

## A Brief History of Kosovo

Kosovo is an international protectorate administered by the United Nations. While Kosovo is technically part of the country of Serbia, in 1999 the UN Security Council established the [United Nations Interim Mission in Kosovo](#) (UNMIK) to temporarily govern the province. A yearlong armed conflict had pitted Serbia's military against Kosovo's Albanian majority; more than 300,000 Albanians fled their homes, many to neighbouring countries. At first, to stop the hostilities, NATO initiated air strikes in March 1999. After Serbia capitulated in June of 1999, the NATO Kosovo force (KFOR) moved in and still remains to keep the peace.

Both Albanians and Serbs claim Kosovo as central to their culture and history. After the Ottomans defeated Serbia at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, they ruled the province for over five centuries until Serbia regained control in 1913. The province subsequently became part of the Yugoslav federation and enjoyed a degree of independence, although it remained part of Serbia. Despite an active nationalist movement, it was never recognized as a full republic within the federation.

In the late 1980s, with the crumbling of the Yugoslav federation on the horizon, President Slobodan Milosevic fanned the flames of Serbian nationalism by cracking down on Kosovo's persistent calls for independence — a change in the Constitution suspended the province's autonomy. By this point, population shifts had left Kosovo overwhelmingly Albanian, up to almost 90 per cent of Kosovo's roughly two million inhabitants, by some estimates. As civil war consumed Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1990s, Albanians in Kosovo, led by litterateur Ibrahim Rugova, retreated into political, educational and economic institutions they established parallel to those of the state. Serbia tolerated this situation until 1998, when fighting broke out between the clandestine Kosovo Liberation Army and Serb security forces.

In 2006, seven years after the arrival of the NATO force and the cessation of overt hostilities, the UN mission in Kosovo maintains legal authority over the province. It has supported social and economic development, and the formation of local governing structures, the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government, as a step towards negotiations to resolve Kosovo's future status.

Formal talks between Serbia and Kosovo began early in 2006 under a UN special envoy, former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari. While a resolution is predicted by the end of the year, both parties maintain diametrically opposed positions. Serbia is willing to consider anything except independence; Kosovo is prepared only for independence. A particular concern for the international community will be how to ensure that Kosovo remains secure for all who live there, including Serb, Roma and other minorities.