

**22. Kosovo One Year on;
Achievement and Challenge;
Secretary General of the NATO
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Introduction**

A year ago, NATO launched its airpower to end the repression in Kosovo and succeeded. In the blizzard of words that has followed it is easy to overlook that simple fact. Much is still misunderstood about what happened. Now is an appropriate time to look back on what NATO did during the conflict, to review what KFOR has achieved since, and to look ahead. The risks were high NATO faced many problems and the price was high. But as the Alliance promised at the time, Serb forces are out, KFOR is in, and the refugees are home. However, there should be no illusions the task remaining is formidable.

The crisis was a long time in the making and cannot be solved in a year. While an enormous amount has been achieved often unheralded no-one can be satisfied with the current situation. But for those who have doubts, the simple answer is to look at the alternatives. The OSCE report, *Kosovo/Kosova As Seen, As Told*, makes what happened appallingly clear, painting a shocking picture of a planned campaign of violence against Kosovar Albanian civilians. No-one was safe it says, "There is chilling evidence of the murderous targeting of children, with the aim of terrorizing and punishing adults and communities." If NATO had not acted, then that spiral of violence would have intensified, and the death toll escalated. There would now be many hundreds of thousands of refugees, with neighbouring countries under pressure and the whole region destabilised. Critics, including those who now criticise NATO for what it has done, would be condemning the Alliance for what it had not done.

The challenge now, and by no means just for NATO, is to complete the job. The air campaign and entry of KFOR have created a platform to build upon, but that requires resources and continuing commitment, or there is a risk that hard-won success could drift away. The people of Kosovo, and their leaders, must also seize the opportunities presented, or risk losing the goodwill and backing of the international community. It is ethnic hatred that has brought disaster in the past, and however hard, however bitter the memories, it must be set aside if the future is to be truly different.

It was Edmund Burke who said that for evil to triumph it is only necessary for good men to do nothing. In March last year, NATO's 19 nations acted. The following is my personal reflection on Kosovo one year on.

Background to the crisis

When NATO launched its air campaign, the situation in Kosovo was one of rising ethnic violence, suppression of democracy, a breakdown of law and order, systematic human rights abuses by the ruling authorities, and a refusal by the Belgrade government to seek, or accept, a political solution. At the same time, there was evidence that the government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was planning to escalate its campaign of repression. The international community could see a humanitarian disaster looming. Reluctantly, NATO decided to use force.

The conditions leading to this crisis were both long and short-term. The Balkans, on the historical fault-line between Ottoman and European cultures and religions, have long been a troubled area. Centuries of tension were followed by decades of authoritarian rule under President Tito, which suppressed, but did not find solutions to, these underlying tensions.

In Kosovo, the seeds of tragedy can be traced to the rise to power of Slobodan Milosovic, his now infamous speech at Kosovo Polje in 1987, and the revocation in 1989 of the autonomous status of the province, bringing it under the direct control of the government in Belgrade. In the years that followed, the majority population of Kosovo were progressively denied the right to govern their own affairs, to earn a living for themselves, to have access to the legal and judicial system, and to be able to educate their children in their own language and culture.

Initially, the Kosovar Albanians struggled to cope with this situation by peaceful means. The Serbs dominated the administrative structures and the Kosovar Albanian leadership eventually formed a kind of parallel “government”. It even held elections, and tried to provide the education and medical care the Albanians were denied by the Yugoslav government. Eventually, as peaceful opposition failed to yield results, some Kosovar Albanians took up arms and organised themselves into what became known as the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

The KLA was, in effect, a direct product of Serb repression. But the emergence of an armed Kosovar Albanian force was used by the Yugoslav authorities to justify yet more violence, further alienating and radicalising the population. As the situation in Kosovo deteriorated, the international community became increasingly concerned about the human rights situation and its potential to spread instability to neighbouring countries in the region.

International pressure is applied

In December 1997, NATO foreign ministers confirmed that NATO’s interest in stability in the Balkans extended beyond Bosnia and Herzegovina to the surrounding region, and expressed concern at the rising ethnic tension in Kosovo.

It is important to recall the enormous effort made by NATO and the international community to avoid military intervention over Kosovo, while making clear to President Milosevic its ultimate preparedness to use force, if necessary. Experience had taught that diplomacy without the threat of force would be wasted on him. In the spring of 1998, NATO ministers called on all parties to seek a peaceful resolution to the crisis, while directing the Alliance’s military authorities to prepare options for the use of force, should it prove necessary.

NATO's actions, including subsequent demonstration flights by NATO military aircraft, undoubtedly had an inhibiting effect on Yugoslav forces, but the KLA accelerated their own military action, ultimately resulting in a Serb counter-offensive in late summer, that was conducted in a typically indiscriminate manner. The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that well over 200,000 people were displaced as a result. Around 50,000 people were forced to camp out in the open, in increasingly bleak conditions. So in autumn 1998, a series of diplomatic initiatives were taken, including visits to Belgrade by NATO's Secretary General, Javier Solana, US Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke, the Chairman of NATO's Military Committee, General Klaus Naumann, and the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Wesley Clark. In September, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1199, which expressed the international community's concern about the excessive use of force by Serb security forces, highlighted the impending humanitarian catastrophe, and called for a cease-fire by both parties to the conflict.

To strengthen these initiatives the North Atlantic Council on 13 October authorised activation orders for air strikes against Yugoslavia, in a further attempt to convince President Milosevic to withdraw his forces from Kosovo and to co-operate in bringing an end to the violence.

As a result of this pressure, President Milosevic agreed to limits on the number of military and security forces within Kosovo, and their weaponry. He also accepted the deployment of an observer mission to the province led by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) and a NATO-led aerial observer mission. NATO also deployed a military task force to the region to assist, if necessary, in the emergency evacuation of the KVM.

Violence and repression in Kosovo escalates

Despite these measures, organised acts of violence, repression, provocation, and retribution continued on both sides, particularly on the part of Serb forces and paramilitaries. In its December 1999 report *Kosovo/Kosova As Seen, As Told* the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) estimates that as many as 350,000 Kosovars, overwhelmingly Albanian, but including some Serbs, were displaced from their homes by the end of 1998.

Any balanced analysis of the situation in Kosovo, particularly since 1998, would acknowledge that serious acts of violence and provocation were committed against the Serb population by Kosovar Albanians, and in particular by the KLA. By adding to the cycle of violence, they further reduced diminishing hopes of a peaceful outcome. However, as the OSCE/ODIHR report makes clear, the actions of the KLA paled in comparison to the premeditated, well-orchestrated, and brutally implemented campaign of violence and destruction conducted by the forces of the Yugoslav regime against the Kosovar Albanian population.

The massacre of 40 unarmed Kosovar Albanian civilians in the village of Racak on 15 January 1999, according to the OSCE/ODIHR report, "most graphically illustrates the descent into violence amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity". It shocked the international community and crystallised its resolve to find a solution to the crisis.

Other key events highlighted by the OSCE in the period leading up to the conflict were the killings of Kosovar Albanians by police at Rogovo and Rakovina later in January; the launch of “winter exercises” involving the shelling of villages and the forced expulsion of villagers in the Vucitrn municipality in February and March; a military and police offensive in Kacanik in February, which employed a tactic of burning and destroying civilian homes to allegedly clear the area of the KLA; and a violent police crack-down in an Albanian quarter of Pristina in early March, after the killing of two police officers. Alongside the killings in Racak, the OSCE/ODIHR report concludes that these events revealed “patterns of grave abuses by the Yugoslav and Serbian forces against the civilian population”.

The Rambouillet talks fail

By the end of January 1999, the Contact Group on the former Yugoslavia (France, Germany, Italy, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States) agreed to convene talks between the parties to the conflict. NATO supported this initiative by issuing a warning to both sides of the conflict and agreeing to the use of air strikes, if required. On 6 February, the parties met at Rambouillet, outside Paris, to discuss a peace agreement.

The talks lasted 17 days with a follow-on session in Paris in mid-March. The proposals offered both sides a great deal, but also required major concessions. The Kosovar Albanians were offered considerable autonomy, ensured by the presence of a NATO-led force, but no independence. The Serbs were asked to concede autonomy, but not sovereignty, with Kosovo’s ultimate status left open. Unfortunately, despite the enormous efforts of the international community and the decision by the Kosovar Albanian delegation to sign the Rambouillet Accords, the Yugoslav delegation refused to do so. It is clear the Yugoslav government never seriously sought a negotiated peace at Rambouillet.

Even while the discussions continued, the Yugoslav military and police forces were preparing to intensify their operations against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. In breach of the October 1998 agreements, they substantially raised the level of forces and weaponry in the province. During this period, the UNHCR, the OSCE and others reported frequently on the deteriorating human rights situation. After one final attempt by Richard Holbrooke to convince President Milosevic to reverse his policies, NATO Secretary General Javier Solana, knowing diplomacy had run its course, gave the order to commence Operation Allied Force.

This fateful decision followed months of intense political negotiation and calls on Yugoslavia by the United Nations, the Contact Group, the G8 countries, and others to halt the repression and acts of violence that were provoking an ever-worsening humanitarian crisis. The Yugoslav regime’s reckless disregard of these appeals and its campaign of terror against its own population, in direct violation of the most basic, internationally agreed standards of humanitarian conduct, and the failure of all diplomatic efforts to find a political solution, left NATO no option but to use force.

The aims of the air campaign

NATO had given President Milosevic clear warning of what would happen if the demands of the international community were ignored. The essence of coercive diplomacy is that a threat of force, to be credible, must be backed by real force if necessary. NATO was not bluffing.

On 12 April, by when it was clear that the Yugoslav government was embarked on a policy of mass forced expulsion of Kosovar Albanians, the North Atlantic Council confirmed the political justification for its decision as follows:

“The unrestrained assault by Yugoslav military, police and paramilitary forces, under the direction of President Milosevic, on Kosovar civilians has created a massive humanitarian catastrophe, which also threatens to destabilise the surrounding region. Hundreds of thousands of people have been expelled ruthlessly from Kosovo by the FRY authorities. We condemn these appalling violations of human rights and the indiscriminate use of force by the Yugoslav government. These extreme and criminally irresponsible policies, which cannot be defended on any grounds, have made necessary and justify the military action by NATO.

NATO’s military action against the FRY supports the political aims of the international community: a peaceful, multi-ethnic and democratic Kosovo in which all its people can live in security and enjoy universal human rights and freedoms on an equal basis.”

The OSCE/ODIHR report confirms that the expulsions by the Yugoslav and Serb forces were carried out “with evident strategic planning and in clear violation of the laws and customs of war”, and that “the violations inflicted on the Kosovo Albanian population after 20 March were a continuation of actions by Yugoslav and Serbian military forces that were well rehearsed, insofar as they were already taking place in many locations in Kosovo well before 20 March.” In early April, details were revealed of a covert Serb plan (Operation Horseshoe) to forcibly expel Kosovar Albanians from Kosovo that had been drawn up months beforehand.

In undertaking the air campaign, NATO made clear the actions expected of President Milosevic and his regime to bring a halt to this action:

1. ensure a verifiable stop to all military action and the immediate ending of violence and repression;
2. ensure the withdrawal from Kosovo of the military, police and paramilitary forces;
3. agree to the stationing in Kosovo of an international military presence;
4. agree to the unconditional and safe return of all refugees and displaced persons and unhindered access to them by humanitarian aid organisations;
5. provide credible assurance of his willingness to work on the basis of the Rambouillet Accords in the establishment of a political framework agreement for Kosovo in conformity with international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

When these conditions were met by President Milosevic, the North Atlantic Council, through the Secretary General, agreed to suspend air operations on 10 June 1999. Throughout the conflict, NATO made clear on many occasions that it was not conducting a campaign to defeat Serbia or the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and was not making war on the Serb people. This was not a war.

It was a careful operation to disrupt the Yugoslav campaign of violence in Kosovo by attacking proportionately and appropriately the military machine that was conducting these attacks. The Alliance engaged in this campaign only to convince President Milosevic to comply with the reasonable demands set out above. The end result was a far worse settlement for the Yugoslav government than had been on offer at Rambouillet.

NATO did not take the decision to use military force easily. It is a tribute to western democracies that they are so reluctant to take up arms. Balancing the concerns and priorities of 19 nations with differing domestic political pressures was an enormous challenge. Compromises were required which may have complicated the military task. But that was the necessary price of consensus, which lies at the very core of NATO. That is not a cause for regret, but pride. In a situation fraught with political risk, all NATO Allies agreed that action to prevent continuing repression in Kosovo was imperative, and that it was essential that NATO should prevail.

The conduct of the air campaign

The concept for Operation Allied Force envisaged a phased air campaign, designed to achieve NATO's political objectives with minimum force. The phases ranged from a show of force in the initial stages, to operations against Serb forces in Kosovo, expanding if necessary to targets throughout the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that supported the regime's ability to attack the civilian population of Kosovo. It had been hoped, but never assumed, that President Milosevic would quickly realise NATO's determination, and accept its demands. Instead, his campaign of ethnic cleansing escalated and, in response, NATO's leadership accelerated and strengthened its air campaign considerably.

Selecting targets

The air campaign set out to weaken Serb military capabilities, both strategically and tactically. Strikes on tactical targets, such as artillery and field headquarters, had a more immediate effect in disrupting the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo. Strikes against strategic targets, such as government ministries and refineries, had a longer-term and broader impact on the Serb military machine. Just over 38,000 combat sorties, including 10,484 strike sorties, were flown by Allied forces, with no Allied combat fatalities a remarkable achievement.

Initially, it was vital to defeat the Serb air defence network. This proved a tough challenge, as it was highly developed and had many mobile elements. But without air superiority, NATO would not have been able effectively to achieve its military objectives while protecting its own forces, and the ability of Allied forces to strike military targets precisely and minimise "collateral damage" would have been reduced. While NATO successfully suppressed the threat, it was never eliminated, requiring constant vigilance throughout the campaign.

The bulk of NATO's effort against tactical targets was aimed at military facilities, fielded forces, heavy weapons, and military vehicles and formations in Kosovo and southern Serbia. Many of these targets were highly mobile and hard to locate, especially during the poor weather of the early phase of the campaign. Strikes were also complicated by the cynical Serb use of civilian homes and buildings to hide weapons and vehicles, the intermixing of military vehicles with civilian convoys and, sometimes, the use of human shields.

In this way, NATO's concern to avoid civilian casualties was exploited by the Serbs. But the constant presence of NATO aircraft inhibited the Serbs by forcing them into hiding and frequently punishing them when they did venture out.

Strategic targets included Serb air defences, command and control facilities, Yugoslav military (VJ) and police (MUP) forces headquarters, and supply routes. NATO was sometimes criticised for such strikes, by those who said NATO's actions also risked both civilians and civilian property. In fact, the Alliance carefully selected targets based on their role in the Serb war effort. Facilities were only attacked when it was assessed that they made an effective contribution to the Yugoslav military effort and that their destruction offered a definite military advantage. Massive effort was made to minimise the impact of the air campaign on the Serb civilian population.

Minimising the risk to civilians

The selection of targets was carefully reviewed at multiple levels of command, as well as by the Allies carrying out the strikes. These reviews ensured they complied with international law, were militarily justified, and minimised the risk to civilian lives and property.

In fact, the concern to avoid unintentional damage was a principal constraining factor throughout. Many targets were not attacked because the risk to non-combatants was considered too high. But such restrictions did not alter the ultimate outcome. Modern technology, the skill of NATO's pilots, and control over target selection made it possible for the Alliance to succeed with remarkably few civilian casualties.

The actual toll in human lives will never be precisely known, but the independent group, Human Rights Watch, has estimated that there were 90 incidents involving civilian deaths, in which between 488 and 527 civilians may have lost their lives 87 of these at Korisa, where the Serb forces forced civilians to occupy a known military target. These figures are far lower than the 1,200-5,700 civilian deaths claimed by the Yugoslavs.

NATO deeply regrets any civilian casualties it caused, but these losses must be viewed in perspective against what NATO was seeking to prevent, and the actions of the Belgrade regime. Any historical study shows that Alliance aircrew set and achieved remarkably high standards. It is unrealistic to expect all risk to be eliminated. This is something that was well understood and was frequently stated openly by Kosovar Albanians themselves.

Despite cynical Serb attempts to exploit images of accidental civilian casualties from NATO air strikes, the Alliance held firm. President Milosevic calculated that if he held on long enough, it would weaken. He was wrong. The length of the air campaign did put stress on the Allies, but the unity and common purpose that lies at the core of NATO was equal to it. The steady increase in Allied airpower and effectiveness, and the realisation that NATO was holding together played a fundamental part in the Serb climb-down.

Progress in Kosovo since the conflict

Given the legacy of violence it is hardly surprising that the situation in Kosovo is far from settled and will require long-term engagement by the international community. But, while there are severe problems, there are many positive signs. Much has changed for the better since the deployment of KFOR.

Since the end of the air campaign, over 1,300,000 refugees have returned to their homes and villages: 810,000 from Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and other countries around the world, and 550,000 who were internally displaced within Kosovo. Crime, while still a major problem, has also fallen dramatically. For example, although still far too high, the murder rate has declined from over 50 per week in June 1999 to around five per week today.

In addition to carrying out its mission to establish and maintain a secure environment, KFOR is actively involved in helping the civilian community and the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to overcome the horrors of war, and establish the foundations for a peaceful, tolerant, multi-ethnic society in the future.

KFOR soldiers and the international community have cleared over 16,000 homes, 1,165 schools and almost 2,000 kilometres of roads of unexploded ordinance and mines. They have distributed over one million roofing tiles, 18,000 stoves and 4,000 truckloads of firewood to Kosovar homes and villages. Over 43,000 Kosovars have received medical treatment in KFOR medical facilities. Power stations, roads, bridges, and railroads have been repaired by KFOR engineers.

In addition, over 50 per cent of KFOR's manpower is currently dedicated to protecting the minority (mainly Serb) populations of Kosovo. This involves guarding homes and villages, transporting people to schools and shops, patrolling, monitoring checkpoints, protecting patrimonial sites and otherwise assisting local people.

It is important to always keep in mind the sheer scale of the recent tragedy in Kosovo, as well as the historical backdrop. The resulting physical and psychological wounds will take time to heal. There must be realism about what improvements can be expected in such a short time. NATO is determined to pursue its even-handed approach to all peoples of Kosovo and to support the goals set out by the international community in UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

The job is not yet done: Assessing remaining challenges

Of course, much remains to be done. In partnership with the international community and the people of Kosovo, we must now build on what has already been achieved. UN Security Council Resolution 1244 of 12 June 1999 lays down the responsibilities of the international community during its interim administration of Kosovo. This Resolution, as well as the Military Technical Agreement on the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces and NATO's own operational plan (OPLAN 10413, Operation Joint Guardian) form the basis for KFOR's responsibilities. These can be broken down into five main areas:

- deterring renewed hostility and threats against Kosovo by Yugoslav and Serb forces;
- establishing a secure environment and ensuring public safety and order;
- demilitarising the Kosovo Liberation Army;

- supporting the international humanitarian effort;
- coordinating with and supporting the international civil presence, the United Nation's Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

Detering renewed hostility and threats to Kosovo

Under the terms of the Military Technical Agreement signed by both NATO and Yugoslav commanders on 9 June 1999, Yugoslav Army and Interior Ministry Police forces withdrew from both Kosovo and a five kilometre wide Ground Safety Zone between the province and the rest of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This agreement now governs the relationship between KFOR and Yugoslav forces. In addition, the presence of about 40,000 well-equipped and well-trained troops in the region, mainly from NATO nations, acts as a powerful deterrent to renewed hostilities and ensure that Yugoslav forces pose no immediate threat to Kosovo.

KFOR is ready to meet any such threat should it arise. One unresolved issue is the return of an agreed, limited number of Yugoslav military and police personnel, as allowed, when conditions permit, under UN Security Council Resolution 1244. These limited forces would return for specific tasks related to mark and clear minefields, and provide a Serb presence at patrimonial sites and border crossings. KFOR will implement these provisions for the return of some Serb forces, when the time is right.

Maintaining security in Kosovo

The most daunting current challenge for KFOR is to maintain a safe and secure environment within Kosovo. On a positive note, security in Kosovo has improved markedly over the first nine months of KFOR's presence. The number of serious crimes has decreased sharply as a result of the strong action by KFOR in close co-operation with UNMIK police. KFOR soldiers conduct between 500 and 750 patrols each day, guarding over 500 key sites and manning over 200 vehicle checkpoints.

KFOR's efforts would be even more effective if Kosovo had a stronger international police presence and a properly functioning judicial system. But UNMIK has been severely hampered by a shortage of financial resources and personnel, particularly police. The lack of an effective court system makes it extremely hard to crack down on criminals, giving them a feeling of impunity. This in turn makes it harder to deal with the most serious public order problem in Kosovo, the security of minority populations. These issues need to be addressed urgently.

Improving the security of minorities is one of KFOR's chief priorities and a major cause for concern. In Pristina, for example, there are over 100 KFOR soldiers living with and guarding individual Serb families. KFOR soldiers regularly escort Serb and Roma children to school. In Mitrovica, the area of highest ethnic tension, KFOR is constantly seeking to ensure the security of minorities on both sides of the River Ibar.

KFOR is determined to ensure that all refugees and displaced persons are able to return to their homes. Sadly, a high proportion of the minorities, mainly Serbs, remain displaced, most having left during or immediately after the conflict, before KFOR had been deployed to protect the population.

Some have returned since then, and KFOR is totally committed to creating an environment in which Kosovars of all ethnic groups can live in peace. But the scale of the task is considerable. The embers of past injustices, real or imagined, can easily be rekindled within all communities in Kosovo. This means that there is unlikely to be any scaling-down in KFOR's task for some time to come. KFOR itself must therefore remain properly and fully resourced and manned.

NATO recognises that security is not just an internal issue. KFOR has put considerable effort into monitoring the international borders with Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia², and the provincial boundaries with Montenegro and Serbia.

Reintegrating KLA members into civilian life

KFOR's third major challenge was the demilitarisation of the Kosovo Liberation Army. One of the key challenges in any post-conflict situation is the reintegration of former fighters into civilian life. Ensuring the KLA's co-operation in the demilitarisation process would have been impossible to achieve without an accompanying transformation plan. KFOR was acutely aware of the need not just to remove their fighting capability (10,000 weapons were handed in by December last year), but also to help find jobs for former KLA fighters. Working closely with UNMIK and the UN Secretary General's Special Representative, Bernard Kouchner, one of KFOR's main efforts has been to create the Kosovo Protection Corps. The KPC is a civilian organisation designed to assist the people of Kosovo in the event of manmade or natural disasters and has no role in the maintenance of law and order. Once fully established, the KPC will be firmly under the authority of UNMIK, with day-to-day supervision carried out by KFOR.

The aim of KFOR and other international organisations is to see Kosovars become responsible for their community as a whole. But for this to happen, there is a heavy burden on the leaderships of all communities. They must publicly and privately stand against ethnic division and violence. Their commitment to the goal of a fair and multi-ethnic Kosovo must be totally unambiguous or they will risk undermining the commitment of the international community.

Supporting the international humanitarian effort

As well as maintaining security in Kosovo, KFOR is co-ordinating with and supporting the international civil administration under Dr Kouchner. Having learned some hard lessons from the Bosnian experience, KFOR and UNMIK have a close, co-operative relationship. In daily meetings, in joint planning, and in joint strategy sessions at all levels, KFOR and UNMIK are making the relationship work well.

KFOR and UNMIK especially UNMIK's first "pillar", the UNHCR have been working well together in building a humanitarian assistance programme. As a result of their efforts, combined with those of other non-governmental organisations, widespread suffering, disease and death over the winter months were prevented. Indeed, before winter, over 95 per cent of the planned winterisation programme was completed a tremendous achievement in the circumstances, that went virtually unnoticed. More remarkably, given the harshness of the Balkan climate, there have been no reported deaths over the winter caused by lack of food or shelter.

Other notable achievements include re-opening the schools. For the first time in 10 years, 300,000 children are being taught in their own language. This is just one sign of the slow return to peaceful life that large areas of Kosovo are now able to enjoy.

Assisting UNMIK

But the problem of insufficient resources pervades all that UNMIK tries to do. Successfully turning pledges into useable donations has proved to be a continuing challenge. With inadequate money for the basic building blocks of government wages for teachers, railway and municipal workers, judges and prosecutors, for example how can UNMIK establish an effective civil administration, and exert the will of the international community? It is in the international community's interest to provide the necessary resources, both personnel particularly police and funds to overcome the existing shortfalls. Governments, including NATO governments, must do more in this respect.

A just and necessary action

The abuse of human rights by the government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and the humanitarian disaster which NATO's intervention in Kosovo reversed, threatened to undermine the values on which the new Europe is being built. The Yugoslav regime's barbaric actions raised the spectre of instability spilling over to neighbouring countries, including derailing the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. If NATO had failed to respond to the policy of ethnic cleansing, it would have betrayed its values and cast permanent doubt on the credibility of its institutions. By facing up to President Milosevic's challenge, NATO nations confirmed that common values and respect for human rights are central to the Alliance and all the world's democracies.

NATO's success has not blinded the Alliance to the need to learn lessons from the conflict, and that process is continuing. The Kosovo campaign revealed gaps in NATO's military capabilities, especially in Europe, which need to be overcome. NATO is already acting through the Defence Capabilities Initiative (DCI) and through strengthening the European "pillar" of NATO by developing the European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI). NATO nations are already addressing these shortfalls. The challenge is to reorganise and re-equip our forces to make them more flexible, more mobile and more effective, and the need to do so is urgent. We cannot know when or where the next crisis will occur. The necessary resources must be provided.

Nevertheless, the air campaign achieved its goals in less than three months, with remarkably few civilian casualties, and no NATO combat casualties. The coalition held together and all states neighbouring the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia supported NATO's actions, despite the political and economic risks to their own countries. NATO will not forget this support. Nor will it forget the particular role played by Partnership for Peace nations, who were both steadfast and instrumental in achieving success, during the crisis and in its aftermath. Support for KFOR is widespread and today, there are 19 non-NATO nations actively participating in KFOR peacekeeping, including Russia, which is a key partner in keeping and maintaining a permanent peace.

NATO understands the fundamental importance of long-term success in the Balkans. It will not be easy. No-one should expect dramatic improvements overnight. Much has been done, and much remains to be done. NATO will remain firm in its resolve to pursue the humanitarian and democratic objectives we all share.

Could it have been done better?

It is a strength of our democracies that even when a military operation is successful and commands overwhelming international support, many will question whether it should have been undertaken on policy or legal grounds and, once undertaken, whether it should have been conducted differently. A year on, it is worth reviewing such criticism to try to present the issues fairly. The main questions raised about NATO's actions are as follows:

Did the international community insist on conditions that made a failure of the Rambouillet talks inevitable?

Some suggest that by insisting on a NATO-led international military force to oversee any settlement agreed at Rambouillet, the Contact Group made it impossible for the Yugoslav authorities to agree to the Accords, which would otherwise have been acceptable. It is further claimed that the rights of this force on Yugoslav territory would have been so extensive that the Serbs were bound to reject them.

It is true that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia resisted the idea of a NATO-led force to guarantee any agreement, however, President Milosevic's record speaks for itself. The international community had to take account of the fact that President Milosevic had repeatedly failed to honour previous agreements and that an international security presence was essential to guarantee that the Accords would be honoured. Also, without such a presence, the Kosovar Albanian side would not have given their agreement.

The rights such a force would have needed to operate on Yugoslav territory were based on a standard agreement on the status of forces that has been used on many other occasions. These rights were not raised as an issue at the time, and so cannot be blamed for the breakdown.

Despite the provision for an international security presence, the Rambouillet Accords recognised Yugoslav sovereignty over Kosovo and permitted a VJ and MUP presence and role in the province. The agreement, which provided for an interim status for the province for a period of three years, would have protected the rights of all sides. As a result of the Yugoslav government's refusal to negotiate in good faith, Serb forces were ultimately expelled from Kosovo a far worse outcome than had been on offer at Rambouillet.

Were NATO's actions legally justified without a mandate from the UN Security Council ?

Some argue that NATO should not have acted against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in Kosovo without a specific United Nations Security Council mandate. The Allies were sensitive to the legal basis for their action. The Yugoslavs had already failed to comply with numerous demands from the Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and there was a major discussion in the North Atlantic Council, during which the Council took the following factors into consideration:

- the Yugoslav government's non-compliance with earlier UN Security Council resolutions,
- the warnings from the UN Secretary General about the dangers of a humanitarian disaster in Kosovo,

- the risk of such a catastrophe in the light of Yugoslavia's failure to seek a peaceful resolution of the crisis,
- the unlikelihood that a further UN Security Council resolution would be passed in the near future,
- and the threat to peace and security in the region.

At that point, the Council agreed that a sufficient legal basis existed for the Alliance to threaten and, if necessary, use force against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Had NATO not acted, the Yugoslav regime would have continued its brutal repression of the Albanian population of Kosovo. Today those who survived the ethnic savagery and the ravages of the winter would still be living in refugee camps outside their country, and the region would have been condemned to continuing warfare and instability for years to come.

**Did the Alliance do enough to avoid “collateral damage”,
and did NATO planes fly too high to be effective?**

Some have suggested that, despite the low civilian casualties, NATO should still have done more to protect civilians. In fact, as explained above, NATO planners went to great lengths to minimise such risks, in keeping with the laws of armed conflict.

Apart from ensuring the relevance of each target to the military campaign, the kind of weapons used were chosen to reduce to an absolute minimum the risk of unintended damage. Targets were studied to determine the distance between the intended impact point and any civilian facilities. Timings of attacks were restricted to minimise the chance of civilians being nearby. Aircrew flew under strict rules of engagement, and were directed to break off any attack if they were worried there was too much risk of what is known as “collateral damage”. Despite all this, it was inevitable that some mistakes would occur and that weapon systems would sometimes malfunction. Top priority was given to investigating mistakes and applying any lessons learned.

The exact figures for civilian casualties in the air campaign will never be known, and NATO has had no access to target areas outside Kosovo. However, the independent group, Human Rights Watch, estimates there were 90 incidents involving civilian fatalities, which suggests that less than one per cent of the 10,484 NATO strike sorties led to civilian deaths.

Critics argue that measures to reduce the risks to our aircrew, which prevented them operating below certain altitudes, made it harder to find targets and decreased bombing accuracy. This is not the case. Modern weapon systems can strike from great ranges and heights with extreme accuracy. As aircrew themselves have pointed out, flying above most enemy air defences allowed time to properly identify targets, even circling them, before striking. It is not even true that all strikes were conducted from high levels. As the campaign developed, and conditions allowed, some aircraft operated down to 6,000 feet. A balance had to be struck between the risks taken, and the likely results. Poor weather and the need to avoid unintended damage were both far more important targeting constraints than operating heights.

Ultimately, air-power achieved its goals. In contrast, the Serb strategy failed. They had hoped to outlast NATO and to inflict losses that would undermine public support in Allied countries. Their inability to do so was one of the failures that in the end forced them to accept the international community's demands.

Was NATO's bombing campaign poorly conceived and executed?

Some argue that NATO's air campaign should have been more aggressive, striking at the heart of power in Belgrade at an earlier stage, while others have criticised NATO's decision not to deploy ground troops for an invasion of Kosovo.

Such a debate is theoretical NATO won with the strategy it used. Airpower worked. We must not forget that NATO decided to employ military force to achieve limited political objectives to end the violence and repression not to militarily defeat Yugoslavia. As mentioned elsewhere, President Milosevic's only hope was to divide the Alliance, so any NATO strategy had to preserve Alliance unity and to reflect the democratic wishes of all 19 nations. Avoiding unnecessary suffering among the Serb population was also vital in maintaining public and international support for NATO's actions.

As the Serb repression in Kosovo accelerated, NATO responded quickly to intensify the air campaign. And as the air campaign lengthened other military options were seriously discussed at NATO and in national capitals. Nations were understandably reluctant to launch a ground invasion, which would have been time-consuming, difficult and expensive, in terms of lives as well as money and equipment. Nevertheless, many believe that NATO would have taken this step if necessary. It is probable that President Milosevic came to believe that we would do so, if necessary, and this may have been one of the reasons for his capitulation.

Did NATO deliberately mislead the public concerning the success of its air strikes against Serb forces in Kosovo?

There is still debate over the amount of Serb weapons and equipment destroyed. Numbers cited are often contradictory and unsubstantiated. For its part, the Alliance and individual member nations have extensively studied the air campaign's effectiveness to learn the lessons. On 16 September 1999, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Wesley Clark, briefed the press on the findings of NATO's Kosovo Mission Effectiveness Assessment Team. During this briefing, he said NATO carried out successful strikes against 93 tanks, 153 armoured personnel carriers (APCs), 339 military vehicles and 389 artillery pieces and mortars.

In June, with the conflict still underway, it was estimated 120 tanks, 314 artillery pieces and 203 APCs had been struck. Given the extreme difficulty of judging results during combat, and without access on the ground, these figures stand comparison with later assessments, and show how hard NATO tried to give accurate information during the conflict. It should also be noted that although this still left the Serbs with many hundreds of armoured vehicles in Kosovo, they had mostly been hidden throughout the conflict.

Relying on numbers also misses the point. When General Clark was asked how many targets NATO destroyed he simply replied: "Enough." Overall, NATO's air campaign forced President Milosevic to accede to the demands of the international community, achieving the Alliance's political objectives.

This is the ultimate measure of NATO's success.

Did NATO's air campaign itself cause the ethnic cleansing it intended to stop?

Some claim the brutal ethnic cleansing, violence and refugee exodus was precipitated by NATO's air campaign. The facts do not support this. President Milosevic's ethnic cleansing in Kosovo was well prepared and rehearsed, as the OSCE/ODIHR report shows. It was preceded by a military build-up that was underway even as the Rambouillet talks were in progress. Later intelligence showed that he had a pre-planned strategy (Operation Horseshoe) to drive the Kosovar Albanian population out of Kosovo.

What we also know is that he tried to implement this brutal strategy of ethnic cleansing, but failed. Those refugees are now home. Instead of hiding in hills, sitting in refugee camps, or being scattered throughout Europe, the vast majority of Kosovar Albanians were brought home within months. In comparison, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are still an estimated one-third of a million refugees, with over twice that number internally displaced. The firm and timely response of NATO and the international community stopped a vicious spiral of violence in its tracks.