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## Kosovo Conflict: Russian Responses and Implications for the United States

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## ABSTRACT

This report examines Russia's response to the NATO air campaign against Yugoslavia. It briefly discusses the background of dissidence and repression in Yugoslavia's Kosovo region and Russia's cooperation with the West in the Contact Group and other forums to limit this conflict. Russia's reactions to the air campaign that began on March 24 are examined, including heightened anti-American and anti-Western rhetoric, curtailment of some U.S., NATO, and other contacts, shipments of food aid to Yugoslavia, and military measures. The report discusses recent diplomatic attempts by Russia to mediate the conflict. Implications for Russia are analyzed, including political instability and possible foreign and military policy changes. The report analyzes implications for the United States, including further delays in ratifying START II, threats by Russia to curtail cooperation with the United States on denuclearization and safeguarding nuclear materials, and possible dangers to U.S. personnel and citizens in Russia. Administration policy regarding Russia's role and Congressional concerns are discussed. This report may be updated. (See also CRS Issue Brief 98041, *Kosovo and U.S. Policy*; and CRS Reports RS20141, *Kosovo: Situation Report* (updated daily); RS20125, *Kosovo: Issues and Options*; and RL30114, *Kosovo: International Reaction*.)

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## Summary

Russians across the political spectrum and the wider public condemned the March 24 beginning of NATO airstrikes against Yugoslavia, perhaps presaging a fundamental Russian reassessment of ties with the United States and the West. Russian officials asserted that the airstrikes were responsible for the Kosovar humanitarian crisis and initially curtailed some ties with the United States and NATO. By mid-April, however, Russian media had provided some coverage to Serb atrocities in Kosovo, the Russian government's bombast had diminished, and some effected U.S.-Russian cooperation had resumed. Chances that Russia might play a positive role in mediating a peace settlement were enhanced with President Boris Yeltsin's April 14 appointment of former premier Viktor Chernomyrdin as an intermediary. The issue of NATO airstrikes remains extremely contentious in Russia. Yeltsin faces demands by many in the military, legislature, and the general public to counteract NATO, particularly if it prolongs or deepens its campaign. The United States has urged Russia to support NATO and to repair its U.S. ties. This report may be updated.

## Contents

Background .....	1
Russia's Response to the NATO Bombing	
Campaign .....	2
Military Response .....	2
Diplomacy .....	3
Implications for Russia .....	4
Implications for U.S. Interests .....	7
Impact on U.S.-Russia Relations .....	9
Arms Control and Other Impacts .....	10
Congressional Response .....	11

# Kosovo Conflict: Russian Responses and Implications for the United States

## Background

Dissidence and repression in Yugoslavia's Kosovo region intensified after 1989 when Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic ended Kosovo's autonomy. In 1998, Yugoslavia stepped up its efforts to quell separatism by forcible suppression of the Kosovar independence movement. Russia opposed NATO threats of air strikes against Milosevic's repressive apparatus in Kosovo, partly because many Russians appeared sympathetic toward "fellow" Orthodox Christian Serbs. Russia argued that the situation in Kosovo could be solved only through negotiations, and that, in any event, it was within Yugoslavia's sovereign rights to combat in Kosovo what Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov called a "breeding ground for Islamic extremism" that threatened the West.

The Yeltsin government nonetheless approved UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution 1160 establishing an arms embargo against Yugoslavia (March 1998) and has appeared to abide by it, though many in Russia have called for breaking the embargo after NATO began airstrikes on Yugoslavia. Russia supported other UNSC resolutions in 1998 (1199 and 1203) calling on Yugoslavia to cease repression, and on establishing the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM). Russia sent 76 OSCE observers to participate in the KVM. Russia also condemned the killing of Kosovars in the town of Racek in January 1999. Russia has been a member of the Contact Group on Yugoslavia and supported the January 1999 peace talks in Rambouillet, France. The United States and other members of the Contact Group and NATO envisaged Russia as a participant in the proposed NATO Kosovo Peace Implementation Force. Russia agreed to send troops if Milosevic agreed to the Force, and if the UNSC approved it, but rejected NATO's use of force to gain Milosevic's compliance. In follow-on peace talks in Paris in March, Yugoslavia refused to allow NATO peacekeepers into Kosovo and stepped up its atrocities in Kosovo. When airstrikes commenced, Russia denounced NATO for not going to the UNSC to seek a resolution authorizing its military campaign in Yugoslavia. Officials from some alliance states said that no resolution was sought because Russia and China would have vetoed it. (For further information and discussion of the Kosovo conflict, see CRS Issue Brief 98041, *Kosovo and U.S. Policy*; and CRS Reports RS20141, *Kosovo: Situation Report* (updated daily); RS20125, *Kosovo: Issues and Options*; RL30114, *Kosovo: International Reaction*; and 94-387F, *Yugoslavia*.)

## **Russia's Response to the NATO Bombing Campaign**

Then-Russian Premier Yevgeniy Primakov aborted his March 23, 1999 official visit to the United States while en route, after U.S. officials refused to guarantee that no airstrikes would occur during his visit. The airstrikes elicited harsh Russian condemnation across the political spectrum not seen since the Cold War era. A poll released April 1 showed that 92% of Russians interviewed opposed the airstrikes. On June 1, the reformist Right Cause party coalition announced it had gathered one million signatures from Russians opposed to the airstrikes. Yeltsin on March 24 stated that there was "deep shock" about NATO's "naked aggression" and authorized government and church-donated food and material aid for "all refugees" of the conflict, including Kosovars. At the same time, Yeltsin stressed that Russia would work to mediate the conflict. Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov called the airstrikes the worst aggression in Europe since World War II (ignoring Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968), and asserted that NATO leaders who had instigated "genocide" through airstrikes should be tried by the international war crimes tribunal (*Interfax*, March 27, 29).

The Communist and ultranationalist dominated State Duma on March 27 passed a non-binding resolution endorsing humanitarian aid to Yugoslavia, supporting volunteer efforts, suspending Russia's ties with NATO, suspending START II ratification, and accelerating integration of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The resolution was reportedly watered down at government insistence by removing extremist calls such as for deploying tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus to counter NATO. The Federation Council (March 31) and the State Duma (April 7) called on the government to consider sending arms to Yugoslavia. On April 16, the Duma endorsed a proposal by Yugoslavia's legislature for Yugoslavia to join the Russia-Belarus union, but the Yeltsin government has balked. In late April, a Duma group met with a U.S. Congressional delegation in Vienna to work out a peace proposal (see below). Several Communist and ultranationalist legislators have visited Yugoslavia to show their support, including Duma leaders Sergey Baburin and Gennadiy Seleznev in early April.

### **Military Response**

Russia's military responses after the airstrikes began were initially limited, but raised concerns of a prospective fundamental shift away from cooperation with the West. Yeltsin ordered contacts with NATO to be curtailed and ship deployments to the Adriatic Sea. Yeltsin, Primakov, and Federal Security Service head and Security Council secretary Vladimir Putin repeatedly stressed that Russia would not supply arms or otherwise get involved militarily in Yugoslavia, although it might pursue "defensive measures." Putin stressed that Russia's national interest in non-intervention took priority over Yugoslavia's interests (*ITAR-TASS*, March 29). Many Russian politicians and military leaders have called for increased military spending to counter NATO's enlargement and actions in Yugoslavia. On April 16, the Duma unanimously adopted a resolution calling for increased defense budgets, re-nationalization of some defense industries, and restructuring of the military command to put it on a war footing. Yeltsin on April 30 ordered the modernization of Russia's

aging stock of decommissioned tactical nuclear weapons, viewed by some observers as rhetorical saber-rattling for the domestic audience, since modernization would be costly and take several years.

At Yeltsin's orders, Russia withdrew its chief military representative to NATO, but not its ambassador (who is also accredited to Belgium), and suspended participation in NATO's Partnership for Peace activities. All troops receiving training in NATO countries were recalled. On March 26, NATO's Moscow-based liaison officers were ordered to leave. The Russian General Staff recalled its military representatives from the Supreme Allied Command for Europe, withdrawing control over Russia's Bosnia peacekeepers from NATO and placing them directly under General Staff control. The peacekeepers remained in place, however, pending a decision on whether to remove them. Another mixed signal included Russia's suspension in May of Norwegian aid for retraining Northern Fleet officers and other confidence-building ties with Norway's Defense Ministry, while announcing Russian troops cuts in the northwest (see also below, *Arms Control*).

On March 30, Defense Minister Igor Sergeyev announced that Russia would send a ship from the Black Sea Fleet to the Adriatic Sea off the Yugoslav coast in advance of other possible ship deployments and "measures." This intelligence-gathering ship took up position on April 7 (it was replaced by another ship in May). Sergeyev and other officials stressed that the deployment was dictated by national security concerns, and that Russia would not share this data with Yugoslavia, though other reports implied some data-sharing. Similarly, Russian military inspectors in late May 1999 tried to carry out air inspections and inspections of NATO forces in Albania and Macedonia, but were barred by these governments and U.S. and NATO officials. Russia's Foreign Ministry lodged a protest that these actions violated the 1994 OSCE Vienna Accords and that it would "keep in mind" these violations in its future actions and negotiations. The Russian media reported that the Northern, Black Sea, and Pacific Fleets and other military units were involved in exercises, though they reported fuel shortages and other problems.

*Izvestiya* warned on April 2 that several volunteer groups were being formed by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), though Zhirinovskiy has indicated that his groups have not yet gone to Serbia (*Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, May 12). Belgrade reported on April 4 that a group of Russian mercenaries sponsored by the ultranationalist All-Russian Spiritual Heritage Movement had arrived in Yugoslavia. Russian and Yugoslav media have reported that 80-100 Russian mercenaries are in Yugoslavia. Some members of Russia's Islamic community reportedly have volunteered to aid the Kosovars.

## **Diplomacy**

Soon after the beginning of NATO airstrikes, many in the international community called for Russia to play a more constructive diplomatic role in settling the Kosovo conflict, since many in Russia share Slavic and Orthodox ties with many Serbs and many Russians and Serbs perceive "fraternity" between the two countries. NATO's foreign ministers on April 12 issued a statement that endorsed "working constructively with Russia" to reach a political settlement of the conflict, and its Parliamentary Assembly on May 31 "welcomed" Russia's peace efforts.

Many observers viewed Russian diplomacy as initially unconstructive or ineffective, including Russia's insistence at the beginning of the NATO airstrikes that the UNSC vote for the immediate cessation of airstrikes in Yugoslavia. In a vote on March 27, only China supported Russia (among permanent members). Primakov and Ivanov alleged that Belgrade had repeatedly signaled, at Rambouillet and subsequently, its support for a settlement, but that NATO had spurned these overtures. Primakov led a mission in late March that reached agreement with Milosevic on a settlement predicated on an immediate halt to NATO airstrikes. NATO allies rejected the proposal and reiterated demands for an immediate halt to atrocities in Kosovo and other conditions. Some critics of the Primakov mission termed it grandstanding in support of Milosevic and an attempt to divide NATO.

Some observers have hoped that Yeltsin's April 14 appointment of former Russian premier Viktor Chernomyrdin as Kosovo intermediary would mark a shift in Russian diplomacy toward more support for NATO goals. Some observers have viewed as evidence of this shift Russia's recognition of some principles of a NATO settlement in its agreement on May 6 with G-8 foreign ministers on measures to settle the Kosovo conflict. Although ambiguities and differences remained, Russia agreed to the withdrawal of military, police, and paramilitary forces from Kosovo, deployment of international forces "capable" of ensuring the refugees' safe return, and creation of an interim administration for Kosovo leading to substantial self-government. Differences between NATO and Russia include the degree of Yugoslav withdrawal, the composition of peacekeeping forces, and timing. Because of Russia's problems with separatism in its Chechnya region and elsewhere, it does not support independence for Kosovo. Sergeyev has indicated that the Russian military is ready to contribute troops and "lead" Nordic and other peacekeeping forces in Kosovo (*FBIS*, May 7; May 4-5).

After ten hours of talks with Milosevic, Chernomyrdin on May 28 announced that Milosevic had accepted "in principle" the peace proposals of the G-8. Implementation efforts agreed to included an immediate bombing halt, an international peacekeeping force for Kosovo formed under U.N. auspices and led by a commander from a neutral country, peacekeepers from non-NATO states, except for non-combatants Greece and Portugal, and 11,500 Serbian troops to remain in Kosovo. Administration and allied officials dismissed the plan because it did not require withdrawal of the Yugoslav Army from Kosovo, and because NATO forces were not at the core of the peacekeepers.

## **Implications for Russia**

According to some observers, NATO actions in Yugoslavia, particularly if prolonged or widened to include ground forces, may well presage a substantially negative change in Russian elite and public opinion regarding the United States and the West (Floriana Fossato, *RFE/RL*, April 7; *Slate Magazine*, April 13). The NATO actions were widely regarded in Russia as marking its political, economic, and military weakness in Europe and the international arena. The actions appeared to deepen political infighting in Russia that Yeltsin viewed as threatening his authority. Communist and other hardline and ultranationalist parties quickly tapped into the strength of public condemnation to assail Yeltsin and other reformers. These parties



have raised apprehensions among many Russians by stressing that NATO enlargement and actions in Serbia are a direct threat to Russia ("Russia will be next"), as well as appealing to Russians' feelings of kinship with Orthodox Slavs. A lengthening and deepening conflict could greatly bolster the attractiveness of these parties in the run-up to legislative races at the end of 1999, reversing the declining public appeal of some of these parties, according to some observers. Extremist parties such as the LDPR could gain seats, and espouse anti-Western, anti-Semitic, and hegemonial policies. More moderate parties identified with the West could lose appeal, such as Chernomyrdin's Our Home Party, Yabloko, or the Right Cause coalition, although all these parties joined in condemning the NATO airstrikes.

Russian reaction to the NATO airstrikes has gone through at least three stages. While reaction was extremely negative at first, Yeltsin and some reformers and others soon attempted to counter hardline and ultranationalist calls for military aid to Yugoslavia or other forceful intervention. Western and other critics of Russia's initial pro-Yugoslav reaction to the airstrikes likewise urged Russia to end its isolation from the West on the Kosovo issue and criticized the Russian government's search for support for Serbia from India, China, Namibia, and international pariahs such as Iran and Iraq.

An important stimulant to a moderating stance may have been Russia's need for international financial aid, according to many observers who argue that Russia has to weigh the importance of such aid and investment against its support for Serbia. This conundrum became more evident to Russians with the IMF's announcement in late March of an agreement in principle that may permit new lending. These observers view Russian desires for Western economic aid as a major lever to keep Russia oriented toward the West, though some warn that a deepening NATO campaign may vitiate this leverage.

Signs of moderation included Yeltsin's March 30 "State of the Federation" speech urging Russians to assess the NATO airstrikes rationally rather than emotionally, and to count on diplomatic rather than forceful means to solve the conflict. In a major statement on April 9, he denounced "deputies and politicians" from "the party of war" who had threatened him with impeachment if he did not agree to intervention, stressing again that "Russia will not get involved." He reiterated that Russia strongly opposes NATO ground troop deployments, and pointed out that, as Russia found out in Afghanistan, "after all [the bombing, NATO] will have to sit at the negotiating table." He also denounced calls for defending "Slavonic brothers," terming this notion "ideological garbage." This moderation has not been consistently adhered to by the Foreign Ministry, which on April 15 resurrected its previously harsh rhetoric in condemning NATO's accidental airstrike against Kosovars as a "criminal act," and Ivanov pointed to this as evidence that "ethnic cleansing" in Kosovo is caused by NATO airstrikes. On May 8, the Russian Foreign Ministry similarly condemned NATO's accidental targeting of the Chinese embassy as "criminal."

While the government and media initially had focused on Serbian casualties of NATO airstrikes, the reformist media during April began to give some attention to Serb atrocities in Kosovo and counseled nonintervention. *Izvestiya* on April 1 stated that "Russia is obliged to find within itself the strength" to continue its policy of mediation, and its leaders are obliged to refrain from "a competition ... in hysterics."

Television broadcasts included April 17 coverage by NTV of “ethnic cleansing” of 15,000 Kosovars within 24 hours by “Serb troops,” and some footage of atrocities. Slightly more balanced media coverage led Communists and ultranationalists on April 18 to demonstrate and demand that “pro-NATO” media be censored, and the Communist-dominated Duma to pass a resolution on May 12 requesting government censorship.

A third phase of Russian reaction may have begun when Yeltsin in mid-April more forcefully countered hardliners and their government sympathizers such as Primakov and Ivanov by appointing long-time ally Chernomyrdin as his special envoy on the Kosovo conflict. Differing views between Yeltsin and Primakov on the importance of Russia’s ties with the West, and Yeltsin’s political fears of Primakov’s apparent gains in political stature — after Primakov canceled his U.S. visit, tried to mediate the conflict, and obtained an IMF agreement in principle to renew lending — spurred Yeltsin’s move, according to some observers. Yeltsin explained the appointment in terms of obtaining “help” for Primakov and Ivanov in mediating the Kosovo conflict, and stressed that Chernomyrdin had good relations with Milosevic and Western leaders. Further countervailing moves by Yeltsin may have included Russia’s support for the agreement of the G-8 foreign ministers on May 6 on common principles of a settlement, and Primakov’s dismissal on May 12.

The NATO airstrikes highlighted other weaknesses of Russia’s central government. The government has appeared unable to adequately prevent violent anti-Western demonstrations and violence, to halt efforts to send volunteer forces to Yugoslavia, and perhaps to maintain its arms embargo on Yugoslavia. A lack of military preparedness was demonstrated by the faltering exercises and deployments aimed at signaling Russia’s concern, and contributed to calls by many in the legislature and elsewhere for greatly enhanced military budgets. Russia’s support for Yugoslavia also has engendered ethnic tensions within Russia. Elements of its 20 million member Islamic community have called for the Russian government to change its policy. Russia’s Bashkir Republic president on April 14 denounced plans for a Yugoslav-Belarus-Russia union, calling Milosevic unreliable and genocidal (ITAR-TASS).

Yeltsin’s May 12 demand that NATO cease its airstrikes as a condition of continued Russian mediation may have marked a shift back to a less cooperative Russian position. The retention of Ivanov (Primakov’s client) in the new government formed in late May also perpetuated some aspects of the clash between Chernomyrdin and the less cooperative Primakov. The Russian media, too, appeared in late May to generally view NATO airstrikes through the prism of Russia’s loss of international influence and security, and as a major cause of the suffering of both Kosovars and Serbs. The political turmoil in Russia associated with Primakov’s dismissal, and the ongoing economic crisis, though, tended to sidetrack media, popular, and some elite attention to the Kosovo conflict.

Russia’s involvement in Kosovo mediation holds risks for the Yeltsin government and Chernomyrdin’s Our Home Party if the mediation fails, perhaps contributing to Yeltsin’s May 12 and Chernomyrdin’s May 27 (see below) efforts to distance themselves by asserting that Russia would pull out of mediation if NATO does not seriously consider Russia’s efforts. A failure in mediation could also be marked by Yugoslavia’s rejection of terms delivered by Russia. Such failures would

accentuate Russia's perceptions of itself as geopolitically weak and could further bolster jingoistic and xenophobic parties and groups, according to some observers.

## Implications for U.S. Interests

In early 1993, newly elected President Clinton identified U.S. relations with Russia as among his top foreign policy priorities. He launched a major increase in aid to Russia, held frequent presidential summits, created the Joint Commission on Scientific and Technical Cooperation, and advocated Russia's integration into Western institutions. The United States and Russia in the 1990s have generally termed their ties as a "partnership" (see CRS Report 98-787F, *U.S.-Russia Moscow Summit*). According to some observers, these relations appeared in substantial jeopardy after NATO airstrikes began in March 1999.

During the early days of the Kosovo crisis, U.S. policy focused on the NATO military campaign and appeared to discount concerns that it would seriously harm U.S.-Russian ties. Administration officials stressed that United States and Russia "agreed to disagree" on Kosovo policy, but continued contacts on other matters. The United States has hence been generally restrained in its comments on Russia's reaction to the NATO airstrikes, but State Department spokesman James Rubin stated on March 30 that the US did not view Russia's ship deployment "as a particularly helpful gesture." The initially harsh Russian reaction to the airstrikes was noted by Ambassador at Large Stephen Sestanovich on March 31, who stated that he had "been disappointed ... by a rhetoric in Russia which obscures the responsibility of the Yugoslav government...."

The lengthening of the conflict and Russia's harsh reaction led to Administration efforts to encourage and extol Russia as an "important" mediator or go-between and international power. Albright met with Ivanov on April 13 (*Albright-Ivanov Press Briefing*). President Clinton and Vice President Gore had extended talks with Chernomyrdin on May 3-4. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott has taken a leading role in talks with Russia in recent weeks, repeatedly visiting Moscow and meeting with Chernomyrdin to try to convince Russia to support NATO.

There have been differing views within the Administration and elsewhere on whether Russia would play an able and reliable role in mediating the Kosovo conflict. Michael McFaul (*Los Angeles Times*, April 4) initially argued that Russia was uniquely able to influence Yugoslavia, and William Hyland and Celeste Wallander (*Washington Post*, March 31; April 8) called for convening a European conference, including Russia, to devise a peace plan. Conversely, Chester Crocker (*WP*, April 1) and others warned against relying on Russia to mediate an end to the Kosovo conflict. They argued that Russia itself halted cooperation with the United States and NATO to lend support to a non-democratic pariah state, so bears blame for deteriorating relations. They also warned that Russia's affinity with Yugoslavia makes it a biased and unconstructive mediator, and that Russia has not appeared able to greatly influence Milosevic. They point to several alleged Serbian peace moves supported by Russia that have been rejected by NATO as unconstructive to a settlement. These include support for Milosevic's April 6 unilateral Orthodox Easter ceasefire, support

for Milosevic's May 10 announcement of some troop withdrawals from Kosovo, and support (with China) for Serbia's demand for an end to airstrikes as a precondition of talks. (Editorial, *Los Angeles Times*, April 1; Charles Krauthammer, *WP*, April 28).

During May 1999, concerns about Russia's mediation abilities increased when it appeared unwilling or unable to convince Milosevic to accede to NATO demands. These concerns were heightened following publication of an opinion piece by Chernomyrdin in the *WP* on May 27. He harshly criticized U.S. policy on Kosovo, possibly marking the clearest expression of the stance of the Yeltsin government. Chernomyrdin characterized the destruction and loss of life in Yugoslavia as solely due to "one man's [Clinton's] blunders" in starting the conflict. Issuing thinly veiled and open threats, he warned that the world is the closest it has been in this decade to nuclear war, and that unless the NATO air strikes ceased soon, Russia would suspend mediation efforts, sever military-technological cooperation with the United States and the West, postpone START II ratification, and veto Western-backed U.N. resolutions on Yugoslavia. He dismissed the possibility that air strikes alone could "win the war," that a ground campaign would succeed without massive casualties, or that most Kosovars would return, calling such a NATO victory "Pyrrhic." NATO's actions will also encourage the Kosovar paramilitaries to consolidate their regional control over drug-trafficking and foster countervailing nuclear proliferation among regimes worldwide worried about NATO intervention, he stated.

Contradicting Clinton's statement in the May 23 *New York Times* that Russia was cooperating with NATO to mediate the conflict, Chernomyrdin asserted that NATO's goals of a NATO-dominated peacekeeping force and substantial autonomy for Kosovo "run counter to Russia's stance," which calls for a U.N. force that upholds Yugoslavia's territorial integrity. Contradicting Clinton's statement that U.S.-Russian relations would weather the conflict, he stated that it has set back relations "by several decades," because Russians object to the bombing of a sovereign state in violation of international law. The worst damage to relations, he averred, was the rejection by most Russians of an image of the United States as the moral leader of the democratic world. Dismissing the fact that NATO's actions were in response to "ethnic cleansing" in Kosovo, he asked rhetorically how Kosovars could return to homes and factories destroyed by NATO, or live with Serbs who had become embittered toward them because of NATO. He stated that NATO would eventually be expected by the international community to compensate bombing victims and punish its pilots and "criminal" commanders. The indictment of Milosevic by the International War Crimes Tribunal on May 27 also was denounced by Chernomyrdin as "politically motivated," and he warned that it had damaged his mediation efforts.

Western disillusionment with Russia's mediation efforts in May 1999 led the European Union to select Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari as an envoy to bolster Chernomyrdin and clearly present NATO and G-8 proposals. On May 29, Talbott stressed that Chernomyrdin was not authorized to negotiate on behalf of NATO, but was to serve as a go-between in presenting NATO's demands, a stance that Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin have rejected. Appearing to answer Talbott, Chernomyrdin declared on May 31 that he viewed his efforts as fostering "mutual understanding" by the two sides without "political pressure from the West" (*WP*, May 29; *FBIS*, June 1). Ahtisaari reportedly balked at traveling to Belgrade until a detailed NATO peace

plan had been worked out with Russia, but substantial NATO-Russia agreement led him to accompany Chernomyrdin to talks with Milosevic on June 2.

## **Impact on U.S.-Russia Relations**

Some U.S. observers have argued that NATO airstrikes have contributed to the worst U.S.-Russian relations since the early 1980s (Angela Stent, May 11, *Carnegie Institute* talk). Some Russians have viewed the U.S. decision to support the NATO airstrikes, coming just before Primakov's U.S. visit, as indicating a U.S. dismissal of Russia's views and an expectation that Russia would be unwilling or unable to jeopardize its U.S. ties. Similarly, they asserted that the war crimes indictment was timed to wreck Chernomyrdin's mediation efforts. Many in Russia viewed the airstrikes as excluding Russia from European security decisions, and called for revising Russian military doctrine to stress the NATO threat. The chances of salvaging U.S.-Russian cooperative relations will decline if the NATO action continues more than a few weeks, and will become more problematic if ground troops become involved, according to some observers. Some critics of Administration policy say the choice may then be between Kosovo and U.S.-Russian ties. While U.S. policy may prevail in Yugoslavia, according to this reasoning, it may well fail in retaining good relations with Russia. Despite the decreasing presence of pro-reformist politicians in top positions in recent years, Russian domestic and foreign policy has not yet fundamentally turned against Western interests. A more intense NATO campaign, however, could tip elite and popular support toward more authoritarian, jingoistic, and bellicose domestic and foreign policies, according to these observers.

The NATO airstrikes strengthened the open official and public expression of anti-American and anti-Western views and actions, including violent demonstrations at the U.S. Embassy in late March involving gunfire and a failed missile attack. An ultranationalist group claiming responsibility for the embassy attack warned Americans to leave Russia or face "retribution." Zyuganov and Zhirinovskiy participated in these demonstrations. Some U.S. private- and government-owned facilities have been damaged or destroyed. The safety of Americans and U.S. personnel in Russia is at greater risk. There have been reports of some harassment of missionaries and religious groups with real or perceived ties to the United States, threatening progress the West has made in urging Russia to uphold religious freedom, according to some observers. Russians indicated in a recent USIA poll that they viewed Chechnya and the United States as Russia's main enemies. Despite this evidence, many Russians continue to view good relations with the United States as necessary for Russia, with one April 1999 Russian poll showing that 59% of respondents still favored strengthening U.S.-Russian ties.

The Kosovo conflict has negatively affected political stability in Russia. The NATO airstrikes galvanized opposition to Yeltsin, partly influenced his countervailing appointment of Chernomyrdin and ouster of Primakov, and became a factor in the Duma's push to impeach Yeltsin. While Yeltsin appeared momentarily strengthened by the failure of the impeachment bid and the legislature's easy confirmation of Yeltsin's new premier, the implications of continued political turmoil may include drift or further deterioration of U.S.-Russian ties, and increased policy paralysis and chaos that harms U.S. interests in democratization, economic stability, nonproliferation, and other goals in Russia. Alternatively, if Russia views itself as successful in mediating

the conflict on grounds found suitable by NATO, stability and U.S. interests and ties with Russia may be bolstered. Some observers speculate that Russia might then request strengthened influence within NATO in European security cooperation.

Besides possible damage to U.S.-Russian ties, the accidental NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade may have contributed to Russia's efforts to forge closer ties with China to counter U.S. and Western power. Chernomyrdin visited China on May 10 and both sides condemned NATO's "hegemonial policies" and demanded that NATO immediately cease bombing Serbia. Ivanov visited China on June 1 and the two sides issued a statement appearing to agree that a halt to NATO airstrikes and the agreement by Yugoslavia to a peace plan were preconditions to their support in the U.N. Security Council for a settlement. They also pledged to counter NATO's attempt to consolidate what they termed a unipolar world order.

### **Arms Control and Other Impacts**

The initial Russian response to the airstrikes included threats to halt or reconsider U.S.-Russian arms control programs. The Russian legislature again delayed ratification of START II, and approval of theater missile defense delineation. Possible adaptation of the ABM Treaty may be set back. Russia rhetorically announced suspension of U.S. Nunn-Lugar programs to assist Russia in dismantling weapons of mass destruction and safeguarding weapons materials (but see below). A deputy secretary of Russia's Security Council warned on April 3 that if NATO airstrikes do not end, Russia will re-evaluate export control cooperation, but will abide by international commitments (*RIA-Novosti*).

Although some arms control efforts appear in limbo, other programs have continued or appear to be getting back on track. Many mid- to lower-level contacts continue as well as START weapons destruction, including an April Moscow visit by Deputy Assistant Defense Secretary Susan Cook on Nunn-Lugar issues. U.S. Col. Robert Boudreau, head of the Moscow Nunn-Lugar office, has stated that the program "has continued with only minor bumps" since the NATO airstrikes began (*Associated Press*, May 5). Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Marvin Langston testified to Congress on April 14 that cooperation on strategic early warning to avert possible Y2K problems with Russia's early warning system appeared to be back on track, with discussions held in Moscow on April 19-21. NATO and Russia agreed in late March to adaptation of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty. Russian legislators participated in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly at the end of May 1999 to urge consideration of an immediate end to airstrikes. (For background, see CRS Issue Brief 98030, *Nuclear Arms Control*; and CRS Issue Brief 98038, *Nuclear Weapons in Russia*.)

Among other impacts, some exchange and training programs have been curtailed at least temporarily. U.S. officials reported that the \$1 billion food aid shipments to Russia were proceeding, though some U.S. private voluntary and EU shipments have been affected. Primakov's cancellation of his U.S. visit put consideration of added food aid on hold. Russia's equipment contributions to the International Space Station might be further jeopardized, but continued cooperation was indicated by participation by a Russian cosmonaut in station construction activities in May-June 1999.

## Congressional Response

Congress has been increasingly active in exploring Russia's involvement in mediating the Kosovo conflict. Some Members and others urge Russia to play a positive role in mediating the conflict, if it becomes less obdurate in its support for Yugoslavia in contravention of NATO's objectives. Others discount Russia's ability (because of its economic and political crisis) or willingness to intervene either constructively or detrimentally. Some Members and others have called for the reconsideration of U.S. aid to and relations with Russia if it fails to fully cooperate with NATO, and for close scrutiny of Administration thinking on Russia's IMF request.

In debate over H.Con.Res.42 on March 11, 1999, regarding participation of U.S. troops in a NATO peacekeeping operation implementing a Kosovo peace agreement, several Members raised concerns about whether Russia could play a positive or negative role. Among those who thought Russia might play a positive role, Representative Alcee Hastings, in supporting the resolution, stressed that Russia had played a positive role in the Rambouillet process (*CR*, H1236). Representative Randy Cunningham, in opposing the resolution, called for Russia, France, and other European nations to send peacekeepers to Kosovo, without U.S. troop involvement (*CR*, H1221-H1222). Others were more wary of Russia's role. Representative Doug Bereuter, in arguing against deployment, warned that Russia was likely to increasingly support Serbia, complicating the conflict (*CR*, H1194). Representatives Benjamin Gilman and Porter Goss raised concerns about intelligence security among the peacekeepers if Russia became involved. Taking a different perspective, Representative Thomas Ewing called for the United States to pay more attention to vital national security issues such as the deteriorating economic and security situation in Russia, rather than U.S. troop deployments in Kosovo (*CR*, H1212).

Reflecting growing concern among some Members about the impact of the airstrikes on U.S.-Russian relations and Russia's future, Representative Curt Weldon on April 12-13 warned that Russia might conceivably begin supplying arms to Yugoslavia or might even send troops, creating a major crisis. He urged the Administration to consider a proposed peace plan he had received from several Duma deputies as a point of departure, and "to let Russia know that we expect, for the assistance that we give them, that they play a significant and vital role in bringing Milosevic ... to the table" (*CR*, H1855-57; H1932). During debate on supplemental appropriations related to Kosovo, Representative Michael Simpson too urged that the Administration should be "treating [a nuclear armed] Russia with respect" by involving it more closely in using its influence with Milosevic to bring him to the peace table (*CR*, H1858-59).

Senator Patrick Leahy on April 14 reflected the views of those who argue that Russia bears the burden for possible damage to U.S.-Russian relations posed by its strong negative reactions to the airstrikes. At the same time, he discounted "threatening statements" by Russian officials, arguing that Russia would be "foolhardy" to intervene militarily. He called for Russia to "join with us [NATO and the West]" for its own economic and security interests, rather than "casting its lot with the likes of Milosevic." In this case, he stated, Russia might play "a major role" in an international peacekeeping force in Kosovo (*CR*, S3667-68). Senator Joseph

Lieberman on April 15 similarly discounted Russian threats, cautioning that “we can’t let fears about how Russia would respond deter us” from a “noble mission” in Kosovo (*Reuters*).

A bipartisan group of Representatives traveled to Vienna April 30-May 1, 1999, to meet with three Russian Duma deputies (two representing reformist parties and one the Communist Party) and Milosevic’s personal emissary to work out details of a Kosovo peace plan. The plan agreed to by the participants called for the termination of NATO bombing and Kosovo Liberation Army action, withdrawal of Serbian armed forces from Kosovo, release of prisoners, the voluntary repatriation of refugees with NATO ensuring that they are unarmed, and an agreement on armed peacekeepers and OSCE monitors. On May 5, Representative Weldon introduced H.Con.Res.99 to garner House endorsement of the peace plan. He and Representative Jim Gibbons pointed out the substantial point-by-point similarities between the Congress-Duma peace plan and the May 6 G-8 proposal, and hailed the peace plan as forming the basis of the G-8 proposal (*CR*, May 6, H2913-16).

The House International Relations Committee held a hearing on May 13 on H.Con.Res. 99. Undersecretary of State Thomas Pickering testified that the peace proposal was “free-lancing,” echoing Secretary of State Albright, who on May 12 urged Weldon and other Representatives to cease pursuing the initiative (*WP*, May 13). Representative Sam Gejdenson criticized the proposal as an intrusion into the executive branch power to negotiate agreements. Representative Roscoe Bartlett, in defending his efforts as one of the Members who met with the Russian Duma deputies, stated that the Administration was too narrowly focusing on the teetering Yeltsin regime rather than wider Russian political forces. Senator Richard Lugar, in separate comments, reportedly stated that it was inappropriate for House Members to discuss peace proposals with the Duma while the Duma tried to impeach Yeltsin (*AP*, May 13).

Among other recent Congressional actions, a Congressional Teach-In on the Crisis in Kosovo was organized in April 1999 by Representative Dennis Kucinich and others, and has invited several speakers to meetings. In launching the series, Representative Kucinich called for a recognition of Russia’s important role in attaining peace in Kosovo and in European security (*CR*, May 6, E902; *CR*, May 26, E1106). Senator Richard Lugar, visiting Moscow, reported on May 30 that most Russian officials he had talked to were “angry, bitter, [and] in general revolt” about U.S.-Russian relations, because they felt that the United States had “let them down” on Kosovo, international lending, and other issues (*CBS/Fox*).