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HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION IN THE WAKE OF THE KOSOVO CRISIS

Introduction

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How often have we heard the name of this (formerly autonomous) region in Yugoslavia over the last months. In the past, many of us were maybe only vaguely aware of its existence, and policy makers, even if aware, seemed to not have focused on it much. Kosovo was not yet on the hot-list of bush-fires to put out, or not interesting or pressing enough politically, or maybe there were just too many conflicts with too little time to solve them. One could say, Kosovo was like the Kurdish problem in Turkey, or like East Timor in Indonesia or like wars fought in Sierra Leone and Sudan. This means, we know they exist, in some cases for a long time, but we never really do anything about it. Particularly Kosovo is such a classic case where all the early warning existed. Structurally even ten years ago the likelihood of conflict was clear—when Kosovo was stripped of its autonomy in March 1989.

In the fall of 1989, I was a Ph.D. student in sociology, not an area specialist of the Balkans, who wrote a paper on Yugoslavia. When asked what area was most likely to explode into conflict, my

answer was Kosovo, not Bosnia, but Kosovo. This means, we have known for a very long time that Kosovo was prone to conflict if no improvements to the rights of the Kosovo Albanians were

made. Maybe we did not know when or how, but we knew it could and would happen. Thus, in essence we had ten years to avert a disaster happening, and nevertheless it did happen.

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