

**REPORT FROM THE ROUNDTABLE ON
CANADA, NATO AND THE UNITED NATIONS:
LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE KOSOVO CRISIS**

**Ottawa
October 1, 1999**

On October 1, 1999, the Human Rights Research and Education Centre at the University of Ottawa in partnership with the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development organised a one-day roundtable on the lessons from Kosovo. The roundtable focussed on the implications of the Kosovo crisis for Canada, NATO and the UN. It brought together a wide range of International Relations and legal experts, academics, government officials, NGOs and students. The proceedings were broadcast by CPAC on October 27, 1999.

1. Thinking about the Kosovo Intervention

John Polanyi, Nobel Laureate, University of Toronto, opened the discussion by pondering the **moral aspects of NATO's intervention in Kosovo**. He went on to say that concern about the fate of human beings does not stop at our border. We must extend our commitments and responsibilities abroad and strive to strengthen the rule of law everywhere. While some may argue that the intervention in Kosovo actually weakened the rule of law, it had extensive moral backing within the international community. Lacking was the institutional approval/legitimation of the action by the UN Security Council. Nevertheless, what would the consequences of inaction be?

John Polanyi further pointed out that the Kosovo intervention brings to focus several other questions. What are the criteria for intervention? How to achieve desired ends and at what cost? Kosovo made the case that it is unacceptable for a nation to invade another and that there are limits to governments' actions within their own state borders. Sovereignty is less than absolute. There is no law that requires the international community to respect a lawless government. There is no doubt that the humanitarian intervention in Kosovo enhanced terror perpetrated against the Kosovo Albanians by the Yugoslav leadership. While more effective ways have to be found to address humanitarian crises, criminals must be punished. Here our unpreparedness to go on the ground and sacrifice military life come to the fore. Similarly to domestic policing, humanitarian intervention entails risks. The failure to recognise this fact and commit resources towards effectively re-enforcing the rule of law is a testimony to the ambiguous attitudes within the international community towards intra-state/humanitarian causes.