

Containment of the Kosovo Conflict To contain the Kosovo conflict, the primary task is to stem the cross-border flows of weapons, guerrillas and refugees. Neither Albania nor Macedonia has the resources to do this themselves. An international peacekeeping force is required with the authority to detain persons and to confiscate illegal weapons. In March 1998, the OSCE stepped up its presence along Kosovo's borders with Albania and Macedonia, but the OSCE's mandate is limited to monitoring and reporting violations.

The danger of the Kosovo conflict spilling beyond its borders could be significantly reduced if the United Nations "Prevention Diplomacy" force that is already in Macedonia were strengthened and a similar United Nations peacekeeping mission were created for the Albania- Kosovo border. These UN troops need to have the right to turn back refugees and individuals with weapons and/or the right to confiscate weapons.

If the international community takes action to prevent refugees from fleeing Kosovo, then, for humanitarian reasons, it should implement a complementary program for ensuring the basic needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Kosovo, of whom there are an estimated 24 000 at this time. There are a number of international organisations already working with IDPs in Kosovo whose knowledge and skills could easily be augmented.

As well as preventing the cross-border transit of arms within the region, it is wise to prevent an infusion of new weaponry into the region. The UN Security Council has implemented an arms embargo on the FRY and on 31 March, the European Union enacted its own arms embargo. In so far as these efforts have been characterized as sanctions against Yugoslavia to pressure it into political negotiations with Kosovo, they may prove counter-productive. If instead these efforts are characterized as measures to protect both Serbs and Albanians, their counter-productive potential may be neutralized.

Resolution of Kosovo's Political Status Until the fall of 1998 when human rights issues came to the fore, nearly all parties in the Balkan region and international community were treating the Kosovo conflict as a question of political status: Should Kosovo remain a region of the Serbian Republic within Yugoslavia, regain its status as an autonomous province within Serbia, become a republic within Yugoslavia, or achieve independence as its own state?

The international community is virtually unanimous in its support for greater autonomy for Kosovo within the Yugoslav federation, while categorically opposing independence. This is the view of the European Union, the United Nations Security Council and the six-nation Contact Group—comprising the United States, Russia, Britain, France, Germany and Italy. The United States, both unilaterally and as a member of the Contact Group, is the strongest advocate of pushing Yugoslav President Milosevic and Kosovar Albanian leaders into negotiations to find a political resolution to the Kosovo issue. As US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said with reference to the Contact Group's imposition of new sanctions on Yugoslavia: "The purpose of these measures should not be to return Kosovo to the status quo of last month or last year...Belgrade must enter into a real dialogue on an enhanced status for Kosovo."
