

## IR Theory in Practice Case Study: The 1999 Kosovo Crisis

### Section 1: Realist IR Theory and the 1999 Kosovo Crisis

*From reading Chapter 6 of The Globalization of World Politics (7e.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of Realist International Relations (IR) theory. You are advised to consult this crucial chapter if you have not done so already as its contents will not be repeated here.*

*Where you see bracketed chapter references, for example (see Ch.4), this refers to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics (7e.).*

### Introduction

There are many ways in which the 1999 Kosovo crisis might pose a challenge to traditional IR realism. These will become apparent to you from reading the Liberalism, Marxism, Constructivist, and Poststructuralist theory sections of this case study. However, the purpose of this section is to suggest ways in which the insights you will have learnt from Chapter 6 of *The Globalization of World Politics* (7e.) illustrate important aspects of the Kosovo crisis from a Realist perspective. By no means can the following be an exhaustive survey of the possible ways Realist international theory might help us think about the Kosovo crisis.

In this case, we will briefly focus on **1) the security dilemma, 2) the role of US power, and 3) the continuing relevance of military force in the international system.**

### 1) The Security Dilemma and 'Inter-Ethnic Rivalry'

At the end of the Cold War, the idea that *intra*-state violence in the form of civil war and ethnic conflict was rising became increasingly prevalent. Although this may not be an accurate picture of the dynamics of conflict - after all, we know that wars in the "periphery" did not cease during the Cold War - the explanations for the rise of "ethnic conflict" have varied. One common explanation argues that the end of superpower patronage of small authoritarian regimes created a lack of financial and ideological support for Communist governments, exacerbating civil unrest. In Yugoslavia, the death of long-time leader Josef Tito, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the democratic revolutions sweeping East and Central Europe, meant that allegedly old ethnic antagonisms stifled under communism could now burst to the surface. The result was a breakdown of order, "emerging anarchy" (absence of sovereignty) and, according to some, a context where the traditional realist concept of the "security dilemma" came into play.

Recall the discussion of survival and self-help in chapter 6 of the book. The security dilemma is when an action designed to enhance one's own security causes others to feel less secure (see ch.15). Physical security, rather than economic security or democracy, becomes the primary concern of the group. According to realist Barry Posen, emerging anarchy forces groups to consider three questions concerning their power relative to

bordering groups. 1) "Are they a threat? How much of a threat?" 2) "Will the threat grow or diminish over time?" 3) "Is there anything that must be done immediately?" The answer, according to Posen, will determine the probability of war as they reveal potential "windows of [group] vulnerability and opportunity" (1993: 34).

**Box 1.1: The Security Dilemma and Inter-Ethnic Conflict**

Islands of one group's population are often stranded in a sea of another.... These islands may not be able to help one another; they may be subject to blockade and siege... Thus, the brethren of the stranded group may come to believe that only rapid offensive military action can save their irredenta from a horrible fate.

*Barry Posen, 'The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict', p.32*

What can this tell us about Kosovo? The massive expulsion of Kosovar refugees shows that large military forces are not required to drive out unarmed civilians. Exposure of civilians, coupled with the "fanatic" nature and small size of the bands of fighters (described by Posen as part of the political and military history of the region) provide incentives for the initiation of violent conflict. Accordingly, it is the solidarity and "groupness" of ethnic communities emerging from Yugoslavia's collapsed structures that endow them with "inherent offensive military power" (1993: 29), and not the nature of ethnic group identities or political manipulations by nationalistic elites. Rather, this inherent offensive power makes military offence (hardware and intentions) difficult to distinguish from military defence, particularly in the context of historical traditions of inter-group violence.

## 2) The Power of the United States

From chapter 7 of *The Globalization of World Politics* (7e.), you will be aware of the important role played by international institutions, norms and law in Liberal IR theory. According to Realism, however, these institutions and "norms" are less significant than the powerful states that create them and whose interests they principally serve.

The ineffectiveness of the United Nations in the run up to NATO's military intervention is illustrative. The virtual inevitability of a veto from Russia and China meant that NATO did not seek UN Security Council permission to bomb the Former Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). Since then, the legality of bombing of Belgrade has been a contentious topic. Even though the Security Council did not authorize intervention, some suggest that NATO's action established customary international law justifying intervention to prevent gross violations of human rights.

Realism, however, dismisses this legal debate in favour of the contention that law is a product of politics and power politics rules the anarchic international system of states. Therefore, once the US, Britain and France had decided to intervene, there was relatively little the UN and weakly institutionalized international legal system could do to prevent it. The Kosovo intervention demonstrated the global hegemony of the United States and consolidated the view that in the international system force remains the final arbiter.

Although aircraft from thirteen countries participated in NATO operations to expel Yugoslav forces from Kosovo between March 24 and June 10, 1999, these operations were dominated by American military might. Of 38,400 sorties, the US conducted 60%, and over 80% of the 10,484 strike sorties (*Kosovo Report*, p.92). American intelligence capabilities, technical expertise, and military equipment stood head and shoulders above the rest, especially in the "hi-tech" dimensions of the campaign. In what was ostensibly a multilateral intervention, the US refused to allow its soldiers to be placed under the command of any other NATO member and was far from generous in sharing military intelligence with its NATO allies. From a realist perspective, US advantages in material power translated into these favourable outcomes.

**Box 1.2: Neo-Classical Realism on Kosovo 1999**

Humanitarian war has no future. If NATO's assault on Serbia over Kosovo in 1999 was the first case in history of this oxymoronic phenomenon, it is likely also to be the last. Kosovo 1999 did not herald a Brave New World... Instead, Kosovo 1999 illustrates yet again why the tenets and lore of (neo-) classical realism deserve their authority.

*Colin Gray, 'No Good Deed Should Go Unpunished', p. 302.*

To paraphrase Thucydides, the weak Serbs submitted to the will of the mighty US. Despite several attempts, Russia was ineffective in preventing the bombing of its Serbian ally. In the words of self-styled "neo-classical realist" Colin Gray, "although we can argue that for NATO, Kosovo 1999 was history's first plausible example of strictly humanitarian war, it should not be imagined that the more traditional issues of statecraft were entirely absent" (2000: 306).

**3) The Continuing Relevance of Military Force in the International System**

At the end of the Cold War, it became almost a truism that nuclear weapons, the spread of liberal democracy, and increasing interdependence had all but ended war between the great powers (see ch.26). Realism, which disputes this as naïve, cites NATO's military intervention to highlight the continuing relevance of military force. (This does not, however, mean that realists favour humanitarian intervention. Indeed, one of the most prominent American realists, Henry Kissinger, opposed intervention into Kosovo based on the argument that no vital US political or strategic interests were at stake in the Balkan conflict.)

**Box 1.3: Are Some Liberals and Realists So Different Over Kosovo?**

First, there is no international consensus on the standards expected of states in dealing with their own subjects or on the sanctions appropriate to breaches of an agreed standard. Second, NATO failed to seek UN authorization for its attack on Serbia because it knew it would not get it. Third, the by-passing of the UN by NATO sends a clear message to all countries that force, not law, governs international affairs. Fourth, if membership of the UN

no longer protects states from invasion, all governments which can, will acquire weapons of mass destruction to deter or repel foreign invasion.

*Robert Skidelsky, independent member of the House of Lords, UK, in Michael Ignatieff, Virtual War, p.75-76.*

Once Bill Clinton agreed to use force, however, prominent realist politicians in the US, including Republican Senator and Vietnam War veteran John McCain, decided that the US ought to "do the job properly". The ensuing debate over the most effective and appropriate military strategy focused on the relative merits of an air campaign coercing President Milosevic to withdraw Yugoslav forces, versus the employment of ground troops to actually enforce withdrawal. "Moral outrage is not a sound basis for policy", suggested realist Colin Gray, "but periodically it is so insistent that prudent policy-makers must bow to its demands. In so bowing, they should behave strategically (Gray 2000: 306). Although "liberal hawks" - who advocated force to protect human rights and prevent ethnic cleansing – were most likely to advocate for ground troops, even some of those unsympathetic to the breach of Yugoslav state sovereignty argued for a forceful response. This opinion was predicated on the belief that great powers should, at all costs, avoid the military humiliation of being unable to defeat this relatively minor Balkan power; US and NATO credibility required a decisive military victory.

In the end, Milosevic withdrew Yugoslav forces without the introduction of ground troops. Kosovo, therefore, is a 'mixed verdict' for Realism; it affirmed the belief in the predominance of military might, but offered no clear guide to the reason or manner of intervention.

## Section 2: Liberal IR Theory and the 1999 Kosovo Crisis

*From reading Chapter 7 of The Globalization of World Politics (7e.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of Liberal International Relations (IR) theory. You are advised to consult this crucial chapter if you have not done so already as its contents will not be repeated here.*

*Where you see bracketed chapter references, for example (see ch.4), this refers to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics (7e.).*

### Introduction

Humanitarian intervention is viewed as a quintessentially "liberal" foreign policy practice, largely because liberal democratic states have been the principal initiators. Such interventions have accorded an important role to international institutions because of their focus on the traditionally liberal concern for human rights. Although Kosovo in 1999 is not an exception, you should consult the Realism, Marxism, Constructivist and Poststructuralist Theory sections of the case study for important alternative perspectives. This section suggests how insights from Chapter 7 of *The Globalization of World Politics* (7e.) illustrate important aspects of the Kosovo crisis from a Liberal perspective. Like Realism, Liberalism is not a single theory but a tradition derived from a set of broad assumptions. These diverge from Realism on the greater number of relevant actors in world politics, the impact of institutions, and liberal ideas of individual autonomy, commerce and universal rationality.

In the context of the Kosovo crisis, we will briefly focus on **1) increasing norms of humanitarian intervention and "liberal" debates over strategy, 2) the importance of multilateral action, and 3) international law.** As with the previous section, by no means can the following be an exhaustive survey of the possible ways Liberal international theory might help you think about the Kosovo crisis.

### 1) Liberal-Democratic War and Debates over Strategy

There are several reasons why developing norms of humanitarian intervention might favour liberalism and challenge realist accounts of world politics (ch.32). As you will know from chapter 7, perhaps the most important empirical challenge to realism is the claim that liberal democracies do not go to war with one another (see ch.14-15). If the domestic constitution of states impacts their external relations in such a crucial way, then relative material power, traditionally accorded prominence by realists, becomes less important in explaining war and peace. However, if liberalism can explain peace between liberal democracies, it may also suggest why liberal states are more warlike toward non-liberal democracies, as in the case of humanitarian intervention. Liberal values may convince the public – and in turn, their democratically accountable leaders – that intervention is right. "Liberal peace" may itself become a justification, and post-conflict reconstruction will emphasize the need to reconstruct states along liberal democratic lines. (In fact, this is precisely what the United Nations has been trying to do in Bosnia since 1995 and in Kosovo since 1999.)

But once liberal states have decided to intervene, what is the appropriate method? Recall the air strikes versus ground troops debate mentioned in the section on Realism. Many argued that since air power alone had convinced Milosevic in 1995 to withdraw support for the Bosnia-Serbs, it could persuade him to leave Kosovo. However, if the region's war exhaustion and the Bosnian-Croat coalition offensive were the real reasons behind Serbia's decision to negotiate the Dayton settlement, air strikes alone would not compel Serb nationalists to surrender Kosovo. Moreover, bombing from the air contributed to, if not created, the ground conditions entirely conducive for ethnic cleansing to occur - precisely the situation NATO claimed it was seeking to avert.

### **Box 2.1: Ground Troops or Just Air Strikes?**

The reply to those who argue that bombing was the only strategy that could ensure alliance cohesion is that, by ruling out the ground option, NATO governments demonstrated that their commitment to defending the human rights of Kosovars did not extend to accepting the risks to soldiers' lives of deploying ground forces.

....The difficulty with balancing these conflicting moral considerations is that it can never be known how many more Kosovars would have been killed and driven from their homes had NATO not acted in March 1999. NATO... employed the wrong means. The Alliance should have demonstrated its commitment to defending human rights by building up an invasion force so that, if diplomacy failed, it could have conducted a successful *rescue* mission.

*Nicholas Wheeler, Saving Strangers, p.284*

Although strategy is often conveyed in realist language and realists have dominated elite military circles, realists are not the only ones interested in military strategy (ch.14). Indeed, these patterns may be changing with the more "liberal" forms of humanitarian war. During the NATO intervention, so-called "hawks" often argued for negotiating with Milosevic, while liberal former "doves" took up more warlike positions, advocating for intervention and even the introduction of ground troops to effect regime change. Although these foreign policies may have been couched in the realist discourse of strategy, the goal many liberals considered worth fighting for - the protection of civilians against ethnic cleansing - differed from traditional realist concerns.

## **2) Multilateral Action**

According to liberals, realism underplays the importance of international institutions and the increasing importance of multilateralism, even in matters of security. This was highlighted forcefully during the humanitarian intervention over Kosovo. There was little suggestion that any one liberal state would or should unilaterally intervene to halt the ethnic cleansing. Rather an international "coalition of the willing" came together and decided to act. Realists sceptical of the importance of multilateralism would argue that the earlier wars in the former Yugoslavia (1990-95) and the intervention in Kosovo highlighted the relatively weak institutionalization of a European Common Foreign and Security Policy,

while liberal-institutionalists point to the subsequent establishment of a European Rapid-Response Force as evidence of the continued development of multilateralism in the security realm.

### 3) The Importance of International Law

Whether NATO's decision to militarily intervene in Kosovo constituted a violation of international law has important consequences for liberal international theory. If the intervention was a breach of international law, then realists could argue that the liberal emphasis on humanitarian norms and commitment by states to adhere to agreed standards of conduct should not be taken seriously. Powerful states decided to take action and international law did little to prevent it. On the other hand, liberals could argue that any breach of international law, for example, NATO's decision not to seek UN approval of military action, actually *established a humanitarian norm* itself - the right to intervene in a sovereign state when gross violations of human rights occur (see ch.32).

#### **Box 2.2: Was the Intervention Legal?**

The most convincing legal ground for the NATO military campaign relates to the UNSC's [UN Security Council's] authority to regard any set of circumstances as posing a threat to international peace and security as understood by Chapter VII of the Charter, and thereby opening up the possibility of authorizing the use of force to "maintain or restore" peace and security.

*The Kosovo Report, p.171*

This position would be supported by the "implicit" authorization to use force given the prevailing "fluidity of international law" concerning the right of humanitarian intervention. In the words of the *Kosovo Report*, "The Chapter VII resolutions prior to March 1999 usefully support this analysis... Even more indicative of a quasi-ratification of the NATO action was the willingness of the UNSC in Resolution 1244 to accept a central role for restoring normalcy to Kosovo on the basis of the NATO negotiating position at Rambouillet and elsewhere" (2000:172-3). The UN's post facto involvement, therefore, is interpreted as tacit retroactive endorsement of the intervention.

#### **Box 2.3: A Desirable Precedent?**

To endow the NATO campaign with an aura of legality on the basis of "implicit" authorization to use force by the UNSC seems an undesirable precedent. This is likely to encourage an even greater reliance on the veto of those Permanent Members who fear expansive subsequent interpretations.

*The Kosovo Report, p.173*

Realism views the debate over war's legality and morality as spurious. They believe that states fight only to protect national interests. In addition to legality, however, liberals use

the "just war" tradition to justify intervention. Kosovo, they suggest, met the criteria for *jus in bello* - the right to initiate war - which requires a legitimate authority fighting for a just cause as a last resort with moderate chances of success.

Issues of international law, however, concern not only the legitimacy of the intervention (the ends) but also the way in which the intervention is conducted (the means). For *jus ad bellum* - what is right to do in war - the means ought to be proportional to the ends (the evil incurred in conducting war cannot be greater than the evil it was designed to relieve), and those deemed 'innocent' - usually non-combatants - must be spared. Michael Walzer refers to the tension between *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* as the "the military form of the means/end problem, the central issue in political ethics" (1992: xxx-xxxi).

Liberals, therefore, ask whether the *means* used to conduct the Kosovo intervention, including NATO's choice of targets, its use of cluster bombs, and the tactic of bombing from a high altitude rather than the use of ground troops, were proportional to its ends. Although the Final Report of the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY) concluded that allegations against NATO were insufficient to warrant criminal investigation, Amnesty International suggested that NATO had engaged in violations of the laws of war, and Human Rights Watch claimed that NATO bombs killed over 500 Kosovo and Serb non-combatant civilians. Another Independent Commission argued that, "A significant number of these civilian deaths occurred during attacks on civilian infrastructure targets, and others as the result of legally dubious cluster bombs against targets located in densely populated areas. Thousands of cluster bombs remain unexploded throughout Kosovo and Serb territory..." (*Kosovo Report*, p.180). Liberal theory, therefore, not only sheds light on the decision to intervene, but raises normative questions about the conduct of the intervention itself.



### Section 3: Marxist Theories and the 1999 Kosovo Crisis

*From reading Chapter 8 of The Globalization of World Politics (7e.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of Marxist theories of IR. You are advised to consult this crucial chapter if you have not done so already as its contents will not be repeated here.*

*Where you see bracketed chapter references, for example (see ch.4), this refers to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics (7e.).*

#### Introduction

Those scholars influenced by Marxist accounts of IR have perhaps been the most critical of international involvement in Kosovo, posing the severest challenge to liberal notions that war can be "humanitarian". As well as considering Marxist-influenced accounts of Kosovo 1999, you should consult the Realist, Liberal, Constructivist, and Poststructuralist theory sections of the case study. The purpose of this section is to suggest ways in which the insights you will have learnt from Chapter 8 of *The Globalization of World Politics* (7e.) illustrate important aspects of the Kosovo crisis from Marxist and Critical perspectives. You should note that there is no single Marxist reading of the Kosovo crisis and, in fact, some of the authors discussed in this section might not explicitly identify themselves as such. There are common threads to the arguments presented, however, which are loosely derived from Marxism.

We will briefly focus on **1) the relationship between theory and practice, 2) the "liberal" values and humanitarian motives of NATO, and 3) the history of liberal state involvement in ethnic cleansing.** As with the previous sections, by no means can the following be an exhaustive survey of the possible ways Marxist international theory might help you think about the Kosovo crisis.

#### 1) Theory and Practice

The inter-relationship and correspondence between theory and practice is a central tenet of critical and Marxist analysis. Therefore, it becomes crucial to look at the way in which the 1999 Kosovo conflict was represented in policy-making circles, academic discourse, and the media, because this will have significant consequences for the way in which external actors respond. (More will be said about this in the next section.) The distinctive contribution of Critical Security Studies, however, is that representations and responses to conflict are based on a particular conception of security that privilege nation-states in the West, rather than individuals in Kosovo or Serbia. The purpose of theory is not simply to reveal the "objective" facts of the world; instead, the theories we choose and the assumptions we make concerning what is to be secured have massive implications for political practice.

Marxists, therefore, ask whether some of the carnage of wars in Yugoslavia could have been avoided if the policy-making narrative had followed the premises of a different, more emancipatory, ideology and theory. They illustrate this point by examining the Kosovo intervention's military tactics. NATO's decision to conduct the military campaign from

altitudes above 15,000 feet, away from the range of Serb anti-aircraft missiles, meant that despite advances in precision-guided munitions, aircraft were restricted in their ability to hit targets on the ground. Marxists suggest that had NATO's intentions been truly humanitarian, they would have risked their soldiers' lives to minimize risk to Kosovar non-combatants.

### **Box 3.1: Whose Security? Civilian Casualties**

Most of the main telecommunications transmitters were damaged, two thirds of the main industrial plants were nearly destroyed. According to NATO, 70% of the electricity production capacity and 80% of the oil refinery capacity was knocked out. Hitting these targets, however, has significant political fallout: the consequent suffering of the Serbian civilian population contradicted initial NATO assurances that the war was not aimed at the Serbian people.

*The Kosovo Report, p.93*

As previously noted, the air campaign also created conditions where Serb forces could expel Kosovar-Albanians more easily, precipitating the refugee crisis.

### **Box 3.2: Just War?**

Militarized humanitarianism causes a number of problems. First, the valorization of military action flies in the face of humanitarianism, which requires the erosion of the legitimacy of using military force. Second, the more force is seen to be successful, the more it is likely to be used. The instrument will shape the will to use it. Third, hi-tech, zero-casualty wars, fought for just causes are a godsend to arms manufacturers: just profit. Finally, the new humanitarian militarism has promoted a changed attitude among some sections of society, in which imperialism, strategy, and warriors are being reinvented for the twenty-first century.

*Ken Booth, 'Ten Flaws of Just War', p.320*

## **2) The Motives of the "International Community"**

Chapter 9 observed that Critical Theory denies the objectivity of knowledge and the notion of theory as an objective body of wisdom. There is also, however, a strong universalist emphasis on common humanity and individuals as autonomous agents possessing particular human rights (see ch.31), which renders the state and international system valuable only in their instrumental ability to protect those rights. The "fundamental conflict in the world system", writes Andrew Linklater, "is not conceived as that between states, but of competing ideologies - emancipatory ideologies versus all others" (1990: 21).

This framework might provide an ethical case for the right to militarily intervene in a state's domestic affairs to prevent governmental abuse of citizens. Thus, critical theorists might claim that the use of force to halt ethnic cleansing in Kosovo was "emancipatory" because

it pursued the individual rights of Kosovar Albanians over the sovereign right of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. On the other hand, however, critical and Marxist writers may favour non-violent strategies, such as non-offensive defence or general and complete disarmament, as a more emancipatory strategy.

**Box 3.3: A New Humanitarian Beginning for World Politics?**

If the high-minded spirit of the liberation of Kosovo has even shreds of authenticity, if at last leaders are acting 'in the name of principles and values' that are truly humane as confidently proclaimed (Vaclav Havel), then there will be exciting opportunities to place critically important issues on the agenda of practical and immediate action.

*Noam Chomsky, New Military Humanism, p.2*

Normatively, Marxists might argue that no war conducted by powerful states such as the US or Britain can be "just," especially given Marxist scepticism of the motives of Western governments. First, NATO's intervention may be perceived as the West imposing its will through force, part of the problem perpetuating the cycle of violence in the capitalist international system. Therefore calls for humanitarian intervention only increase the power of Western states rather than protecting the weak. Second, Marxists may lament the fact that Western states do not leave questions of post-war governmental and economic organization to local groups. Indeed, UN Security Council Resolution 1244 established Kosovo as an international protectorate, and the United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK) essentially became the government, enforcing democratic and liberal economic principles. Where liberals often argue that this is essential to maintaining lasting peace and regional stability, Marxists might respond that it provides additional markets for Western capitalism, consolidating its hegemony at the expense of more egalitarian forms of government.

**Box 3.4: A Better Peace**

NATO's war did not result in a better peace. First, the Rambouillet peace proposal was unworkable and NATO should have explored compromise instead of going to war. Second, NATO's use of force and its preceding threats made things much worse for Albanian Kosovars by provoking an increase in the human rights violations inflicted on them.

*Eric Herring, 'From Rambouillet to the Kosovo Accords', p. 241*

Scholars interested in Marxist accounts of world politics might also point to how the intervention affected democracy in the West. There was little democratic accountability of NATO's actions against Serbia. The air strikes were not debated in the British Parliament before they occurred, nor did President Clinton seek authorization from Congress before NATO began bombing. "In this emerging regime of virtual consent", writes Michael Ignatieff, "the public is consulted but the formal institutions of democracy are bypassed... Our representatives debate in empty chambers, and in the supposedly ultimate questions of war and peace, leaders go over the heads of representatives to mould and manipulate

public opinion directly" (Ignatieff 2000: 180). Critical theorists might also proffer NATO's bypassing of the UN as a similar disregard for international democratic procedure (see ch.19).

### 3) The History of Ethnic Cleansing and Liberal State Involvement

Marxist and Critical theorists might also note the ahistoricism of the Western media's portrayal of ethnic conflict as something that goes on "out there," on the periphery outside the zone of liberal democratic peace. Ethnic cleansing has occurred in Western countries in the twentieth century, as in Nazi Germany and Stalin's Russia, preceded by violence in the liberal settler colonies of North America and Australia, in which native populations were systematically destroyed. Marxist and critical theorists emphasize that in earlier colonial contexts and processes of state formation, liberal states have been complicit in practices that they now condemn.

#### **Box 3.5: Humanitarian Liberal-Democrats?**

This is not to say that Western democracies do not participate in ethnic cleansing. Despite the slowly emerging norm against ethnic cleansing, democratic states inconsistently respond to and sometimes support particular instances of ethnic cleansing, creating an uneasy relationship between the two.

*Carrie Booth Walling, 'The History and Politics of Ethnic Cleansing', p.56.*

Other radical thinkers go further than this. Noam Chomsky, for example, points to more recent examples of Western state involvement in and indirect support for human rights abuses.

#### **Box 3.6: Contemporary Support for Human Rights Abuses**

"Borrowing Orwell's apt phrase, it 'wouldn't do to mention' that the 'normal world' not only cheerfully tolerates huge atrocities, but actively initiates and conducts them, lends them decisive support, and applauds them, sometimes euphorically, from Southeast and Western Asia to Central America to Turkey and beyond, not to speak of earlier history."

*Noam Chomsky, The New Military Humanism, 1999, p. 60*

Claims of "humanitarian" intentions in the West are seriously undermined by turning a blind eye to Turkey's repression of the Kurds in Northern Iraq, Indonesian abuse of the East Timorese or human rights violations in Colombia on a level matching Serb actions in Kosovo. Chomsky and others also find hypocrisy in NATO's failure to prevent "cleansing" of ethnic Serbs from Kosovo when Kosovar Albanians returned bent on revenge.

## Section 4: Constructivist and Poststructuralist Approaches to the 1999 Kosovo Crisis

*From reading Chapters 9 and 10 of The Globalization of World Politics (7e.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of Constructivism and Poststructuralism. You are advised to consult these crucial chapters if you have not done so already, as their contents will not be repeated here. The case study also references material covered in Chapter 17 on Feminist IR theory.*

*Where you see bracketed chapter references, for example (see ch.4), this refers to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics (7e.).*

### Introduction

You should be aware by now that International Relations Theory has undergone something of a sea change since the beginning of the 1990s, marked in particular by the emergence of Constructivism and a host of Alternative theories. You will also be aware that, in general, humanitarian intervention has been viewed as a quintessentially "liberal" foreign policy. Was Kosovo part of the trend of the past, or a shift toward an era of "post-modern" warfare, where traditional epistemologies and world-views are left behind? As well as considering this question you should also consult the Realist, Liberal and Marxist sections of the case study for important challenges to Alternative theoretical approaches. The purpose of this section is to suggest ways in which the insights you will have learnt from Chapters 9 and 10 of *The Globalization of World Politics (7e.)* illustrate important aspects of the Kosovo crisis. As with the previous sections, by no means can the following be an exhaustive survey of the possible ways alternative theories might help you think about Kosovo. However, we will briefly focus on **1) the importance of discourse and identity politics, 2) the construction of the security dilemma, and 3) rape in Kosovo.**

### 1) The importance of discourse and symbols

The importance of discourse and the need to construct counter-narratives was especially highlighted in the 1990s in the wars in the former Yugoslavia. One of the central themes of alternative international theory, especially post-modernism, is that symbols, metaphors and representations are integral to world politics and security. Symbolic politics helps to define political and security agendas and the ways in which politics is perceived, used, and justified. "Self" and "other" definitions are thereby created and transformed in mutually constituting ways. For example, in an effort to unify and organize behaviour in terms of "group-ness" a system of ascribed ethnic categories and political identities, histories, memories, past glories, wars and suffering have been invoked. Using ethnic symbols to assemble support for exclusionary policies between Serbs and Albanians is thus a form of representational politics intimately connected to issues of global security (see ch.14).

**Box 4.1: The exploitation of 'Truths'**

The case of Kosovo illustrates what happens when political leaders exploit the most demeaning Truths about the other to create intense feelings of insecurity and victimization. [T]he conditions which foster a politics rooted in antagonistic Truths: a culture of victimization and a history of real and imagined domination of one group over another, long-term human political and social oppression of a disfavoured ethno-national group, structural poverty, unmet human development needs, media manipulation of misunderstanding among the general populace, and the absence of civil and political institutions which allow for divergent opinions.

*Julie Mertus, Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War, p. 4*

For example, the "ethnic conflict" narrative has been a significant way in which representations of conflict shape war. Persistent media representations portrayed the conflict between Serbs and Kosovar-Albanians as ethnic and ancient, a continual battle between the majority of Albanian Muslims and the minority Serb Christians. The emphasis on ethnic divisions not only reproduced the myth of purely "ethnic conflict," but led to ignorance of other ethnic groups in the territory: for example, the Roma, who faced intimidation from both Kosovar Albanians and Serbs.

**Box 4.2: The Ethnic Conflict Myth**

Ethnic conflict is a strategic myth in the sense that it is not ethnic groups that are fighting each other, but sections of ethnic groups led by those who claim to speak on behalf of the supposed whole. These ethnic groups are not actually fixed, completely separate groups of people - their separateness is created and moulded through representational practices.

*Barry Buzan and Eric Herring, The Arms Dynamic in World Politics, p. 186*

Employing a narrative that depoliticized the conflict – in that the focus on ethnic hatred ignored the political objectives served by violence – created conditions that could justify international inaction until 1995 in Yugoslavia, and 1999 in the case of Kosovo.

**2) The social construction of the security dilemma**

What has conventionally been conceived as the enduring and natural predicament of international relations (see ch.13 and 14) and more recently ethnic conflict – the "security dilemma" – is conceived by some alternative theorists as a construction open to dispute, to be transcended and denaturalized. If you have not already done so, you should refer to the Realism section of this case study and Chapter 14 of *The Globalization of World Politics (7e.)* for an explanation of traditional approaches to the security dilemma.

The criticisms of the realist account from an alternative perspective are twofold. First, historical-sociologists suggest that it is problematic to transpose the concept of the security dilemma onto ethnic groups, because realist epistemology and terminology cannot comprehend dynamics of intra-group identity formation. Merely replacing the state

with an equally problematic entity – a pre-existing "ethnic group" – as the object of security ignores how the creation and manipulation of security dilemmas partially constructed ethnic groups and rendered them politically relevant. Realism assumes what is to be explained: the existence of the security dilemma in relations between Serbs and Kosovo-Albanians. It ignores what alternative analysis emphasizes: that Serb nationalists, through media manipulation and scare mongering, created rather than responded to a security dilemma in relation to Kosovo-Albanians.

The second criticism of Realism concerns its uncritical acceptance of an acute security dilemma as a natural feature of relations between groups. As noted above, it assumes the offensive military power of ethnic communities, ignoring the processes of identity creation and recreation responsible for designating other groups as a threat. Alternative theory opens the way for other constructions of the relations between groups. A normative approach to the security dilemma, for example, might be based on the belief "that what is possible in world politics is expandable, so even though the security dilemma has been a regular feature of interstate relations in the past, the expansion of community between peoples can provide an escape from its grip" (Wheeler and Booth, 1992: 57). In short, the so-called laws of international relations do not function independently of our understanding of them and efforts to change them. This link between theory and practice, a key feature of many alternative theories, gives rise to its emancipatory claim: believing that the security dilemma is neither endemic nor permanent may in fact hasten its demise.

### 3) Rape in Kosovo

Mainstream realist discourses of war have traditionally neglected discussions of the impact of war on women, and the ways in which rape and humiliation of women can be a deliberate policy of war (see ch.17). This omission has informed post-war attempts to deal with the atrocities of war, in which systematic treatment or response to the specific violence practiced against women was often overlooked. Feminist scholars, therefore, have tried to link the historical marginalization of women to their treatment during warfare, in an attempt to change this status quo.

#### **Box 4.3: Gender and Ethnic Myths**

Nationalism became 'written on the body'. Slurs against Kosovo Albanians shifted..., a sexualized imagery of Albanian men and women was adopted. In the mainstream Serbian and Yugoslav presses, Albanian men were declared to be rapists... Albanian women were portrayed as mere baby factories... Accused in the past of being culturally inferior, Albanians increasingly were depicted as genetically inferior.

*Julie Mertus, Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War, p. 8*

Public exposure of rape in the 1990-95 wars in the former Yugoslavia, primarily of Bosnian-Muslim women, prompted increased attention to the issue. During the run up to the Kosovo intervention the British Government went as far as citing incidence of the systematic rape by Serb forces of Kosovo-Albanian women, along with other human rights abuses, as one of the justifications for the military intervention (Kennedy-Pipe and

Stanley, 2000: 78-9). Efforts to try rapists at the War Crimes Tribunal at The Hague afterward marked the first time that rape had been successfully prosecuted as a war crime.

It is less clear, however, that NATO's bombing campaign effectively prevented rape, similar to its effect on other human rights abuses. In fact, as previously discussed, it may have facilitated the ability of Serb forces and paramilitary groups to clear villages – and in that process, to rape women in retaliation for the NATO bombardment. In addition, feminists note that abuse of Kosovar Albanian women was not perpetrated only by Serbs; they also suffered abuse and rape by Kosovar-Albanian men – before, during, and after the crisis.



## Web links

[www.un.org/Docs/scres/1999/sc99.htm](http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/1999/sc99.htm)

Among the Security Council Resolutions on this website are Resolution 1244 of 10 June 1999, on the deployment of the international civil and security presence in Kosovo, and Resolution 1239 “on relief assistance to Kosovo refugees and internally displaced persons in Kosovo”.

[www.unmikonline.org](http://www.unmikonline.org)

The website of the UN Interim Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK) contains updates on developments in post-conflict Kosovo, relevant documents, and details of the structure and work of UNMIK.

[www.osce.org/kosovo/](http://www.osce.org/kosovo/)

This is the website of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s mission in Kosovo.

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo)

The website affiliated with the Public Broadcasting System’s documentary, “The War in Europe,” contains interviews, statistics, a timeline, a map, and links to key documents.

[news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/kosovo\\_fact\\_files/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/kosovo_fact_files/default.stm)

The BBC coverage of the Kosovo conflict contains statistics, maps, and news.

<http://www.chomsky.info/articles/199903--.htm>

This page includes Noam Chomsky’s essay, “The Current Bombings: Behind the Rhetoric.”

[www.ctheory.net/text\\_file.asp?pick=132](http://www.ctheory.net/text_file.asp?pick=132)

This website contains a theory interview of Paul Virilio by John Armitage, called “The Kosovo War Took Place in Orbital Space.”

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