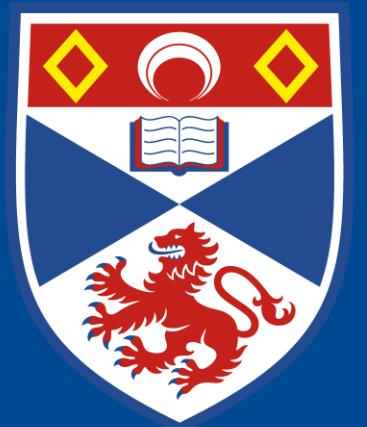


Russia and the Serbia-Kosovo Dispute

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What is the focus of this research?

Since the 1998-1999 Kosovo War, Serbia and Kosovo have been in an ongoing dispute and peace process over Kosovo's status. Kosovo unilaterally declared independence in 2008. Serbia does not recognize this. Several major powers project direct or indirect influence into the dispute, one of which is Russia. This research examines Russia's role in the dispute and its resolution via its influence and involvement in Serbia and the predominantly ethnic Serb region of northern Kosovo.



How does Russia get involved?

1. Using its UN Security Council veto to prevent UN recognition of Kosovo
2. Investment in Serbia's economy
3. Russian and pro-Russian media, including social media
4. Relationship with the Serb Orthodox Church in Serbia and Kosovo
5. Alleged involvement in Serbia's intelligence and security services

What methodology was used?

Literature Review: reading relevant academic journals, research reports and articles to formulate an understanding of the topic.

Interviews: conducting interviews with experts in the field to gain insider perspectives on the topic.

Why does Russia get involved?

1. To contain Western influence in Serbia and Kosovo
2. To prevent the legitimisation of the 1999 NATO intervention
3. To maintain its historical relationship in Europe (with Serbia)

How are local actors reacting?

Serbia: Serbia's President Aleksandar Vučić balances between the West, Russia and China and must be attentive to Russian power and domestic support for Moscow's non-recognition of Kosovo.¹

Kosovo: Pristina has no formal contact with Moscow and pursues Euro-Atlantic integration (contingent on normalisation with Serbia) and an assertive approach to northern Kosovo.

Northern Kosovo: Kosovo Serbs rely on Belgrade and Moscow for support, but some increasingly see Russia as pursuing its own interests vis-à-vis Kosovo.² For example, Russia used the 'Kosovo precedent' as justification for recognising the breakaway regions of Donetsk and Luhansk from Ukraine.

What impact does this have on the dispute?

1. Russia continues to be involved and is a key player. It broadly prefers the maintenance of the status quo and opposes any Western-brokered settlement that runs contrary to its interests.
2. Particularly since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, cracks have emerged in the traditionally close relationship between Russia and Serbia and the Kosovo Serbs, with Serbia also triangulating its interests with the West and China.

Figure 2: A poster of former US President Bill Clinton on Bill Clinton Boulevard in Pristina for his role in the NATO intervention that ended the Kosovo War in 1999.



Figures 3 & 4: Photos from the main bridge in Mitrovica that divides majority ethnic Serb North Mitrovica and northern Kosovo from majority ethnic Albanian South Mitrovica and the rest of Kosovo.



My research trip to Kosovo

To supplement my literature review, I travelled to Kosovo, conducting interviews with journalists, researchers, NGO workers and international officials in Kosovo's capital, Pristina, and the divided city of Mitrovica. I was careful to interview sources from different sides of the issue.

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References

- Figure 1 Photo Credit: BBC. 2022. *Kosovo: Serbs Agree to Dismantle Barricades after Talks*. Online image. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-64117730>.
- [1] Interview with researcher, Pristina, June 27, 2024.; Vuk Vuksanovic, Srdjan Cvijic, and Maksim Samorukov, *Beyond Sputnik and RT: How Does Russian Soft Power in Serbia Really Work?* Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, December 2022, p. 9.
- [2] Interview with researcher, Mitrovica, June 27, 2024.