimtare E Kosoves (UCK)**



The genesis of the expanded violence of the KLA began with the signing of the *Dayton Peace Accord*. Kosovar leaders had expected to have the issue of Kosovo resolved during the talks but the issue was never even raised.

This turn of events undermined the moderates' (amongst the Kosovars) policy of non-violent resistance to FRY repression in Kosovo. Kosovar policy changed from restoration of autonomy to 'complete independence from Serbia and the FRY. The KLA demanded independence for Kosovo with a long-term view to unite the Albanian populations of Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania into a greater Albania.

The FRY claims that the KLA has roots going back to the 1960's. There is, however, little evidence of this. Other sources indicate that the origins of the KLA date back to the early 1980's. It is argued that the hardline Stalinist leader of Albania, Enver Hoxha, used the death of Tito in 1980 to cause political problems for Yugoslavia by raising nationalist sentiment amongst the Kosovar population. Little concrete information is available on this origin of the KLA, but sources indicate that the KLA was soon defeated by the Yugoslav secret police and what remained of the KLA cadre fled back to Albania and some western European nation.

What is certain is that the modern KLA first appeared in Macedonia in late -1991 to early 1992, but after Dayton it began armed resistance against the FRY government with isolated hit-and-run attacks against FRY special forces police and officials. In June of 1996 the KLA officially assumed responsibility for sabotage, committed against the police stations and policemen in Kosovo and Metohija. With the KLA formally taking responsibility for the attacks, the FRY government declared the KLA a terrorist organisation.

By 1997 the KLA continued its attacks against FRY police and other officials and so-called Kosovar collaborators. The KLA, however, avoided any attacks against the Yugoslav Army or its facilities. According to Ljubiska Cvetic, spokesman for the MUP (Ministry of Internal Affairs-Special Police), the KLA were involved in 31 incidents in 1996, and 55 in 1997. Security forces arrayed against the KLA, prior to the Rambouillet peace talks were some 13,000 armed FRY police which were stationed in Kosovo, with another 25,000 policemen that could be deployed into the province in 72 hours. Some 6,500 Yugoslav Army (JA) troops were stationed in Kosovo, with another 10,000 soldiers on stand-by.

The pivotal event that unified the KLA was the response of FRY police to the killing of four Serb policemen on 4 February 1998. In March 1998, a large scale antiterrorist sweep began in the Drenica region of Kosovo. In one operation, FRY forces swept into the village of Prekaz, in the Drenica region, west of Pristina and attacked the family compound of Adem Jashari. His death and that of his family members created a martyr for the KLA and Kosovo's ethnic Albanians. His compound took on a heroic myth akin to the Texans at the Alamo or the Spartan stand at Thermopylae.



After the so called "*Jashari Massacre*" more volunteers were drawn to the ranks of the KLA allowing it to step up its military/terrorist campaign against FRY forces, which included the first attacks against FRY army units (the Military Police) who were working with the FRY police.

By May and June 1998, the KLA had moved to larger actions which included the attacks on roads to isolate police stations and control points. A major element of this new campaign was the defensive blockades of villages at important crossroads to disrupt communication between local FRY police and army units. The KLA objective was to form a line of 'liberated' territories in the western part of Kosovo and attempt to cut off FRY forces from the majority of FRY units in eastern Kosovo. The *Jashari Massacre* also changed the tempo of the type of combat the KLA engaged in. Until the Massacre, they had only used light arms, but with the response of the JA by the use of heavy weapons, the KLA was forced to upgrade its weaponry.

KLA units started to be equipped with assault rifles, mainly AK-47's, Soviet RPG's, light mortars, recoilless rifles, and anti-aircraft machineguns. Their inventory also included equipment from World War II, such as PPS-41 automatic rifles and the MP-40 sub-machinegun. The weapons used by the KLA originated from weapons captured or obtained from the former *Yugoslav National Army* (JNA), Albania, China and Singapore. It is likely that Chinese weapons were in fact, part of the million or so small arms that disappeared during the riots in Albania in the Spring of 1997. There are reports that the KLA captured four JA T-55 tanks in 1998, but these claims were never substantiated.

During Albania's riots, mobs plundered the country's armouries. Weapons were dispersed to anyone who wanted one. Albanian government estimates indicate that some 652,000 weapons (including assault rifles, mines, anti-tank rockets), an undisclosed amount of

ammunition, and 3,600 tons of explosives were stolen from over 1,200 army depots. The government has only acknowledged the recovery of 25,000 of the weapons.

The armed resistance of the KLA allowed the government of the FRY to initiate a brutal military crack-down in the region of Kosovo. The Yugoslavian Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued their 'White Book' in September of 1998, TERRORISM IN KOSOVO AND METOHIJA AND ALBANIA. The White Book claimed that a large portion of KLA members were Albanian mercenaries who have been trained by NATO personnel in Western Europe's "abandoned NATO bases."

The *White Book*, though containing some relevant facts, were in effect, propaganda emanating from Belgrade. The anti-terrorist operation launched by the FRY security forces in March of 1998, lasted until late October. FRY security forces succeeded in dislodging the KLA from many areas, but did not achieve a decisive victory. KLA casualties were light and its command structure remained mostly intact. The majority of the FRY security activity was directed at the Kosovar civilian population in an organised scorched earth campaign. The result was a humanitarian crisis which created 250,000 refugees and internally displaced persons and destroyed hundreds of buildings and homes.

In October 1998, a cease fire was initiated (Kosovo Verification Mission) which temporarily stopped the fighting. The KLA used the cease-fire and the presence of international verifiers to reoccupy lost territory. It also continued to initiate small-scale attacks against FRY security forces, primarily the FRY 'special police' units which are paramilitary in nature.

At the same time the FRY government in Belgrade failed to comply with the majority of the provisions in the October 1998 agreements. Specifically those dealing with the troop withdrawals and reduction of police forces in Kosovo.

Both sides in the conflict prepared for fighting which recommenced in the spring of 1999. The KLA had used the cease-fire to improve its training, its command and control structure, and acquire more and better weapons. As a result, of the latter and the scorched earth policy of Belgrade, the KLA was a better organised and more determined guerrilla force. US intelligence estimates indicated that there were several thousand KLA regulars augmented by thousands of irregulars, or so called home guards. Also funds were now readily available from Albanian's around the world.

## **KLA Organisation**

The KLA was originally not a unified military organisation that was subordinate to a political party or civil authority. It truly was a “grass roots” guerrilla movement, but since the opening of hostilities between the KLA and FRY security forces, the KLA evolved into an organised and politicised military force.

From its initial strength of approximately 500 fighters in 1996, by the end of 1998, its ranks had swelled to a force of at least a few thousand fighters. Some estimates were as high as 12,000 to 20,000 armed guerrillas prior to the Rambouillet peace talks.

The KLA was organised in small compartmentalised cells which were divided between a manoeuvrable strike nucleus of a few hundred trained commandos, and a larger number of locally organised members. The KLA typically performed actions in smaller groups, sometimes as few as three to five persons.

Initially the majority of KLA units were comprised of professionally trained soldiers, many of whom were former JNA soldiers. The units function in a professional covert manner as a number of leaders are former members of the UDBA (Internal State Security Service), the army and the police.

As noted earlier, FRY government sources claim that the KLA by late 1998 had some 1,000 foreign mercenaries from Afghanistan, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Muslims), Croatia, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. In addition, these sources claimed an unspecified number of British and German instructors (supposedly from NATO) were also present. To date, this has not been substantiated. What is known is that the majority of the so called mercenaries are non-Kosovar ethnic Albanians or possibly Albanian nationals, primarily with army and police experience. Their numbers are not really known.

The FRY claimed that the main KLA training bases were in Albania at Ljabinot near Tirana, Tropoja, Kukes and Bajram Curi near the FRY-Albanian border.

The FRY also claimed that these were also the locations of KLA headquarters. This has also not been substantiated at this time.

Prior to Rambouillet, the KLA had two command centres, an unidentified location outside of Kosovo, possibly inside Albania. The other base was in Pristina, where the KLA had a well-developed logistics base. Prior to the events of March and April 1999 direct contact with

Kosovo and Metohija was maintained via Gnjilanq Vitiqa, Glogovac and Pristina. The KLA had a well-organised surveillance and communications apparatus, which was supplemented by a word of mouth messenger service.

### **Armed Forces of the Republic of Kosovo (AFRK)**

Disappointed by the perceived military failures of the KLA, Kosovar politicians encouraged the formation of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kosovo (AFRK, known by its Albanian name as *Forcave Armatosure e Republikes e Kosoves* (FARK). During the summer of 1998, the force was formed and trained in northern Albania. The primary impetus for the formation of the AFRK was Bujar Bukoshi, the de facto representative of the Kosovars from 1991 to 1998.

With the disappearance of its commander, Colonel Tahir Zema, it was thought that the AFRK had been disbanded. April 1999 reports, however, indicated that the AFRK remained active around the Drenica region. Although, there was a split between Bukoshi and Hashim Thaci, the leader of the KLA, reports continued to indicate that the KLA and the AFRK carried out joint operations. It should be noted that coordination between the military factions had been frustrated due to the political differences between the two organisations



### **The Rambouillet Accord**

With the FRY government forces attack on the Kosovar village of Racak on 15 January 1999, NATO, through the Contact Group, threatened both the warring parties with air attacks if they did not attend peace negotiations ("Proximity Talks") scheduled for 6 February 1999. The talks were headed by the French and UK Foreign Ministers. A deadline was set by NATO to reach a settlement by 20 February.

The site chosen for the talks was Rambouillet, a suburb of Paris, France. An interim draft of the accord written by US Special Envoy Ambassador Chris Hall, set out the 'non-negotiable' aspects of the agreement. In short, the plan would provide for "substantive autonomy" for the Kosovar majority within a Serbian republic framework. To increase the political pressure on both the FRY and KLA to come to a settlement, during the talks some 430 NATO aircraft and a flotilla of warships in the Adriatic were put on combat alert.

The deadline passed on 20 February, but NATO forces were not deployed, instead the talks were extended for another three days, with the US Secretary of State Madeline Albright taking charge.



Madeline Albright's efforts were concentrated on convincing the Kosovars to give ground for their demand for a referendum to be held on the independence of Kosovo; a position that both the FRY and the Contact Group were clearly not in favour of, the FRY because it would lose Kosovo, and the Contact Group because it feared a further disintegration of the Balkan region. Madeline Albright negotiated extensively with Hashim Thaci, the leader of the Kosovar delegation, and eventually by phone contacted Adem Demaci, a spokesman for the KLA, who had boycotted the conference, to find some compromise.

The KLA were also unwilling to disarm their units. Only the recognition of the KLA as the official police force in an autonomous Kosovo would be accepted as terms for disarming. There also seemed to be a deep division between members of the Kosovar delegation.

The European members of the Contact Group were trying to get the FRY delegation to concede some ground. There was an offer to lift economic sanctions in return for concessions to the Kosovars. Both the efforts of the US and the balance of the European Contact group members were not coordinated and did not take into account Russia's opposition to any military intervention, which the US advanced in the event that an agreement were not reached.

The FRY delegation did agree to the political aspects of the Accord, regarding the establishment of an autonomous Kosovo, but rejected outright the military provisions as a violation of FRY sovereignty.

No agreement was reached between the warring parties by the second deadline of 23 February. The FRY immediately concentrated an additional 6,500 troops, 250 tanks and 90 artillery pieces on the Kosovo border. The KLA in turn, stepped up its military actions.

## **The Failure of Rambouillet**

It is important that there be a clear understanding of the underlying reasons for the failure of the Rambouillet Accord, as the failure of this diplomatic effort led to the direct intervention of NATO forces in Kosovo in March of 1999.

First and foremost the terms of the Accord were "non-negotiable," thus both sides were expected to accept the terms of the US and the *Contact Group*. But, ultimately the government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) felt it was put in an untenable position due to the clauses in; Chapter 5 Article V, Chapter 7, Article XV and Chapter 7 Appendix B, sections 6, 7, 8, 11 and 15.

It was the objection of the FRY that these various Chapters and articles of the Rambouillet Accord left NATO with 'extraterritorial' powers. It was the FRY'S view that Chapter 5 Article V and Chapter 7 Article XV made the Chief of the Implementation Mission, an EU appointed position, and the KFOR (NATO) commander defacto civilian and military governors respectively in the region of Kosovo. Their authority would be final on all matters.

Chapter 7 Appendix B section 6a, 6b, and 7 made NATO and NATO personnel immune to any legal judicial process of the FRY while anywhere in the FRY, not just Kosovo. Section 8 gave freedom of movement to NATO forces "*throughout the FRY including associated airspace and territorial waters.*" Section 11 exempted NATO from paying any costs for the use of FRY airports, roads, rails, and ports other than "*reasonable charges for specific services requested and received*". Finally section 15 allowed NATO full access to all radio and television frequencies, should NATO desire to use them.

It was the position of the FRY that under the conditions of the *Rambouillet Accord* NATO would have become an occupying power so the government of the FRY felt it had little choice but to refuse to sign the Accord.

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