

## **THE DIPLOMATIC, MILITARY AND HUMANITARIAN ROLE OF FRANCE AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE PEACE AND FREEDOM IN KOSOVO**

### **From the Rambouillet Conference to the deployment of NATO peacekeeping forces in Kosovo (February 6-June 12, 1999)**

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#### **Abstract:**

Kosovo is currently the youngest country in Europe. In this country, in 1999, took place the last war of the twentieth century. Serbia, for ten consecutive years (1989-1999), had denied Albanians of all their legitimate rights. The main objective of Serbia's conflict in Kosovo was ethnic cleansing. However, the Great Powers, including France, ultimately refrained from allowing it to happen. The French assumed command of this conflict and contributed significantly on the political, military, and humanitarian fronts. Additionally, they are credited for coming up with the idea for the Rambouillet Conference (February 6-23). NATO launched war on Serbia as a result of the Yugoslav Delegation's refusal to ratify the "Interim Agreement on Peace and Self-Government in Kosovo" (March 18, 1999, Paris). By order of the President of the Republic and in accordance with the Government, France joined its allies in this war from March 24 to June 12, 1999. Additionally, it made a noteworthy contribution in the humanitarian field. President Chirac, Prime Minister Jospin, Foreign Minister Védrine, and Defense Minister Richard were in charge of all of these promises. Additionally, the press and television were entirely devoted to promoting freedom and peace in opposition to all forms of cruelty and brutality. In the midst of such a catastrophe of worldwide proportions, several famous French figures also spoke out. The French government and other Western Powers made a significant contribution to Kosovo's liberation on June 12, 1999, and its subsequent declaration of independence on February 17, 2008. After that, numerous nations, including France, recognized its independence.

**Keywords:** NATO, conflict, Kosovo, France, Serbia, and the Rambouillet Conference.

Kosovo is the youngest nation in Europe at the moment. In 1999, the last war of the twentieth century took place in Kosovo. According to French President Jacques Chirac, it was a war, “*between barbarism and democracy, it was a real war for the sake of peace and for human rights on our continent ...*” Serbia denied Albanians all of their legal rights for ten years, from 1989 to 1999. The treatment of Albanians violently has become the norm. Serbian military,

police, and paramilitary forces utilized all forms of brutality without discrimination, including systematic village destruction, arbitrary arrests, and mass deportations. Serbian forces bombed and badly destroyed 398 of Kosovo's 945 villages between February and October 1998 alone. They also burned and damaged 23044 homes, killed 1215 people, and injured hundreds more. 230,000 Albanians were driven from their homes in the autumn of 1998, with

50,000 of them being relocated. The real goal of Serbia's war in Kosovo was to terrorize and drive out the Albanian population. In 1999, Milosevic was implementing an old idea—the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo—that he had turned into a specialized project. The Great Powers did not permit this. This was also not permitted by France, which had played a crucial part in the advancement of civilization and significant events on a worldwide scale over the centuries and continues to do so today. France jumped into the lead of this conflict right away.

The French Foreign Minister Védérine and the German Foreign Minister Kinkel issued a letter to President Milosevic on November 19, 1997, pleading with him to grant Kosovo a special status in an effort to stop the situation from worsening as a result of the atrocities committed by Serbia. Belgrade refused. France played a significant role in the Contact Group's unanimity in reaction to such violent acts when the unrest broke out in late February and early March 1998. The Contact Group issued a second ultimatum to President Milosevic while imposing the first sanctions against Belgrade during a cabinet meeting in London on March 9. Resolution 1160 of the United Nations Security Council would ratify the arms embargo (March 31). On June 8, 12, and 15, 1998, fresh sanctions—including an air embargo and a freeze on Serbian investments—were also put in place. The French government then suggested utilizing the threat of employing force to bolster diplomacy because the violence had not abated. The Security Council voted on Resolution 1199 on September 24 in New York after France offered a draft resolution in July. Due to Yugoslavia's reluctance to carry out the terms of these two decisions, the NATO Council was compelled to impose the Activation Orders on October 13, 1998. Yugoslavia was compelled to sign agreements with NATO authorizing the establishment of an air mission to verify the withdrawal of Yugoslav security forces

from Kosovo (on October 16) and the OSCE on the establishment of the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) to ensure the implementation of Security Council resolutions. In the interim, the Contact Group, the Security Council, and a ministerial gathering in Paris led by Mr. Védérine endorsed these arrangements (with resolution 1203, voted on 24 October). But Serbian forces continued their repressive activities throughout the winter.

The final effort to come to an agreement between the parties was made by France. France had proposed the notion of gathering the parties in a private location to discuss a resolution in this situation. The European Union's newly elected president, France, wanted that the negotiations take place within the confines of the Contact Group and on its soil. Six members of the Contact Group, including Igor Ivanov, who represented Russia, declared that the peace negotiations would start on February 6 during a meeting in London on January 29, 1999. In fact, it is what took place.

The Kosovo Albanian Delegation, led by Hashim Thaçi, and the Yugoslav Delegation (Serbia-Montenegro), led by Nikola Pašić, the Deputy Prime Minister of Yugoslavia, began negotiations on February 6, 1999, in the Rambouillet Castle outside of Paris. The US ambassador Christopher Hill, the EU ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch, and the Russian ambassador Boris Majorski served as the Contact Group's mediators. The "Interim Agreement for Peace and Self-Government in Kosovo" is the main Rambouillet agreement. The discussions at Rambouillet continued through February 23. While FYR President Milosevic ridiculed and denigrated the Great Powers, on the other hand, the Kosovo delegation declared in Rambouillet on February 23 that although they considered the agreement to have been signed in theory, they needed at least two weeks to discuss with their people before making a definitive decision. The negotiations went on from March 15 to March 18 in Paris. An interim peace deal

was signed by the Kosovar delegation on the final day, March 18, 1999, in Paris., the Yugoslav delegation, however, obstinately refused to follow suit with their counterparts.. The Contact Group did everything it could to resolve the problem on a political level, but it was unsuccessful. The process then advanced to a military level. The enormous tragedy that the people of Kosovo were going through made the use of force absolutely necessary. This is further supported by the newspaper "Le Monde" headline from March 30, 1999, "Milosevic Weapon," which claimed that Serbia was committing ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.

Whereas, on April 20, 1999, Serbian forces were allegedly committing crimes against humanity, as claimed in the journalist I. Lasserre article titled "How Milosevic cleared Kosovo" that was published in "Le Figaro". The situation in Kosovo is best illustrated by the drawings on the front page of the newspaper "Le Monde".

The Euro-Atlantic Alliance was therefore launched. At 6:50 p.m. on March 24, 1999, NATO formally declared war on Serbia. By order of the Republic's President and in accordance with the Government, France joined its allies in this conflict beginning on March 24 and continuing until June 12.



(First picture: Drawing regarding the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia. Le Monde, 25/03/1999)

According to a survey done for the newspaper "Le Parisien," 55% of French respondents supported of NATO striking Serbia, while according to a different IPSOS survey, popular support for NATO attacks was substantially greater, reaching 70%. According to Prime Minister Jospin, this battle is being fought: ... *for the sake*

*and in the name of freedom and justice, because international peace and security was being threatened by the Milosevic regime, which had violated the rules of international law.* Two principal objectives were sought to be accomplished through this war: first, to halt the humanitarian crisis; and, second, to compel Milosevic to

withdraw his security troops from this land in light of the numerous atrocities perpetrated there. Serbia's rejection to ratify the accord put out by the Contact Group prompted this war (whose members were the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia and Italy).

However, the 1999 NATO operation was conducted in cooperation with the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), according to General Michael Jackson, then the British Army's Chief of General Staff and KFOR commander. There are also rumors that President Chirac and Defense Minister Alain Richard supported the KLA covertly, despite the latter's public denials that the KLA was a source of instability.

The United States and the Alliance's first European partner were the two countries that contributed the most money to this bombing operation, followed by France. 98 of the 786 Alliance aircraft that were utilized in these operations were French.

In comparison to Italy, the United Kingdom, and Germany, which all activated less than 10% of their air capacity at the height of the bombing campaign, the French carried out 12–13% of offensive missions, 20% of intelligence missions, but only 8% of air defense missions. The French also carried out 12–13% of offensive missions. Additionally, between 1263 and 1675 bombing missions were conducted. These missions involved the use of the following types of aircraft: Mirage 2000 D, Mirage F1CT, Jaguar, Super Etendard; Mirage 2000 RDI; Mirage IVP, Mirage F1 CR, Etendard IVP, Alizé; AWACS, Refueller C 135 FR. The French gave a major contribution to the transport and support missions (21.8%), reconnaissance missions (20.2%) and offensive missions (12.8%).

Beginning on December 7, 1998, 500 troops from the French Army were stationed at Kumanovo, Macedonia. Their number climbed to 1,160 in February, and by mid-March 1999, it had reached 2,340, taking the shape of a brigade. General Valentin oversaw the two battalions that

made up this brigade. Additionally, France assisted with the immediate welcome of refugees, the management of camps, the placement (installation) of tents, the establishment of hygienic conditions, the distribution of food and water, the provision of regions in need, as well as the provision of medical assistance. This brigade established and oversaw the Stankovec camp, which is close to Skopje, to house refugees from Kosovo in Macedonia. It was a transit camp that had been set up using French military equipment. It had a surface area of more than 30 hectares. French forces were the first to set up this camp awaiting the arrival of 12,000 Kosovars, who had been traveling for many days and nights and were fatigued. They made the scene safe and rendered first assistance. Thanks to a system that could hold more than 10,000 people and deliver adequate food for everyone, they were able to set up more than 350 tents. In the Macedonian reception camps, the French collaborated with the British. In Albania, they also worked with the Italians and the Germans. The French took over the command of the Southern Task Force in Southern Albania (Elbasan, Korça, Fier, and Gramsh) as part of Operation "Allied Shelter." Their base was in Elbasan, and Colonel Gros oversaw its operations there. It included a battalion of 900 French soldiers, roughly 167 Greeks, 100 Danes, and the remaining 48 soldiers came from the United Arab Emirates.

The members of this battalion worked to establish livable (suitable) circumstances for the housing of refugees and the distribution of supplies.

It took care of building new camps while also considering the refugees' way of life, recreating a rural feel (paths, locations, gathering spots, parking of tractors, etc.) to make their living space as livable as possible. They were able to adjust to these circumstances as gently as possible because to the design of these camps.

From 1 to 30 April, this system of the French armed forces, set up and controlled by the Inter Armées Operations Center in

Paris, had allowed for the delivery of more than 1,000,000 meals (rations), as well as the construction of housing for more than 4000 refugees. On May 28, the total weight of humanitarian cargo being transported to Tirana and Skopje was 1,030 tons and 450 tons, respectively. The majority of these activities were concentrated between April 1 and May 5.. Without a question, all of this was expensive. From March 24 through June 1999, this operation cost the French government 400 million francs per month, according to Defense Minister Alain Richard. With the initial payment in Macedonia included, the total came to around 1,400 million francs.

The following are the costs associated with the various phases: A total of 260 million Swiss francs were spent on the deployment of forces from December 1998 to March 1999. A total of 1,011 million francs, or 92 million francs per week, were spent on the air war from March 24 to June 10, 1999. A total of 63 million francs were spent on military assistance for humanitarian efforts. As a result, the total expenditure was 1,334 million francs. These figures do not, however, encompass all of France's efforts in this area.

Additionally, the French government had established a process that permitted French families and towns to temporarily accept refugees. France took part in the UNHCR-requested evacuation of Kosovar refugees from camps in Macedonia. A total of 6,300 people were formally welcomed, both voluntarily and in accordance with predetermined standards. The French government, in contrast to other European nations, did not impose quotas that restricted the number of immigrants who might be accommodated. Other refugees arrived simultaneously on their own initiative ("spontaneous arrival"). More than 8,300 refugees were reportedly brought in over the course of eight weeks, or at least 2,000 of them, according to estimates. According to some, this was the French nation's greatest significant hospitality undertaking.

Humanitarian efforts by the international community and the Albanian government to successfully carry out the measles and polio vaccination campaign started in the prefectures of Kukës and Has for Kosovar refugee children were largely led by the French assistance. 50,000 doses of measles vaccines from the French manufacturer Merieux were delivered to Tirana specifically for this reason. In close collaboration with the Albanian medical authorities, OMS, and UNICEF, a Bioforce medical team made up of physicians and nurses took part in this immunization program. In addition to making repeated requests for aid, a number of humanitarian associations also opened bank accounts to receive financial support. For their significant efforts, "Médecins Sans Frontières" (MSF), "Action contre la faim," and "Le Comité Français pour l'Unicef" should also be acknowledged. In the interim, "Est-Libertée" established an aid organization called "Est - Libertés - Kosovo."

Together with the Emergency Cell of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Lorraine District Council had also taken the initiative to organize the industrialists, significant agri-food producers, and transportation firms in the area to gather and convey humanitarian aid. The non-governmental organization "Secours Populaire Français" ("French Popular Aid"), well-known for its work within the framework of the French and international commitment to deal with the emergency brought on by the mass deportation of Kosovars to Albania and Macedonia, made a special contribution. President Chirac, Prime Minister Jospin, Foreign Minister Védrine, and Defense Minister Richard were at the forefront of all these promises. To properly grasp what their true devotion was, one only needs to read the statements and interviews that were broadcast on television and in the press. Because of these, it is also simple to comprehend what France's official viewpoint was about the conflict in Kosovo, as well as its dedication,

involvement, and contribution. The Minister of Defense was also very concerned with the situation in Kosovo. In opposition to all forms of cruelty and barbarism, the media (press and television) were likewise fully backed and placed at the service of peace and freedom. In the French press, articles about the war in Kosovo appeared virtually every day. It is important to mention "Le Monde" and "Libération" in this context." "Le Figaro", "Le Parisien", the weekly "Le Journal de Dimanche" etc. Additionally, a lot of well-known French people had expressed their opinions on the situation in Kosovo. On March 12, the daily Libération published a public appeal titled "Sauvez le Kosovo" (Save Kosovo!) that was put together by a number of well-known French individuals who wanted to take a strong stance against Milosevic's policies in Kosovo and in favor of the right of the Albanian people in Kosovo to self-determination. While serving as the MSF Foundation's head of studies at the time, Rony Brauman, a former president of the French chapter of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), joined a number of other well-known individuals in signing this Public Call, including Ismail Kadare, a writer from Albania.

In the interim, virtually the whole civilized world had firmly responded and demanded an end to the crimes carried out by the Milosevic regime. Due to the fact that the number of people dead and missing by Serbian forces was growing daily, public opinion had responded and had done so forcefully. About 13,000 people were slain or butchered during the time frame of 1 January 1998 to 14 June 1999 alone, while 850,000 Albanians were forcibly ejected from Kosovo and sent to Albania and Macedonia. According to the respected Human Rights Watch, war crimes in Kosovo were committed by the Yugoslav army, Serbian police, and Serb paramilitaries.

These savvy political and diplomatic stances, as well as the military and humanitarian efforts of France and other Western Powers, ultimately forced the Milosevic government to succumb. The Kumanovo Agreement, which calls for the removal of all Yugoslav forces from Kosovo, was agreed on June 9. The Security Council passed Resolution 1244 on June 10, 1999, creating an international civilian government and deploying forces to Kosovo. A NATO peacekeeping force known as KFOR with over 40,000 soldiers, including the Multinational Brigade North with 8,000 French soldiers, entered Kosovo on June 12, 1999. The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) was founded in accordance with Resolution 1244, and Bernard Kouchner, a French doctor, served as its first Chief Administrator. He was responsible with assisting the political process that would determine Kosovo's future status in accordance with the Rambouillet agreement as the senior international civilian authority. Kosovo was freed on June 12, 1999, and on February 17, 2008, it was proclaimed an independent nation. Many nations around the world, including France, acknowledged it right away. This independence, in the opinion of former Kosovo top administrator Bernard Kouchner, was a significant victory for both Europe and the international community. It took a long time and was difficult. Without a question, France performed a unique role and made a significant contribution to this process. The Rambouillet Conference would not have been possible without its essential role and participation. There would have been little more NATO intervention without the Rambouillet Conference. Nobody knows how long it would take for Kosovo and its people to experience peace and freedom in the absence of NATO intervention. Without a doubt, neither independence nor enduring peace in Europe or the Balkans would exist.

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