

The reassertion of Serb nationhood and authority in Kosovo was accompanied by widespread human rights violations. The 55,000 strong Serb police force was employed to eliminate any perceived expression of Albanian nationalism. Between 1981 and 1991, about 60,000 Serbs and Montenegrins fled the ethnic turmoil in Kosovo.

The Albanian Kosovars responded to the loss of their institutions by building a parallel society within Kosovo completely outside Serbian jurisdiction. In 1991, Kosovo leaders declared the region a sovereign and independent state. The decision was overwhelmingly approved in a referendum. The following year, Kosovo Albanians elected a shadow parliament and president that created parallel state systems and structures for taxation, health, education and elections by Albanians and for Albanians.

Under the political and moral leadership of Ibrahim Rugova, President of Kosovo's shadow government, Albanians employed a strategy of passive resistance to achieve their objectives. But over the course of five years this strategy did not result in any substantive steps forward towards greater autonomy or diminished repression. Rugova began to lose ground to more militant voices, when the 1996 Dayton peace accords failed to include a settlement on Kosovo. Admitting that passive resistance had failed, in November 1997 the Kosovo shadow government leaders called for active resistance through peaceful civil disobedience.

In 1996, a Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) emerged with separatist ambitions and terrorist tactics, attacking Serbian authorities, in particular the police force. It has one demand--the complete independence of Kosovo. Very little is known about the KLA. It is unclear how many members it has and whether it is well-organized or just ad hoc bands of guerrillas.

In late 1997, KLA attacks and Serb police brutality escalated; the situation became increasingly out of control in 1998. Serbia moved armoured units and Interior Ministry troops to the perimeter of the province. On March 2, a clash between ethnic Albanians and paramilitary Serbian troops in a small village left more than 20 dead. Tens of thousands of ethnic Albanians rallied in Pristina in peaceful protest. Then on March 10, about 1,000 heavily armed Serb police and special armed forces launched a three-day assault on the village of Donji Prekaz, leaving at least 45 dead. This time between 60,000 and 100,000 people gathered in Pristina, a city of 200,000, to demonstrate against the violence.

Over the past month, Serbian police have fortified their positions in the central region. On 7 April there were reports that the Yugoslav military had mobilized near the Albanian border. The New York Times reported that the KLA is gaining followers rapidly as a result of the scale and brutality of Serb attacks, receiving an infusion of new troops and weapons from Albania.

Causes of the Kosovo Conflict

Three key factors have contributed significantly to the decades of instability and ethnic conflict in Kosovo. First, the political status of Kosovo is ambiguous. Both the Serb and Albanian nations have reasonable political claims to the territory. Serbia has a strong historical right to the land on the grounds that Kosovo has been an integral part of Serbia since the end of Ottoman