**NATO Intervention in Kosovo**

By Kennedy Hickman, About.com

**Conflict:**

Operation Allied Force was part of the Kosovo War.

**Dates:**

The NATO involvement (Operation Allied Force) in the Kosovo War lasted from March 24 to June 10, 1999

**Armies & Commanders:**

**NATO**

* General Wesley Clark (USA), Supreme Allied Commander Europe
* Admiral James O. Ellis (USA), Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces Southern Europe
* 1,000+ aircraft

**Yugoslavia**

* Slobodan Milosevic
* Dragoljub Ojdanic
* 85,000-114,000 men (20,000 in Kosovo)

**Conflict Summary:**

In 1998, the long-simmering conflict between the Slobodan Miloševic's Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Liberation Army erupted into full-scale fighting. Battling to end Serbian oppression, the KLA also sought independence for Kosovo. On January 15, 1999, Yugoslav forces massacred 45 Kosovar Albanians in the village of Racak. News of the incident sparked global outrage and led NATO to issue an ultimatum to Miloševic's government calling for an end to the fighting and Yugoslavian compliance with the demands of the international community.

Ušće Tower on fire, 1999 Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

To settle the issue, a peace conference opened at Rambouillet, France with NATO Secretary General Javier Solana serving as a mediator. After weeks of talks, the Rambouillet Accords were signed by the Albanians, United States, and Great Britain. These called for NATO administration of Kosovo as an autonomous province, a force of 30,000 peacekeepers, and free right of passage through Yugoslav territory. These terms were refused by Miloševic, and the talks quickly broke down. With the failure at Rambouillet, NATO prepared to launch air strikes to force the Yugoslavian government back to the table.

Dubbed Operation Allied Force, NATO stated that their military operations were undertaken to achieve:

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* A stop to all military action and repression in Kosovo
* The withdrawal of all Serbian forces from Kosovo
* Agreement to the presence of an international peacekeeping force in Kosovo
* The unconditional and safe return of all refugees and unhindered access to them by humanitarian organizations
* A credible assurance from Miloševic's government that it was willing to work on the basis of the Rambouillet Accords in creating an acceptable political framework for the future of Kosovo

Once it was demonstrated that Yugoslavia was adhering to these terms, NATO stated that their air strikes would cease. Flying from bases in Italy and carriers in the Adriatic Sea, NATO aircraft and cruise missiles began attacking targets on the evening on March 24, 1999. The first strikes were conducted against targets in Belgrade and were flown by aircraft from the Spanish Air Force. Oversight for the operation was delegated to the Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces Southern Europe, Admiral James O. Ellis, USN. Over the next ten weeks, NATO aircraft flew over 38,000 sorties against Yugoslav forces.

While Allied Force began with surgical attacks against high-level and strategic military targets, it was soon expanded to include Yugoslavian forces on the ground in Kosovo. As air strikes continued into April, it became clear that both sides had misjudged their opposition's will to resist. With Miloševic refusing to comply with NATO demands, planning began for a ground campaign to expel Yugoslav forces from Kosovo. Targeting was also expanded to include dual-use facilities such as bridges, power plants, and telecommunications infrastructure.

Early May saw several errors by NATO aircraft including the accidental bombing of a Kosovar Albanian refugee convoy and a strike again the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. Sources have subsequently indicated that the latter may have been intentional with the goal of eliminating radio equipment being used by the Yugoslav army. As NATO aircraft continued their attacks, Miloševic's forces worsened the refugee crisis in the region by forcing Kosovar Albanians from the province. Ultimately, over 1 million people were displaced from their homes, increasing NATO's resolve and support for its involvement.

As the bombs fell, Finnish and Russian negotiators continuously worked to end the conflict. In early June, with NATO preparing for a ground campaign, they were able to convince Miloševic to give in to the alliance's demands. On June 10, 1999, he agreed to NATO's terms, including the presence of a United Nations peacekeeping force in Kosovo. Two days later, Kosovo Force (KFOR), led by Lieutenant General Mike Jackson (British Army), which had been staging for an invasion, crossed the border to return to peace and stability to Kosovo.

**Aftermath**

Operation Allied Force cost NATO two soldiers killed (outside of combat) and two aircraft. Yugoslavian forces lost between 130-170 killed in Kosovo, as well as five aircraft and 52 tanks/artillery/vehicles. Following the conflict, NATO agreed to allow the United Nations to supervise the administration of Kosovo and that no independence referendum would be permitted for three years. As a result of his actions during the conflict, Slobodan Miloševic was indicted for war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. He was overthrown the following year. On February 17, 2008, after several years of negotiations at the UN, Kosovo controversially declared independence. Operation Allied Force is also notable as the first conflict in which the German Luftwaffe took part since World War II.