

6.2 What problems faced the USA and the UN following the end of the Cold War?

The role of the USA changed in the 1990s as a result of the end of the Cold War and the rivalry with the USSR.

The role of the USA in the Post-Cold War World

During the 1990s, American foreign policy focused on consolidating its success. The USA, because of its economic and military strength, became the only global superpower as well as the champion of democracy in the world. Together with its European allies, the USA set out to create, for the first time in history, a peaceful, undivided and democratic Europe based round the European Union.

- It continued to support NATO, originally set up to defend western Europe against Soviet expansion. Membership expanded to include eastern European states such as Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.
- NATO was seen by the USA as a means of maintaining the security of Europe as well as assisting with the changes in eastern Europe and the Balkans after the fall of Communism.
- Throughout the 1990s, NATO was used by the Americans in the Balkans to try to end the bouts of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Kosovo, part of the former Yugoslavia. In 1995, President Clinton worked with President Yeltsin of Russia to try to bring an end to the war in Bosnia, the outcome being the Dayton Accords. These agreements brought the three and a half year Bosnian War to an end, and provided a framework for peace and stability in the area.

Case studies of UN action in the 1990s

The USA also worked with the United Nations (UN) to resolve crises and enjoyed some success with Kuwait and Kosovo.

Kuwait

On 2 August 1990 Saddam Hussein, the ruler of Iraq, ordered the invasion of Kuwait, one of the leading oil-producing countries in the Middle East. In less than 24 hours, the country was under Iraqi control. Burdened with debts from his war with Iran, Kuwait offered a rich prize. Saddam did not expect the USA to use its military power in support of Kuwait. After all, the USA had been supporting him all the way through the war with the Iranian regime.

President Bush Sr took the lead in pressing for action to remove the Iraqis from Kuwait. He used the argument that it was an act of blatant aggression against a smaller neighbouring country. In reality, Bush wanted to protect US economic (especially oil) interests in the area.

The UN acted at once. The Security Council condemned the invasion and demanded withdrawal. On 6 August 1991, it passed Resolution 661, imposing economic sanctions on Iraq. This was followed by a period of diplomacy, but Saddam refused to withdraw. In November 1990, UN Resolution 678 authorised military action against Iraq if it failed to withdraw by 15 January 1991.

The USA organised a coalition of 34 nations with an armed force of 500,000. With almost 2,000 aircraft, General Norman Schwarzkopf, the US commander of the Coalition forces in the Gulf, opened with an air assault. Operation Desert Storm, the air offensive against Iraq, was launched on 16 January 1991. In the first ten hours, a combination of Stealth aircraft, cruise missiles, electronic warfare and precision-guided munitions took apart Iraq's military infrastructure and wrecked their ground forces.

After more than a month of 'softening up', Operation Desert Saber, the ground offensive to liberate Kuwait, was launched on 23 February. By 27 February, Kuwait City was taken by Coalition troops and the following day the US ordered

a ceasefire. Saddam was allowed to withdraw with much of his army intact. Bush called a ceasefire because he was afraid that if the slaughter continued the allies would lose the support of the other Arab nations. It was widely expected outside Iraq that after his humiliating defeat, Saddam Hussein would soon be overthrown. This was a success for the UN because:

- UN weapons inspectors were allowed into Iraq to make sure that he did not pose a threat to peace again.
- It had successfully used diplomatic, economic and military means, raising a powerful military force, to repel an aggressor.
- It had achieved all this by securing agreement among wider nations, thus avoiding any wider conflict.

However, Saddam Hussein was still leader of Iraq and remained a threat in the Middle East. In 2003, Coalition forces invaded Iraq and removed Saddam as leader.

KOSOVO

Kosovo, a province between Albania and Serbia, was part of the Yugoslav federation. In 1974, it was given greater autonomy within the federation but, in the 1980s, it campaigned for full independence. On becoming president of the Yugoslav federation in 1989, Slobodan Milosevic, who was a champion of Serbian nationalism, proceeded to strip Kosovo of its autonomy. Two years later, leaders of Kosovo declared unilateral independence and, in the mid 1990s, an Albanian guerrilla movement, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), stepped up attacks on Serb targets. The attacks precipitated a major Yugoslav military crackdown.

By the summer of 1998, Kosovo Albanians were mounting mass protests against Serbian rule and police and army reinforcements were sent in to crush the KLA. This led to UN intervention. On 23 September 1998, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1199. This:

- expressed 'grave concern' at reports reaching the Secretary General that over 230,000 persons had been displaced from their homes by the actions of Serbian security forces and the Yugoslav Army;
 - demanded that all parties in Kosovo and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) cease hostilities and maintain a ceasefire.
- Slobodan Milosevic's rejection of the UN resolution and other international attempts to end the persecution in Kosovo led to NATO air strikes against targets in Kosovo and Serbia in March 1999. However, a campaign of **ethnic cleansing** against Kosovo Albanians was launched by the Serbian authorities. Hundreds of thousands of refugees fled to Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro and further afield, and thousands died in the conflict. Serbian forces were driven out in the summer of 1999 and the UN took over the administration of the province. Kosovo was a partial success for the UN:

- It had initially attempted a diplomatic solution.
 - When this failed, it had used military intervention to force out the Serbian forces and end the ethnic cleansing.
 - It had taken over the temporary administration of the province.
- However, it was not a total success. The UN had not been able to prevent atrocities being carried out in Kosovo by Milosevic.

Key term

Ethnic cleansing: the systematic elimination of an ethnic group or groups from a region or society, as by deportation, forced emigration, or genocide.

Comment

Later in 1999, investigations by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe found that Serbs had carried out human rights abuses on a massive scale. Milosevic was put on trial in early 2002 at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity. Milosevic died in 2006 and, later, the court was unable to establish legally what had actually happened in Kosovo. Ethnic Albanians were angry that Milosevic's death robbed them of a verdict.