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# THE DAYTON ACCORDS AND THE ESCALATING TENSIONS IN KOSOVO

By Christopher Carson

## Abstract

This paper argues that the Dayton Accords, which ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, were the primary cause of the outbreak of violence in Kosovo in 1998. While the Accords were regarded as successful in neighboring Bosnia, the agreement failed to mention the existing situation in Kosovo, thus perpetuating the ethnic tensions within the region. Following the Dayton Accords, the response by the international community failed to address many concerns of the ethnically Albanian population living in Kosovo, creating a feeling of alienation from the international political scene. Finally, the Dayton Accords indirectly contributed to the collapse of the Albanian government in 1997, creating a shift in the structure of power in the region. This destabilization triggered the outbreak of war between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo the following year.

## **I. Introduction**

For many years, the territory of Kosovo functioned as an autonomous region within the state of Yugoslavia. During that time, Kosovo was the only Albanian-speaking territory within Yugoslavia, having been home to a significant Albanian population since its creation. The region also had a very important meaning for the Serb community, as it was the site of the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, which defined Serbian nationalism when Serbian forces were defeated by the Ottoman Empire. In the 1980s, tensions began to arise between the two communities, initially resulting in protests against the centralized government in Belgrade and arrests of Albanian Kosovars. Under the presidency of Slobodan Milošević, these ethnic tensions intensified both in Kosovo and elsewhere in Yugoslavia. In Bosnia, the conflict that broke out in 1992 between the Bosnian Muslims and the Serbs was resolved with the implementation of the Dayton Accords (or Dayton Agreement). During this period, tensions in Kosovo between the Albanian citizens and the Orthodox Serb population worsened, resulting in violent warfare and an international intervention on behalf of the Albanian Kosovars.

In this paper, I prove that the Dayton Accords, an agreement ending the war in the neighboring territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, were the primary aggravating force behind the tensions that eventually escalated into war in Kosovo. This assertion relies on three essential points. First, the failure of the Dayton Accords to mention the state of affairs and emerging ethnic tensions in Kosovo created feelings of neglect by the international community among Albanian Kosovars who sought to enjoy greater political freedoms. Secondly, the lifting of trade sanctions and normalization of diplomatic relations with Belgrade due to the Dayton Accords was a symbolic recognition of Yugoslavia's control over Albanian Kosovars by the European Union and the United Nations, further escalating tensions within the region. Finally, the collapse of the Albanian government in 1997, an unintentional effect of the Accords, fostered an additional willingness for Albanian Kosovars to fight for their sovereignty and supplied the community with a large number of weapons necessary to do this.

While this paper addresses many of the flaws and unexpected outcomes of the Dayton Accords, the purpose of my argument is not to frame the Accords, any contributing party, or any signatory as antagonists, but to present some of the indirect effects of the treaty. In this article, I do not suggest that the Dayton Accords were a mistake, nor do I suggest alternative resolutions to them. My argument merely echoes the complexities and interconnectedness of international political events. A political act that was meant to benefit one geographic region had a destructive impact on a number of other nations. Many of the unintentional effects were difficult to foresee. With the end of the Bosnian War, the Dayton Accords succeeded in what they attempted to do; the extent of this success in Bosnia is debatable but is not the focus of this paper. This article addresses the role of the Dayton Accords in the escalation of ethnic tensions in Kosovo in the years leading up to the war in Kosovo.

## **II. Literature Review**

### *A. Introduction to Literature*

Three primary sets of arguments dominate the discussion of literature on the issue. The first examines the role of Slobodan Milošević in the conflict, labeling him as the main perpetrator

against the Albanian minority. While these arguments create a simple and understandable solution that can easily be used to justify foreign intervention, they fail to explain why ethnic tensions worsened before Milošević came to power as well as why so many Serb citizens cooperated with the central government. A second set of articles looks at the social and cultural influences the two communities had on one another. These arguments are able to look more accurately at the relationships between people involved in the conflict. While these readings answer the question regarding the motivations behind the ethnic tension, the arguments fail to explain the rapid increase in ethnic violence in the region. The last set of writings employed in this literature review looks at the historical background of the two peoples. While scholars attempt to get to the core of the issue, they admit that their research is inconclusive due to the lack of evidence in either direction. While the Kosovo War spanned from 1998 to 1999, this paper focuses on the causes of the war and not the war itself. The earliest articles in this literature review are from 1998. Literature written before this does not take the war into consideration. The majority of the cited texts were written in the early 2000s.

### *B. Milošević-Centered Arguments*

The first set of arguments regarding the escalation of violence in Kosovo looks at the actions of the president, Slobodan Milošević, as the primary cause of ethnic tension during this period. According to scholars using this approach, Milošević is the sole aggressor in the conflict. Had he not come to power when he did, the relationship between Albanian Kosovars and ethnic Serbs would look completely different than it does today. In the opinions of many individuals, particularly in Western journalism, he is regarded as a war criminal and remembered for the continuous oppression of minorities within his country. Literature by many scholars affirms these impressions.

Louis Sell describes Milošević as an erratic and ruthless leader with the sole intentions of consolidating power and furthering his own political agenda.<sup>1</sup> With regards to the events in Kosovo, Sell explains how Milošević was the first political leader to have the aspiration to carry out what many Serb nationalists had aspired to do.<sup>2</sup> As part of his campaign against Muslims living in Yugoslavia, the president employed an anti-Islamic rhetoric that emphasized the dangers of fanatical Muslim populations not just in Serbia but across the entire continent.<sup>3</sup> As a contrast to Sell's claim that Milošević acted toward nationalistic goals, Vjeren Pavlaković claims that he used ideas of nationalism as a disguise: his true intentions were only to retain political power at all costs.<sup>4</sup> In order to do this, Milošević worked within the existing structures of the Yugoslav government until this was no longer practical; later, he worked to change the structures of the national government, centralizing power around the president.<sup>5</sup> Carole Rogel examines how the president took advantage of Serb nationalist sentiment in order to advance his political agenda. According to Rogel, Milošević purged the local governments of Kosovo, Vojvodina, and Montenegro of their elected leaders—arresting many of them—and instated new leaders that were loyal to him.<sup>6</sup> Rogel, Pavlaković, and Sell each reveal how Milošević solidified his own political regime by adhering to a strictly nationalist agenda.

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1 Sell: 2002, pp. 170.

2 Sell: 1999, pp. 23.

3 Sell: 2002, pp. 44.

4 Pavlaković: 2005, pp. 15.

5 Ibid, pp. 17.

6 Rogel: 2003, pp 172.

Lene Kühle and Carsten Laustsen contribute to the Milošević-centered literature, building on the ideas presented by the other academics. In an article describing Serbian mythology, the scholars dissect the story of the Battle of Kosovo, claiming that the rhetoric was only used to legitimize the president's regime and justify the continued occupation of the region. Kühle and Laustsen emphasize the lack of evidence that the battle actually took place and argue that the story is likely only an adaptation of a biblical tale.<sup>7</sup> When analyzing the events that unfolded in Kosovo in the 1980s and 1990s, each of the aforementioned writers employs the idea that Milošević was the key figure responsible for the violence against Albanian Kosovars.

For many interested scholars, this argument is appealing due to its simplicity. Following NATO's unilateral intervention in the conflict in 1999, this became a particularly popular assumption. The labeling of a single individual as the antagonist in a conflict serves as a rational justification for the international community to intervene in a sovereign state's domestic affairs. From this point of view, the resulting retreat of Serbian forces following NATO's air raid painted the image of a victory for Western nations. In addition to this justification, the assumption that one party is responsible for a set of tragic events suggests that similar events can be prevented if the antagonist is made incapable of further action. In this respect, by removing Milošević from power and trying him at the International Criminal Court, the international community had already taken the most reasonable preventative measures against future ethnic violence.

There are a variety of issues this argument fails to address. Many scholars argue that ethnic tensions in Kosovo began as early as 1981, half a decade before Milošević came to power. Although the most dramatic increases in violence occurred during his regime, many minor acts led up to the situation Milošević faced when he began his term as president. Regardless of whether Milošević played a crucial role in the escalation of violence after 1987, he should not be held responsible for prior tensions. The Milošević-centered argument also raises the issue of why so many people complied with the instructions given by the president. The violence that took place in Kosovo was committed not by one prominent leader but by a large number of nationalists aspiring to benefit the Serbian cause. Although Sell does mention that the military was reluctant to follow through with the president's plans at times, it is evident that this was not a complete barrier to the plan of action.<sup>8</sup> By the beginning of the war, there was a considerable amount of Serbian forces within the country. In order to further explain the outbreak of violence during this time, additional theories must be employed.

### *C. Cultural and Social Arguments*

A second group of literature regarding Kosovo deals with the feelings and beliefs of the peoples living within the region. Scholars emphasize that tensions increased during this time due to a series of actions taken by members of each national identity derived from their feelings for the other party. Pre-existing animosities between Albanians and Serbs, combined with a lack of communication and diplomatic efforts, paved the road for ethnic conflict in the region. The violence could have been avoided if actors involved in the conflict had dealt with these issues differently.

Lazar Nikolić examines the issues leading up to the conflict from a sociological perspective, assessing the aspirations of both ethnic groups. Nikolić finds a vast number of similarities between the Serbs and Albanians: each group felt they had been oppressed under the

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7 Kühle: 2006, pp. 23.

8 Sell: 1999, pp. 24.

recent communist regime and domination of prior empires, each group possessed particularly negative stereotypes about the other ethnicity, and each group accepted the possibility of the use of force as a potential solution to the conflict. After examining these issues, Nikolić asserts that neither the Serbs nor the Albanians confronted the real issue at hand—the necessity of a means of civil coexistence.<sup>9</sup> Accompanying Nikolić's argument regarding similarities between the Albanians and Serbs, Julie Mertus focuses her argument on the dual victimization of the two groups. Mertus' work suggests that self-identification as a victim naturally leads to irrational behavior.<sup>10</sup> Due to the consistent repression of both nationalities by Tito's communist regime and a number of hegemonic empires, both parties felt entitled to take back their own property without being bound by the moral repercussions of their actions. Both Nikolić and Mertus examine the similarities regarding how each ethnic group felt about the other, arguing that these mutual feelings were at the center of the conflict.

While one contributor to the escalating tensions in Kosovo was the mutual feelings between the participating parties, scholars argue that unilateral beliefs that one population had about the other are an important aspect as well. When examining sacred symbols and practices of the peoples inhabiting the region, Michael Sells paid particular attention to the veneration of the relics of Prince Lazar, a Serbian hero in the Battle of Kosovo. On the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle, the relics of the prince were paraded through Central Serbia and Kosovo to a monastery in the north where they were revealed.<sup>11</sup> Nationalistic and religious practices like this broadened the gap between the two opposing societies, provoking the marginalized community to take action. In a similar manner, Darko Tanasković expresses the concern of many Serbs that a new wave of politicized Islam would have an unfavorable impact on Serbian culture.<sup>12</sup> The antagonistic beliefs of one ethnic group regarding the cultural practices of another have the potential to exacerbate tensions between populations. If these considerations had been taken into account and more dialogue implemented before the situation reached a point of violence, the communities would have been much better off.

Literature on the social and cultural impacts of the ethnic tensions in Kosovo depicts a much more complex viewpoint on the issue than the prior readings. These explanations take into consideration the complex relationships between communities, highlighting the similarities and differences between these peoples and the probable impact of negative beliefs on the population. While these theories address some of the core, underlying issues regarding nationalism on the Balkan Peninsula, they fail to suggest an answer to the question of what sparked the rapid escalation to violence. Social and cultural theories provide a basis for consideration of what perpetuated the social tensions during this time, but they cannot provide a solution to the question of what ultimately caused the Serbs and Albanians to go to war.

#### *D. Historical Arguments*

A final group of literature dealing with the conflict in Kosovo argues that violence occurred as a result of disputes dating back over a thousand years. Because of this, it would be impossible to settle the dispute in a just manner today. These arguments take into account the tremendously

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9 Nikolić: 2003, pp. 55-57, 69.

10 Mertus: 1999, pp. 1.

11 Sells: 2000, pp. 134.

12 Tanasković: 2000, pp. 129.

extensive length of time the land dispute has persisted. With no plausible way of finding a solution to this perpetual issue, the outbreak of violence in Kosovo was inevitable.

Židas Daskalovski describes how a possible solution could hypothetically be reached if one could answer the question of who occupied the land first. Here, both parties claim to be the victor, tracing their own history back well past the existence of any written record. While the Albanians trace their heritage back to the Illyrians, occupying the area well before the Serbs arrived in the twelfth century, the Serbs deny this claim and describe themselves as the original inhabitants.<sup>13</sup> Tim Judah takes a different approach to the historical methodology, claiming that it matters less what actually occurred and more what people believe happened.<sup>14</sup> While each of these arguments explores the issue, neither of the two scholars is able to determine the original inhabitants.

This last group of arguments attempts to find the root of the issue. Each of the arguments addresses the core factors responsible for the tensions between Albanians and Serbs. Unfortunately, no conclusion is reached. Each of the scholars is unable to trace history back far enough to find a solution. Judah's assertion that the actual events of the past are irrelevant complicates the issue, allowing both parties involved to be correct according to their own beliefs. This set of arguments illustrates additional tension between the groups, but the literature does not suggest an initiator caused the sudden increase in nationalist sentiment.

### *E. Concluding Remarks*

This literature review has examined three classes of arguments attempting to provide a reason for the rapid increase in ethnic tensions in Kosovo after 1980. The first class of evidence examines the role of Slobodan Milošević in the conflict. The second group looks at the social and cultural factors contributing to ethnic tensions. The final group attempts to address the archaic issue of land ownership based on historical data. When examining the research saying that Milošević was the sole key player in the conflict, scholars are able to formulate a simple and understandable argument from which one can easily justify efforts of humanitarian intervention. However, these arguments fail to address the issues of why ethnic tensions were already on the rise before Milošević came to power and why so many Serbs were willing to cooperate with authorities. When addressing the puzzle from a social or cultural standpoint, one can establish a more complex hypothesis, evaluating the relationship between the two ethnic groups and its effect upon the political volatility of the region. While these answers provide a reason for the persistence of harsh feelings in the region, they fail to show why ethnic tensions increased so dramatically in the years prior to the war. The final group of theories attempts to find the core of the conflict by addressing the issue of first occupancy. It is possible to argue that the first community to live in the region should be able to claim the land as their own. However, this method fails to demonstrate practicality, as each ethnic group claims to have lived in the Kosovo region longer than the other.

It would be beneficial to further look into the influence of neighboring countries upon the rapid increase of ethnic violence, particularly regarding the impact of the Dayton Accords. While some academics have taken these factors into consideration, scholars have yet to consider this a primary factor in the provocation of violence.<sup>15</sup> Much of the previous literature overlooks

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13 Daskalovski: 2003, pp. 18, 23.

14 Judah: 2000, pp. 2.

15 Sell: 2002, Nikolić: 2003.



both the direct and indirect effects of the Accords on the escalation of ethnic tensions prior to the war. In the complex and interconnected environment of the former-Yugoslavia, the recognition and understanding of international factors is vital to a proper interpretation of the events.

### III. Argument

In this paper I argue that the signing of the Dayton Accords, which ended the Bosnian War in 1995, played a key role in the escalation of ethnic tensions in Kosovo, eventually leading to an additional outbreak of war involving the Serbian government. Undoubtedly, the relationship between Serbs and the Albanian Kosovars involved a wide range of factors. These spanned from the interactions of certain social circles and religious groups to the recent actions of key political figures and historical roots dating back to the 1300s. Ultimately, the war that occurred must be attributed to the unique variety of circumstances that were in place when the violence broke out. That being said, not all of these variables had an equal effect on the onset of violence. Many arguments which include the Dayton Accords as a contributing variable in the equation of ethnic tension do not show the treaty as playing a key role in the development of the conflict. The agreement had a much more substantial impact on the situation than is commonly acknowledged. While the resolution succeeded in its mission of bringing the violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina to a halt, it had many unintended consequences on neighboring countries, including a detrimental effect on the Albanian community living in Kosovo. I argue that the unforeseen consequences of the Dayton Accords were the most significant contributor to the outbreak of war in Kosovo.

The feeling of alienation of Albanian Kosovars by the international community was arguably one of the most significant consequences of the Dayton Accords and a key motive in the turmoil that followed. With the progress made in Bosnia—specifically the cessation of violence between the Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian Muslims—the Dayton Accords were regarded by many to be an important success for the region. For Albanian Kosovars, however, they were anything but that; the disregard of ethnic tensions within Kosovo was a major failure of the Accords. Following the adoption of the agreements, EU and UN trade sanctions were lifted from Yugoslavia, and many countries gave diplomatic recognition to the post-war Serbian state. These moves were symbolic gestures of approval by the international community toward the actions of the government in Belgrade, as well as an acknowledgement that Kosovo existed as a region within the state of Yugoslavia.

In addition to these events, the Dayton Accords inadvertently contributed to the collapse of the Albanian government in 1997. Following this regime change, the new government which came into power was less supportive of the Kosovars' idea to gain independence. Accompanying the political stance of the new government in Albania, the loss of control of the country's defense system in 1997 created a massive influx of weapons being smuggled across the border to Kosovo.<sup>16</sup> While fueling the surge of negative feelings in Kosovo, the political collapse in Albania supplied Kosovar revolutionaries with the tools they needed to take action.

This argument draws on claims made by a number of different writers on the subject. Many academics have inferred that the lifting of economic sanctions against Yugoslavia and the exclusion of Albanian Kosovars from the Dayton Accords were two variables that contributed to the need of the Albanian Kosovar community to establish a sovereign state. Other writers have

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16 Smith: 1999.



described the impact that the collapse of government in Albania had on the domestic system in Kosovo. My argument combines these theories into a comprehensive and succinct claim that the implementation of the Dayton Accords was ultimately responsible for the escalation of violence between Serb and Albanian populations prior to the Kosovo War.

## IV. Evidence

I argue that the Dayton Accords were the most significant component of the series of events prior to the outburst of war in Kosovo. In this section, I explain the evidence contributing to this theory. I break this into three sections. The first examines the exclusion of Kosovo from the Accords, ending the ethnic conflict in the Yugoslav republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The idea that Kosovo was excluded from this upset many Albanian Kosovars who felt that their own situation had been overlooked by the international community. The second section of my evidence explains how the lifting of trade sanctions by the United Nations and European Union further upset the Albanian Kosovar community. Finally, the last section describes the unplanned effects the Dayton Accords had on the political situation in Albania and how the events that followed contributed to the unrest in Kosovo.

### A. *Immediate Cause: The Dayton Accords*

Although the Dayton Accords are accredited by many for ending the war in the Balkan region, particularly in the newly independent state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the resolution had a number of unforeseen impacts. In the years prior to the Dayton Accords, Kosovo had experienced ethnic tensions similar to what had occurred in Bosnia. The ramifications of this agreement were one of the primary contributors to the violence that erupted in Kosovo in the following years. One of the more prominent effects of the treaty does not deal with the explicit consequences of the Accords but what they failed to address. While the multilateral resolution was hailed as the ultimate solution to ethnic violence on the Balkan Peninsula, it failed to mention Kosovo, a conglomeration of brewing ethnic tension. While some other Yugoslav republics experienced relative peace following the signing of the Accords, the event resulted in an overall loss for Albanian Kosovars. In this section, I examine the primary impacts of the Dayton Accords and the fact that Kosovo was not mentioned in the agreement. I also look at a number of possible reasons why the disputed territory was left out of the resolution.

Kosovo's exclusion from the Dayton Accords undermined many arguments in favor of a pacifist approach to the development of a separate Kosovar state such as that advocated by Ibrahim Rugova. As the President of Kosovo in the years leading up to the war, he was a strong Albanian nationalist and advocate for the independence of Kosovo. He was also an enduring supporter of pacifism with regards to the country's independence movement and a persistent proponent of the idea that a peaceful solution to the dispute was possible.<sup>17</sup> In the time leading up to the Dayton Accords, Rugova was able to ease some of the tensions within Kosovo by claiming to his constituents that their own interests were the top priorities of US foreign policy.<sup>18</sup> Most Albanian Kosovars felt their own suffering to be at the same level as that of their Bosnian

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17 Vickers: 1998, pp. 266, and Sell: 2002, pp. 91.

18 Sell: 2002, pp. 274.

neighbors.<sup>19</sup> Rugova understood that this claim was not entirely true. While traveling to meet with foreign leaders, he had become accustomed to being introduced as a delegate from a non-governmental organization within Yugoslavia and not as a head of state. In Albania, however, the media depicted Rugova as an internationally recognized leader attending summits with other important figures.<sup>20</sup> His assurance that the route of pacifism would eventually lead to greater freedom and possible sovereignty relied on the possibility that multilateral negotiations would eventually occur. The Accords weakened Rugova's strategy. The resolution invalidated any legitimacy which had existed for the idea that intervention or negotiations involving a third party would lead to an independent Kosovo.

There have been a number of explanations as to why the developing tensions in Kosovo were not addressed in Dayton. According to Richard Caplan, one of the reasons for the exclusion of Kosovo was the need to include Milošević in the agreement, possibly undermining the provisions that had already been accepted.<sup>21</sup> The priorities of the parties negotiating the agreement were geographical areas in which violence was currently taking place. At the time of the Accords, that area was predominantly the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had experienced an extremely bloody conflict since 1992.<sup>22</sup> Any complications with the peace agreement could have prevented the cessation of fighting in Bosnia. The omission of an acknowledgement of Kosovo was in Belgrade's best interest. In negotiating the treaty, Milošević attempted "to get the highest possible state rights for Serbs in Bosnia [while maintaining] the lowest possible [level] of autonomy" for Albanian Kosovars, preserving the status quo with Kosovo as a region within the Republic of Yugoslavia.<sup>23</sup> In a 1998 statement regarding the progress of the Accords, United States diplomat Robert Gelbard acknowledged the problem of rising ethnic tensions in Kosovo and noted that it may be in the best interest of the United States to begin negotiations with Milošević and Rugova. The statement, however, is in reference to the possibility that events in Kosovo might jeopardize the peace brought to Bosnia under the Accords.<sup>24</sup> While the United States was recognizing the importance of involvement at this point, action came too late. The statement by Gelbard was made only a few months before NATO's air raid on Kosovo. Caplan claims that the United States and other Western powers did not want to take an active stance on Kosovo's independence so as not to disturb the stability of other states in the region. In particular, he refers to the recently established and extremely fragile state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the neighboring Republic of Macedonia with a large Albanian minority population.<sup>25</sup> Other scholars, however, say Kosovo could have been added to the resolution without incurring significant opposition from Belgrade. The Serbian population was given an autonomous enclave within the newly established sovereign state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. A similar policy could have been used for Albanian Kosovars in Yugoslavia.<sup>26</sup> The implementation of this would have incorporated both Albanian nationalists fighting for greater freedom and Serbs wishing to maintain ownership of the territory.

As an alternative to pragmatic arguments that look at the political volatility of the region, Ivo Daalder and Michael O'Hanlon argue that the United States saw Kosovo as a distinct issue

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19 Vickers: 1998, pp. 265.

20 Ibid, pp. 266.

21 Caplan: 1998, pp. 750.

22 Sell: 2002, pp. 165

23 Maliqi: 1998, pp. 140.

24 Gelbard: 2008.

25 Caplan: 1998, pp. 755.

26 Guzina: 2003, pp. 43.

from the other republics due to Kosovo's status as an autonomous region within Yugoslavia. Croatia, Bosnia, and other neighboring republics were seen as new states emerging from the dissolution of the larger entity of Yugoslavia with their own constitutions, central banks, and judiciaries. However, Kosovo was still regarded as a part of the Republic of Serbia. Because of this neglect, the United States diplomats did not see the tensions in Kosovo as an issue of self-determination but as an issue of minority rights within a larger sovereign state.<sup>27</sup> This perspective restricted the effect that international foreign policy could legally have on the situation in Kosovo.

A final explanation for the United States' negligence of Kosovo in the Accords does not address the nation's ideology regarding the subject but relies on political strategy at a domestic level. Presidential elections were quickly approaching in 1996, and Bill Clinton had experienced widespread admiration within the United States for the current settlement in Bosnia. Complicating the diplomatic exchanges by demanding an additional settlement from Milošević would have been a dangerous political move.<sup>28</sup> Regardless of the reasoning, however, the desires of the Albanian Kosovars were not addressed by the treaty. This neglect had a great psychological impact on the Albanian community within Kosovo—a large contributing factor to the violence that later occurred.

### *B. The Direct Impact: Sanctions and Diplomatic Recognition*

Following the acceptance of the Accords, most sanctions that had been in place against Yugoslavia due to the violence were lifted as members of the international community normalized relations with Belgrade. Albanian Kosovars understood these actions to be in favor of Belgrade and detrimental to the fight for independence. In this section, I elaborate on the idea that lifting sanctions against Yugoslavia and establishing a renewed relationship with the emerging state further alienated Kosovo from the political scene, thus escalating ethnic tensions within the area.

The lifting of trade sanctions by the UN and EU was a symbolic approval for the actions of Slobodan Milošević and the government in Belgrade. In 1996, the European Union normalized economic relations with Yugoslavia and recommended that its member states diplomatically recognize Milošević's regime.<sup>29</sup> In many ways, this was the climax of tensions that had existed between the EU and Yugoslavia during the Bosnian War. When this economic and political relationship was reestablished, the European Union implicitly recognized Belgrade's control over Kosovo and the Albanians living within its borders.

The legalities of the European Union's relationship with Belgrade require a magnitude of scrutiny. Because of the potential political impacts of the action, the diplomatic recognition of Yugoslavia by many European states was arguably illegal. The republic that emerged following the Accords (officially called the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, which included Kosovo) was legally a different entity than the state that existed before the war (The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). Enver Hasani argues that legal recognition by members of the European Union on the new government in Belgrade would rely on the *Guidelines on the Recognition of New States in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*.<sup>30</sup> The republic, however, did not meet many of these requirements, most notably the requirement

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27 Daalder and O'Hanlon: 2000, pp. 9.

28 Sell: 2002, pp. 274, 276.

29 Hasani: 1998, pp. 4.

30 Hasani: 1998, pp. 2.

to guarantee “the rights of ethnic and national groups and minorities.”<sup>31</sup> Following the Accords, member states of the European Union were not required to recognize Milošević’s regime in Serbia and were arguably unable to under international law. During this period, Milošević was desperate for international recognition.<sup>32</sup> By lifting sanctions on Yugoslavia and granting diplomatic recognition to the emerging republic, international leaders gave him exactly what he wanted.

In 1996, the Human Rights Watch predicted the possible effects of the lifting of sanctions on Kosovo, describing the actions as an “unambiguous sign to minority groups and the democratic forces in Serbia that they have been abandoned by the international community.”<sup>33</sup> Before the war broke out, the report indicated that a logical outcome of the removal of sanctions would be political violence in Kosovo. The organization emphasized the importance of maintaining economic sanctions. Once sanctions have been attached to issues of human rights, it is important that they remain implemented until all necessary conditions are met.<sup>34</sup> While this report accurately describes the situation in Yugoslavia, the recommendations of the organization were not incorporated into many policies. Had a larger number of states maintained the sanctions that were in place during the war, much of the future conflict could have been avoided.

The only entity that did not lift the entirety of its economic sanctions against Yugoslavia was the United States, which left in place an “outer wall” of sanctions, due to the possibility of conflict in Kosovo.<sup>35</sup> While this gesture had a small impact on the domestic situation, it did not carry the weight necessary to counter the response of other international actors and deter the violence that would eventually unfold. The continued implementation of the outer wall was in no way a step forward for Kosovars. The existence of these sanctions merely indicates that the situation would have been much worse had the policy of the United States reflected that of the EU and UN.<sup>36</sup>

The lifting of trade sanctions on Yugoslavia and diplomatic recognition of many states on Milošević’s regime was an incredibly symbolic loss for Albanian Kosovars. By acknowledging the improved state of affairs in some parts of Yugoslavia, the international community neglected the deteriorating relationship between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. These losses added to the betrayal Albanian Kosovars felt immediately following the signing of the Accords the previous year.

### *C. The Indirect Impact: The Albanian Government Collapse*

Aside from the immediate impacts on Albanian Kosovars and the centralized government in Belgrade, the Accords indirectly contributed to the collapse of the Albanian government in 1997.<sup>37</sup> This subsequently provoked the conflict in Kosovo. The crisis in Albania placed a new regime in power, with political elites against Kosovo’s independence and accepting of Belgrade’s stipulation

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31 Rich: 1993, pp. 43.

32 Human Rights Watch: 1996.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Hasani: 1998, pp. 2.

36 Human Rights Watch: 1996.

37 Kubicek: 1998.

that it remain a territory of Yugoslavia.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, the collapse of the security forces in Albania created a steady flow of weapons into the extremely volatile region of Kosovo.<sup>39</sup> Due to the ethnic and linguistic similarities between the two communities, as well as the geographic proximity of the territories, the events that took place in Albania altered the course of events for the Kosovars. In this section, I examine the evidence surrounding the ideas that the collapse of the Albanian government was an effect of the Accords.

Prior to the signing of the Dayton Accords, Albania faced an incredibly fragile economic situation. Many citizens' assets were held in networks of pyramid schemes financed by the illegal sale of oil to Yugoslavia.<sup>40</sup> This situation was, of course, extremely unstable, but it was able to maintain itself due to the inflow of monetary resources from Yugoslavia. After the signing of the Accords, the unwarranted trade between Albania and Yugoslavia ceased, triggering the prompt decline of Albania's economy in early 1997. The sudden collapse of the pyramid schemes forced many Albanian citizens into poverty. President Sali Berisha, widely viewed as the perpetrator in the situation, was ousted from power, and a new government was established in June of that year.<sup>41</sup> This demonstrates how the effects of the Accords impacted nations not directly associated with Yugoslavia. The changing relationship between the states of Kosovo and Albania in 1997—an indirect effect of the Accords—served as an additional factor to the motivation of Albanian Kosovars seeking independence.

President Berisha was widely respected in Kosovo, having established a close relationship to President Rugova. In the early 1990s, at the beginning of his career as president, Berisha was a strong advocate of Kosovo separating from Yugoslavia and joining a new state of Greater Albania.<sup>42</sup> During his presidency, his position became slightly less radical, but Berisha still supported Rugova and the Albanian Kosovar community in their demand for greater freedom. As late as 1996, when protests occurred in Belgrade, the Albanian government encouraged Rugova to become involved.<sup>43</sup> After the collapse of Berisha's regime the following year, the movement in Kosovo lost an important geopolitical ally.

The new political leaders of Albania, the Albanian Socialists, had a different agenda from their predecessors, the Democratic Party. While the Democratic Party supported the Kosovars' pursuit of self-determination, the new regime believed it would be preferable for Albanian communities to exist under the protection of a larger state and not seek sovereignty.<sup>44</sup> One explanation of this shift in policy is that the Albanian Socialists drew most of their support from the southern part of the country, a region farther from Kosovo, where citizens had less of an emotional connection to the neighboring territory.<sup>45</sup> The new stance of the Albanian state caused many Kosovars to feel neglected, similar to the situation following the Accords.

Adding to the confusion caused by this shift in power, many Albanian Kosovars felt that Rugova's stance on the issue had shifted to parallel the stance of the new Albanian government.<sup>46</sup> While Rugova's position had not changed, his persistent commitment to pacifism caused many

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38 Austin: 2004, pp. 245.

39 Smith: 1999.

40 Abrahams: 1997.

41 Kubicek: 1998.

42 Austin: 2004, pp. 244.

43 Ibid, pp. 245.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Vickers: 1998, pp. 309.



Albanian Kosovars to become disillusioned with the idea that independence could be achieved without the use of physical force.

Aside from the symbolic impact of Albania's collapse, the turmoil had an important physical effect on Kosovo as well. Prior to the political instability in Albania, Kosovo was relatively stable, partly due to the fact that conflict was impossible as weapons were inaccessible for Kosovars. If weapons made their way into the hands of Albanians in the area, they were quickly confiscated by Serbian authorities.<sup>47</sup> With the political collapse, Albania lost control of its security apparatus. Within one month, 650,000 weapons were taken from a number of military bases across the country.<sup>48</sup> Massive black market exchanges took place on the border between Albania and Kosovo, and the Albanian Kosovars became equipped with the tools needed to physically fight for their own sovereignty.

## V. Counterarguments

Many additional arguments exist regarding the events that contributed to the ethnic violence in Kosovo. Many counterarguments to my claim are completely valid as the Accords were certainly not the only factor responsible for the outbreak of violence. It would be hard, however, to find a variable with a more significant impact on the situation than the implementation of the Accords. Arguments regarding the role of individuals like Milošević are certainly accurate as figures like him played an important role in the situation. However, even the actions of a leader like Milošević would rely on deeper political and historical causes and do not account for the actions of Serb citizens who cooperated with the president's policies or the increased nationalist identity of the Albanians living in Kosovo. With this, one must look to other geopolitical and international factors. The resolution ending the war in Bosnia had a profound impact on the beliefs of Albanian Kosovars regarding their own independence. While Milošević's policies affected the lives of Kosovars, the Albanian community cared little about the stance of Belgrade toward the independence of Kosovo. For nationalists in Kosovo, the Serb opposition to its independence was given and did not greatly affect the trajectory of ethnic tensions in the region.

One claim addressed by some scholars focuses on religious differences between the two communities living in Kosovo.<sup>49</sup> While each came from a different religious background—the Serb community was Orthodox Christian and the Albanian community was Muslim—it is difficult to argue that religion contributed to the outbreak of violence.

## VI. Conclusion

In this paper, I argued that the Dayton Accords were the primary contributing factor to the outbreak of war in Kosovo. The argument draws from claims made by a number of academics looking at a range of factors relating to the Accords. These variables include the psychological effects of Kosovo's absence from the rhetoric in the Accords, the lifting of trade sanctions against Yugoslavia as a result of the resolution, and the political collapse of neighboring Albania and its impact on the domestic

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47 Judah: 2000, pp. 127.

48 Smith: 1999: pp. 2.

49 Sells: 2000



situation within Kosovo. My argument combined these three elements into one comprehensive claim: each of these factors is an outcome of the Dayton Accords.

The paper began by examining previous literature of the subject of Kosovo. Here, I classified the findings into three distinct groups, each employing a different methodology in order to determine the cause of war in Kosovo. The first group attributes the violence in the region to the actions of Slobodan Milošević, the President of Yugoslavia at the time of the war. These writers frame him as the primary antagonist in the conflict, taking violent action against the Albanian minority living in the country. This class of literature is most commonly used to justify NATO's intervention in the war. A second set of literature looks at the situation from a cultural perspective, examining the differences between the two primary communities living in Kosovo. This literature addresses religious differences as well as each community's claims of personal ties to the land. A final set of literature presents the issue from a historical standpoint. These works attempt to determine first occupancy, tracing each community's story back to the legendary Battle of Kosovo. After critiquing these works, I described the possibility of researching how international factors might have impacted the events in Kosovo.

In the following section, I claimed that the Accords had the most significant impact on the escalation of violence within the region. The evidence for this claim draws from three existing arguments. The basis of the first argument is that the exclusion of Albanian Kosovars from the Accords fostered negative feelings within their community. Many members of the Albanian community within Kosovo felt strongly about the need for a greater ability to govern themselves. One key aspect of this was the international community's acceptance of a greater level of independence for the country. After the signing of the Accords, Albanian Kosovars felt neglected by the international community. These feelings created a desire in many citizens of Kosovo to establish sovereignty through the use of force.

The second part of my argument examines the dismantling of trade sanctions against Yugoslavia. This resulted in the diplomatic recognition of Milošević's regime following the end of the war. The lifting of these sanctions was seen by many members of the Albanian community as acknowledgement by the European Union and the United Nations that Milošević had done the right thing. The normalization of relations between Yugoslavia and many Western states sent a similar message. This acceptance of the country was a symbolic denial of recognition of the Albanian community living within the state. For Kosovars, this action was seen as a step away from the possibility of gaining independence.

The final aspect of my argument dealt with the collapse of the Albanian government in 1997, attributed to the effects of the Accords implemented a few years earlier. The collapse resulted in the implementation of a new political regime in Albania that was less favorable toward the political sovereignty of Kosovo. This turnover represented a diplomatic loss for the Albanian Kosovar community. The political insecurity during this time also created a black market for illegal weapons dealing within the region, allowing many weapons to end up on Kosovo's side of the border.

#### *A. Policy Recommendations and Theoretical Implications*

The succession of events in Kosovo in the 1990s presents researchers interested in foreign policy with the opportunity to learn from past challenges and shortcomings. Planning future policies involving comparable subjects to could potentially help deter similar events in the future. Based on my analysis of the events preceding the Kosovo War, I offer several suggestions for where improvements could be made in foreign policy.

When negotiating a treaty meant to put an end to a series of violent acts, the international community must take into account the preferences of all parties involved. The failure of the Accords to address the evolving situation in Kosovo was a primary driving factor in the escalation of violence in the region. Depending on the circumstances, it may be difficult and unreasonable to incorporate all of the demands of a people into a peace resolution; however, an attempt to accommodate such populations would have a beneficial effect.

One additional policy recommendation that can be derived from the situation in Kosovo is that international actors should not rush to praise one party following the end of the war. Once Milošević signed the Accords, many states jumped on the bandwagon in removing economic sanctions against Yugoslavia and diplomatically recognizing the new state that emerged. The international community did not need to act as quickly as it did. If some states had held off on actions regarding Belgrade, the violence that took place could have been prevented.

In addition to the implications for foreign policy, the situation in Kosovo plays a significant role in the development of theories regarding conflict negotiation. While typical beliefs regarding war resolutions assume that violence within a region discontinues following a treaty, the incident in Kosovo serves as a counterexample. When violence in Bosnia ceased, a third party which had not been part of the dialogue became involved in the conflict. The Accords serve as an example of a peace agreement that eventually provoked further violence. Future literature regarding peace agreements must not focus solely on the parties involved in the conflict but also on the potential effects on neighboring regions and other global entities. International resolutions have the power to affect greater audiences than the signatories and actors directly involved in the conflict. Future theoretical research on negotiations must reflect this.

### *B. Criticisms*

One possible critique of this argument is that chronology does not imply causation. Prior to the outbreak of war in Kosovo, a wide range of events transpired. Some of these occurrences undoubtedly contributed to the outbreak of violence in the region while others coincidentally occurred within the same time frame. Through a historical analysis, I explained a likely course of events leading to the outbreak of war. However, without the existence of a counterfactual scenario allowing us to control for certain events, it is impossible to know which factors had an impact on the situation and which ones did not. The claims made in this article rely on the assumption that because one event preceded another, the first event caused the second to occur. Unfortunately, there is no way of accurately determining causation in this type of situation. In this scenario, the most applicable method is to use the available evidence to create a reasonable and understandable argument explaining the course of events.

One additional criticism of the methodology employed in this paper may be the lack of quantitative evidence. I have not used a numerical scale to measure the level of ethnic tension within a region. While this would greatly improve the validity of the study, this element would be difficult to measure by a researcher not present at the location.

### *C. Future Work*

In the future, it would be interesting to examine the application of these findings to similar cases. The example of Kosovo is a unique situation, and many factors that contributed to the war are not present in other areas of the world. However, the theory could be used to explain a wide range of

disputed territories where each party had an incredibly strong attachment to the land. In cases like these, other international treaties may have created feelings of alienation among one of the communities involved, resulting in increased ethnic tension and a possibility of war.

One other field of research would regard other localized effects of the Accords. The resolution had a profound effect on both Albania and Kosovo. It would be interesting to examine possible impacts on other neighboring regions such as Bulgaria and Romania. While the effects may not be as profound as those on Albania and Kosovo, it would be interesting to compare and contrast the impacts between countries.

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