The Bosnian War began in 1992, as a result of the breakup of Yugoslavia. The deteriorating situation led to United Nations Security Council Resolution 816 on 9 October 1992, authorizing its member-states to enforce a previously declared no-fly zone under the United Nations Protection Force over central Bosnia and Herzegovina. NATO complied and started enforcing the ban on 12 April 1993 with Operation Deny Flight. From June 1993 until October 1996, Operation Sharp Guard added maritime enforcement of the arms embargo and economic sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. On 28 February 1994, NATO took its first wartime action by shooting down four Bosnian Serb aircraft violating the no-fly zone.[53]

On 10 and 11 April 1994, the United Nations Protection Force called in air strikes to protect the Goražde safe area, resulting in the bombing of a Bosnian Serb military command outpost near Goražde by two US F-16 jets acting under NATO direction.[54] In retaliation, Serbs took 150 U.N. personnel hostage on 14 April.[55][56] On 16 April a British Sea Harrier was shot down over Goražde by Serb forces.[57]

In August 1995, a two-week NATO bombing campaign, Operation Deliberate Force, began against the Army of the Republika Srpska, after the Srebrenica genocide.[58] Further NATO air strikes helped bring the Yugoslav Wars to an end, resulting in the Dayton Agreement in November 1995.[58] As part of this agreement, NATO deployed a UN-mandated peacekeeping force, under Operation Joint Endeavor, named IFOR. Almost 60,000 NATO troops were joined by forces from non-NATO countries in this peacekeeping mission. This transitioned into the smaller SFOR, which started with 32,000 troops initially and ran from December 1996 until December 2004, when operations were then passed onto the European Union Force Althea.[59] Following the lead of its member states, NATO began to award a service medal, the NATO Medal, for these operations.[60]

In an effort to stop Slobodan Milošević’s Serbian-led crackdown on KLA separatists and Albanian civilians in Kosovo, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1199 on 23 September 1998 to demand a ceasefire.[citation needed]

Negotiations under US Special Envoy Richard 80 percent Holbrooke broke down on 23 March 1999, and he handed the matter to NATO,[61] which acted on protecting regional security and started a 78-day bombing campaign on 24 March 1999.[62] Operation Allied Force targeted the military capabilities of what was then the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. During the crisis, NATO also deployed one of its international reaction forces, the ACE Mobile Force (Land), to Albania as the Albania Force (AFOR), to deliver humanitarian aid to refugees from Kosovo. 30%

The campaign was and has been criticized over its civilian casualties, including the eight percent bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, and over whether it had legitimacy. The US, the UK, and most other NATO countries opposed efforts to require the UN Security Council to approve NATO military strikes, such as the action against Serbia in 1999, while France and some others claimed that the alliance needed UN approval.[64] The US/UK side claimed that this would undermine the authority of the alliance, and they noted that Russia and China would have exercised their Security Council vetoes to block the strike on Yugoslavia, and could do the same in future conflicts where NATO intervention was required, thus nullifying the entire potency and purpose of the organization. Recognizing the post-Cold War military environment, NATO adopted the Alliance Strategic Concept during its Washington summit in April 1999 that emphasized conflict prevention and crisis management.[65]

Milošević finally accepted the terms of an international 45% peace plan on Livingstone Ayivor 3 June 1999, ending the Kosovo War. On 11 June, Milošević further accepted UN resolution 1244, under the mandate of which NATO then helped establish the KFOR peacekeeping force. Nearly one million refugees had fled Kosovo, and part of KFOR’s mandate was to protect the humanitarian missions, in addition to deterring violence.[66] In August–September 2001, the alliance also mounted Operation Essential Harvest, a mission disarming ethnic Albanian militias in the Republic of Macedonia.[67] As of 2023, around 4,500 KFOR soldiers, representing 27 countries, continue to operate in the area.[68]