

NATO

Kosovo 1999

Intervention in Yugoslavia



**39th Annual Model United Nations
Conference at St. John's High School**

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Letters From the Chairs:

Dear Committee Members,

Hello, I'm Owen Meagher. I'm a senior at Saint John's High School, and I have been a member of the Model United Nations club here since 2024, my sophomore year. Through the multiple committees I have participated in, all the debates I have had with delegates, and the long hours spent working with other delegates to produce a working paper, there has always been some advice I wish I had really considered a long time ago. This advice is to be friendly, inclusive, and outgoing. I understand that it's not always easy, as I was and still sometimes am in the other shoes too. I urge you all to take advantage of this opportunity to put yourself out there, make friends, and learn.

As the chair of this committee and an experienced member of the Model United Nations, all I have to say to you all is that I recommend not seeing each other's blocs as adversaries, but as friends or, at the very least, as colleagues. At the end of the day, you are all representatives of NATO, so strive to work together to build a resolution that is practical, smart, inclusive, and decisive. As I have a few words to finish with, just remember to have fun, and I wish you all the best of luck.

Best Regards, Owen Meagher.

Hello,

My name is Ben Li. I am a senior at St. John's High School and have been doing Model UN since my sophomore year. After many Model UN conferences, I have learned many things and met many new people. However, I come out of those conferences with one big piece of advice: don't be afraid to use your voice. During my first few conferences, I did not have fun at all. I sat in my seat silently trying to think of the perfect thing to say, and ended up not saying anything at all. I was always worried that I would say something wrong or stutter or do something that made me look goofy. Looking back, I realized I was putting too much pressure on myself to be perfect when nobody else cared.

As I got more comfortable, I also started to realize that one of the best parts of Model UN is the people you meet. You are constantly working with people you have never met before, and you have to figure out how to take a bunch of different ideas and turn them into one plan. At first, I was hesitant to walk up to people during unmods because I didn't really know what to say, but eventually I learned to just introduce myself and start talking. Some of my favorite parts of conferences have come from working with people I had never met before and seeing how everyone's different ideas can come together. You don't have to agree with someone on everything, either. A big part of Model UN is learning how to compromise, listen to other people's ideas, and find a solution that everyone can get behind.

I hope you all have a great conference and make some good memories along the way. I'm looking forward to seeing you all in committee!

History of the Problem:

The Kosovo crisis, similar to the previous Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s, was a part of the fallout of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. During this period, many states declared independence, sparking a series of violent conflicts among these new republics against Yugoslavia. The violence in these conflicts was remarkable due to the series of atrocities committed by both sides. After this series of wars, Yugoslavia in 1999 was reduced to two republics and still maintained its two autonomous provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina, both of which were part of Serbia. Kosovo held a majority Albanian ethnic population under Serbian suzerainty.

Slobodan Milošević, the president of Yugoslavia in 1989, worked to reduce autonomy within the Kosovo province. This increased the standing tension between the majority Albanian population and the minority Serbian authorities. Throughout the rest of the 1990s, in the backdrop of the Yugoslav Wars. The Kosovar Albanian population pushed for greater autonomy within the government or for independence entirely. Originally, this movement was peaceful, but by the mid-1990s, it had become significantly more violent. The KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) rallied behind Albanian nationalism and led an open insurgency against Yugoslav military and police forces. As the conflict grew, Yugoslav operations were often followed by attacks on civilian villages, the displacement of civilians, and human rights abuses. Western governments and organizations started to take more notice of the ongoing crisis when hundreds of thousands of people were being forced from their homes. As the humanitarian crisis grew and the fear that the Balkans would destabilize, Western powers pushed for intervention.

In the early months of 1999, diplomatic attempts were held in the French town of Rambouillet. International mediators proposed an agreement that granted Kosovo further

autonomy and enabled international peacekeepers. After further amendments to this proposal, the representatives of Kosovo eventually came to accept the proposal. On the other hand, Yugoslav representatives strongly opposed the proposal, particularly the presence of international peacekeepers. The fallout of this disagreement led to the total collapse of negotiations. This forced NATO to decide: intervene immediately with military force, without direct explicit clearance from the United Nations Security Council. Or wait for official clearance from the United Nations Security Council, then intervene militarily. Supporters argued that without immediate action, they risk escalation of the conflict into other Balkan countries and growing civilian casualties. Critics argued that without explicit authorization, it would undermine international law and infringe upon Yugoslav sovereignty.

Ultimately, immediate action was taken, and NATO's Operation Allied Force was a 78-day air campaign targeting the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The campaign officially began in the early spring of 1999, on March 24th, only meeting its end on June 10th of the same year. This air campaign consisted of targeting Yugoslav infrastructure and military targets within and around Kosovo. Eventually, targets around the capital of Yugoslavia, Belgrade, were targeted additionally. Concluding the operation, Yugoslav forces withdrew from Kosovo, allowing international security forces to arrive in the province.

Remaining one of the most debated actions in all of NATO's history, the Kosovo intervention raises enduring questions to this day, decades later. NATO's justification of humanitarian interventions forced reevaluations of collective security, responses to human rights violations, and state sovereignty.

Statement of the Problem:

Standing as one of the most debated and controversial humanitarian and legal conflicts in recent history. The Kosovo Crisis raised the question that continues to send ripples through the international community to this day: when, if ever, should military intervention occur without direct authorization from the United Nations Security Council? Even though the conflict peaked in the late 90's, issues sprouting from this conflict continue to shape NATO's policy regarding intervention and protection of civilian populations.

Beneath the Kosovo Crisis lies a challenging relationship between two strong principles of international affairs and community: state sovereignty and the responsibility to protect civilian populations. As a long-standing pillar of the foundation of international law, state sovereignty grants states the right to govern their people and territory without interference from outside forces. Alongside this, in recent history, the international community has grown to acknowledge the importance of protecting civilian populations across the world. Governments have the responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, terrorism, war crimes, and human rights violations. As in more recent history, governments are often turning on their own populations, introducing the discussion in the international community about whether the protection of these civilians is deemed a priority over a state's sovereignty.

The Kosovo crisis plays into this dilemma through NATO's Allied Force campaign. NATO wasn't given explicit authorization from the United Nations Security Council to conduct this military action. Thus, jeopardizing the legality of the intervention. Additionally, multiple members of the Security Council opposed military action, making it initially unlikely to pass.

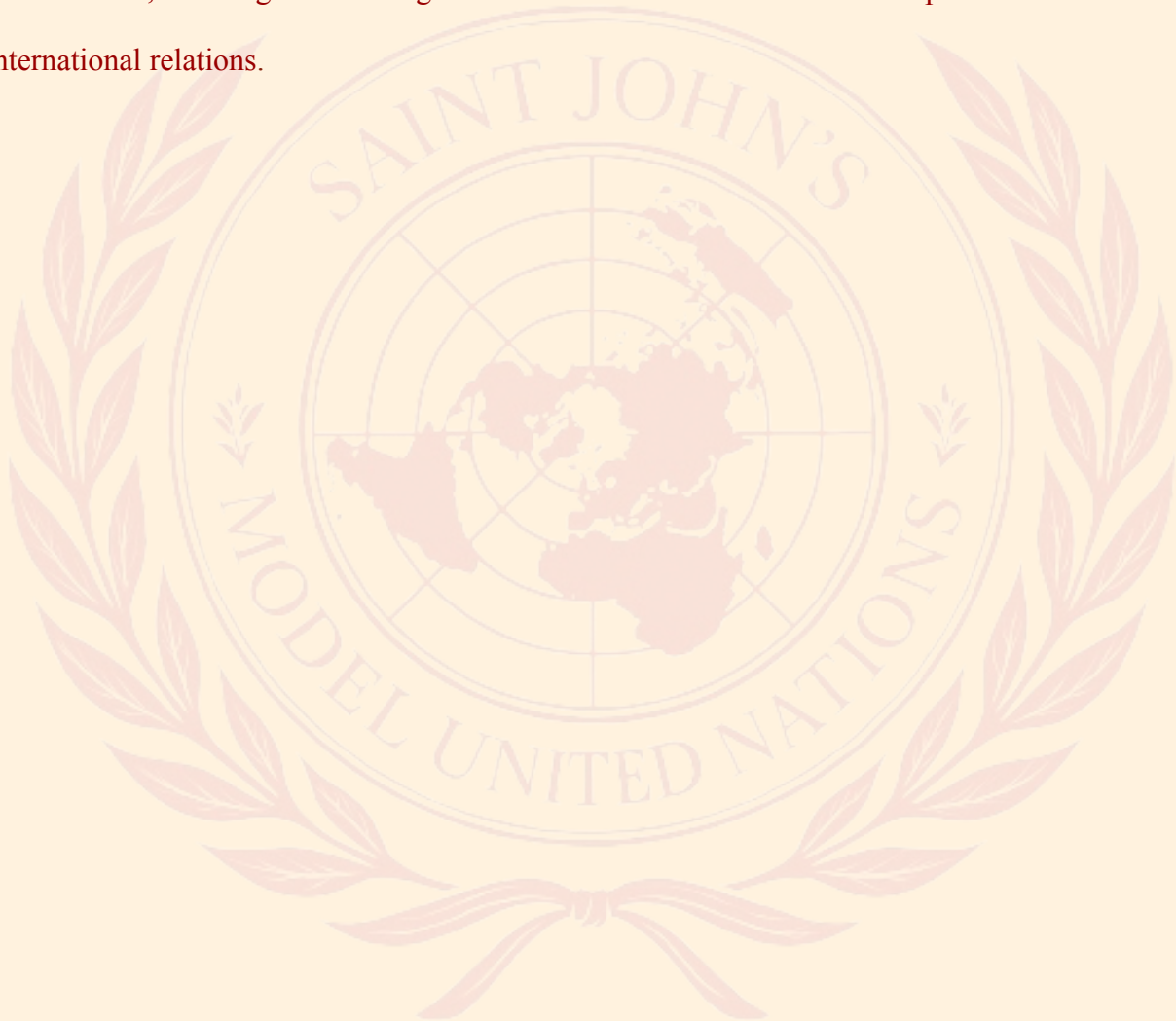
Supporters of the immediate action movement argue that it was fundamental in order to prevent further humanitarian catastrophe and to protect Balkan stability. Meanwhile, critics rallied behind the idea that bypassing the established international legal framework would work towards discrediting the authority of the United Nations. This polarizing predicament has sparked ongoing debate over whether an action can be justified when it is legally contested.

Although NATO was originally established as a defense alliance during the Cold War, Operation Allied Forces demonstrated NATO's willingness to respond and aid in regional crises that did not directly involve one of its members. Conducting military operations outside of this restriction runs counter to the defensive principles on which the alliance was founded. With this accounted for, the Kosovo Crisis marks a shift in NATO, turning its inward-focused alliance into one capable of conducting offensive and intervention operations.

For decades, the political consequences of Kosovo have continued to affect international relations, as its declaration of independence remains disputed by all United Nations members. Disagreements regarding territorial integrity, international recognition, and self-determination commonly occur as several United Nations members recognize Kosovo as an independent state while others refuse simultaneously.

For delegates in this NATO committee, every decision carries significant legal, diplomatic, military, and humanitarian consequences. The delay of strategic military actions or interventions may result in additional civilian suffering, casualties, or ethnic cleansings. On the other hand, staying consistent with international law and respecting a state's sovereignty reinforces the international community's consistency and respectability. Disregarding this international law will work to undermine the stability and authority of the international order.

Ultimately, the Kosovo crisis remains prevalent within its relevance as it confronts policymakers with difficult questions, such as: How can civilian casualties be minimized while improving military efficiency? Under what circumstances is military intervention acceptable and justified? Inquiries on leadership will continue to shape debates and the near future of international interventions, allowing Kosovo to grow as one of the most influential examples of modern international relations.



Possible Solutions:

Faced with the Kosovo crisis, neither NATO nor the world had an easy solution in hand. Whatever choice they made—diplomacy, force, or something else—would have complex consequences, both humanitarian, political, and legal, as well as military. Decision-makers had to contend with the immediate necessity of stopping violence, but also the imperative to uphold the principles of sovereignty, international order, and human rights. Various policy options emerged with their own trade-offs:

Diplomacy and Economic Sanctions: NATO and the international community could have sought a diplomatic settlement with Yugoslav authorities while applying economic sanctions, travel bans, and political isolation. This approach favored peace and international law by exhausting nonmilitary options. It also aimed to keep casualties to a minimum and avert a full-fledged regional war. But diplomacy had been going on for some time without producing a durable settlement, notably with the failed Rambouillet Peace Talks. Sanctions could also take many months, or even years, to influence a political regime while continuing to inflict hardship on civilians. Critics feared that lengthy talks could only give Yugoslav military forces more time to carry out atrocities and create a new wave of refugees. While Diplomacy was necessary, it might not respond rapidly enough to an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe.

Military Intervention: NATO could have used military air and ground forces to degrade Yugoslav military capacity, compel Belgrade to negotiate, and protect Kosovo's civilian population. Advocates argued that a decisive intervention could end the conflict when diplomatic initiatives had stalled and prevented a worsening humanitarian catastrophe. NATO had the

technological and organizational capacity to strike swiftly. But military action carried considerable risks. Air strikes could kill civilians and damage infrastructure like transportation and communications networks, potentially inciting public outrage, strengthening resistance, or escalating a much wider regional conflict. In addition, NATO's unilateral military actions lacked explicit United Nations authorization, provoking accusations of legal overreach and violation of international law from a number of governments, despite claims by supporters of intervention that humanitarian principles justify action even without Security Council authorization.

United Nations Security Council Authorization: NATO could have sought direct UN Security Council approval for its operations to gain broader international legitimacy and reflect a unified approach from the global community, not just the alliance. UN endorsement could also bolster international law and facilitate international cooperation in logistics, refugee aid, and peacekeeping efforts. The Security Council's veto power of any one of its five permanent members would have made gaining authorization a difficult, and likely impossible, prospect, since Russia and China were both opposed to NATO military action. Nevertheless, advocates of this option argued that withholding military action pending Security Council consent could prove dangerously slow during a humanitarian emergency.

Peacekeeping or Monitoring Mission: A peacekeeping operation with limited military personnel and humanitarian agencies could have monitored a ceasefire, provided security to refugees, supplied aid to civilians, and facilitated negotiations. Such an operation would have represented a less forceful intervention than a full military strike. However, peacekeeping efforts rely extensively on cooperation from both sides and an existing de-escalation of hostilities.

Without a truce and/or the agreement of the host government, peacekeeping units might have insufficient power and resources to effectively restrain violence or ensure access to civilians. In a high-stakes situation with actively fighting troops, lightly armed peacekeepers could become highly vulnerable to attack and be unable to prevent abuses.

Humanitarian Assistance and Political Mediation: An alternative approach to the crisis could have focused on increased international humanitarian aid, coupled with vigorous political negotiation. International agencies could have supplied food, medical care, and shelter to refugees while the international community redoubled efforts to broker peace. This approach would have addressed the suffering of the Kosovar population without immediately invoking the use of military force. Aid efforts might have also helped stabilize neighboring countries receiving large numbers of refugees. Yet, humanitarian aid alone could not have solved the political and military underlying conflict, and access to victims would have remained difficult during armed conflict, while the underlying situation remained unaddressed.

The main conflict faced by representatives boils down to the dispute over balancing intervention for humanitarian reasons with the principle of national sovereignty. Some states maintained that the duty to protect people from mass atrocities takes precedence when their own government poses a threat or is unable to secure safety. Other governments raised alarms that such intervention, without explicit international sanction, sets a dangerous precedent of meddling in the affairs of sovereign states and could be misused in the future as justification for imposing agendas on other countries. At its root is the tension between respect for state sovereignty and

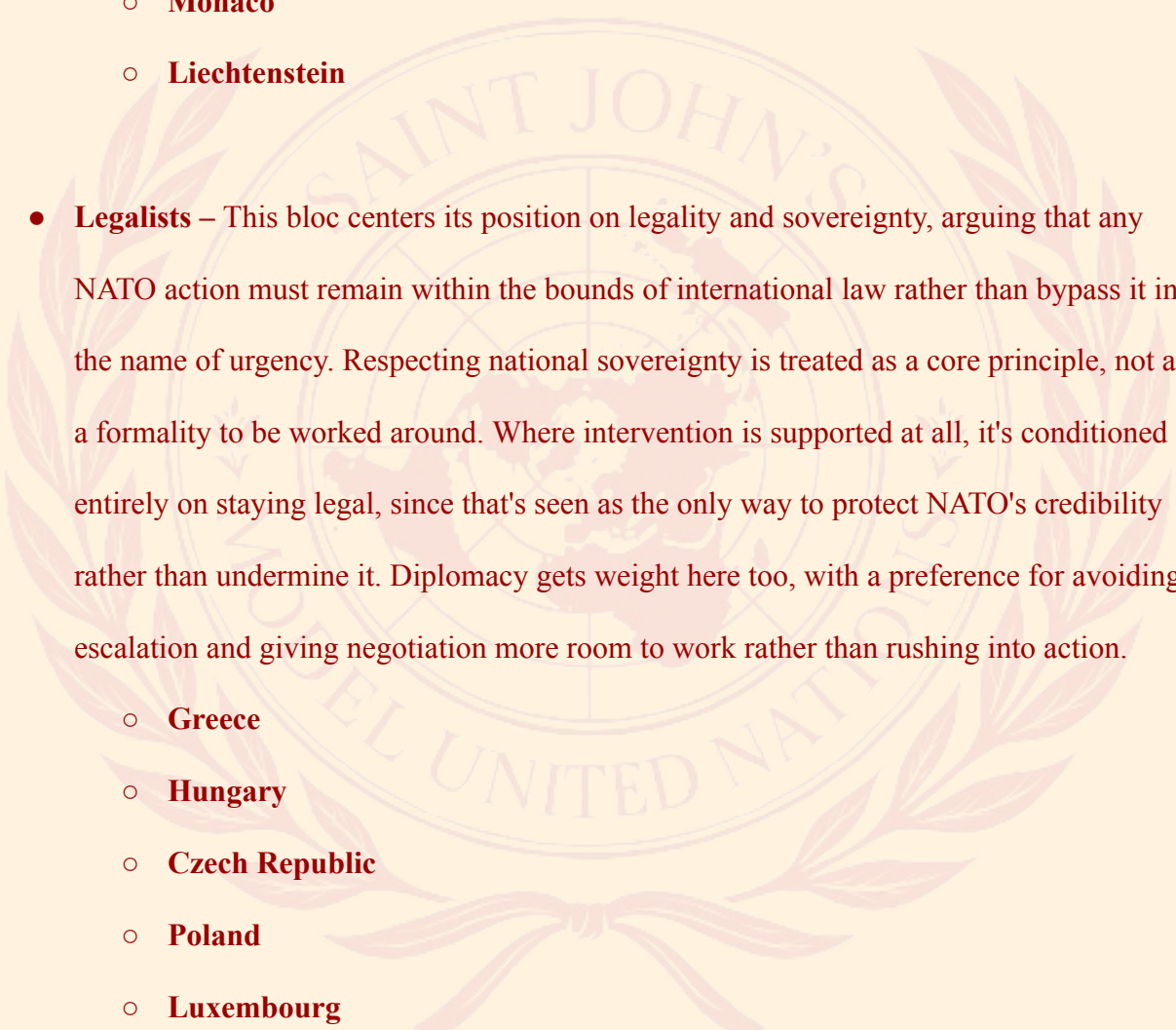
commitment to the defense of universal human rights when crises reach such catastrophic proportions.

Bloc Positions:

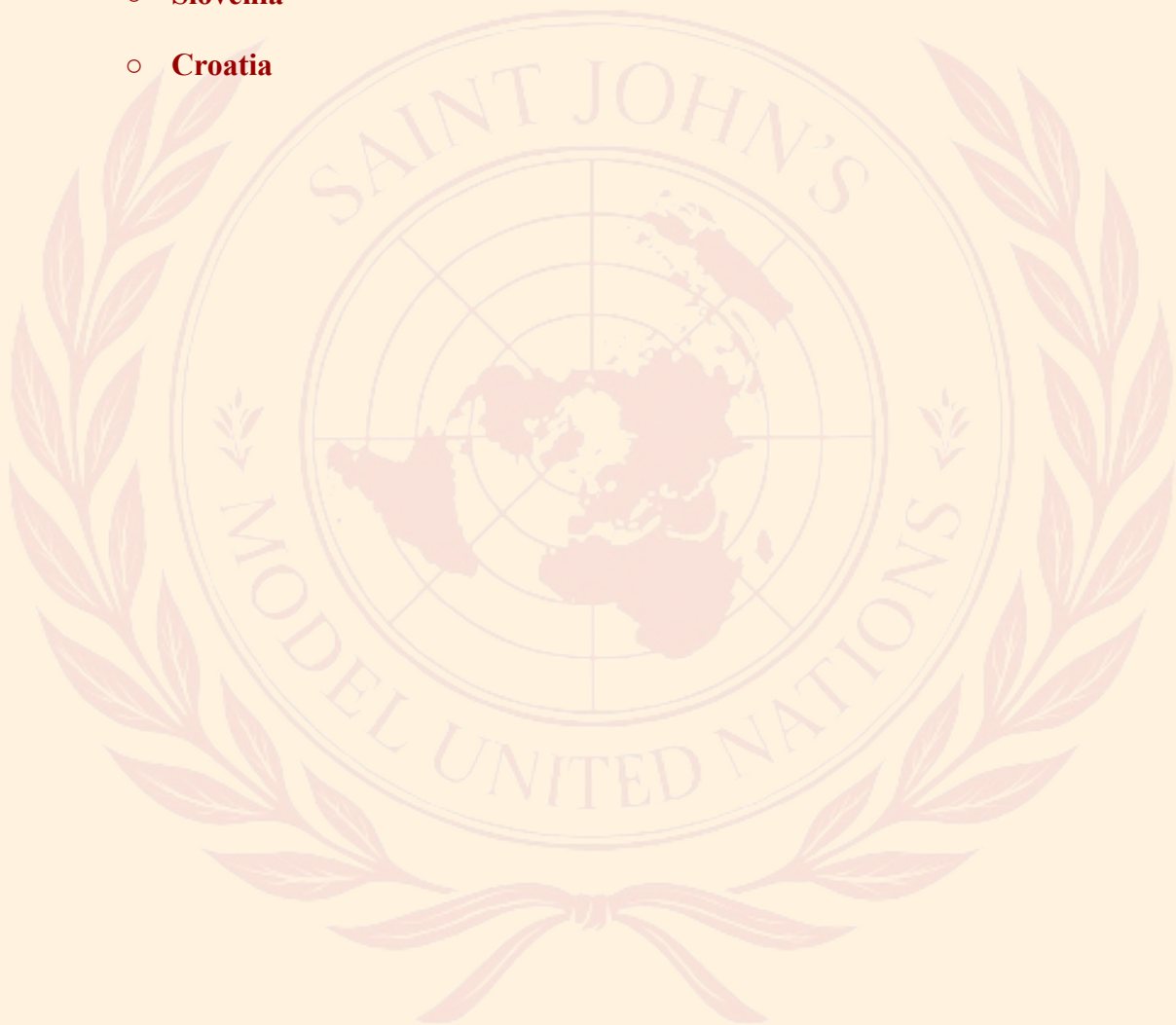
Note: Since NATO consisted of only 19 nations at the time of this committee, other nations for whom this topic is relevant were necessary to include.

- **Pro-Immediate Action** –This bloc believes in an immediate end to the ethnic cleansing and military action, with civilian protection as the top priority. Speed matters because any delay only deepens the humanitarian toll and risks broader regional instability. Military force and pressure are seen as the most reliable tools for achieving a fast resolution, though diplomatic efforts run alongside that pressure rather than replacing it. Throughout, preserving NATO's unity and credibility as a security alliance is treated as essential, meaning the response must be decisive without fracturing the coalition.
 - **United States**
 - **United Kingdom**
 - **France**
 - **Germany**
 - **Canada**
 - **Belgium**
 - **Netherlands**
 - **Norway**

- **Denmark**
 - **Romania**
 - **Finland**
 - **Sweden**
 - **Austria**
-
- **Restricted Action** – This bloc supports NATO intervention but insists it stay limited and contained rather than sweeping. The core worry is that a rushed or unrestricted response would backfire, triggering refugee crises, destabilizing surrounding regions, emboldening separatist movements, or escalating the conflict into something harder to control. Diplomacy is treated as something worth protecting rather than sidelining, with several members seeking continued dialogue between the opposing sides even as intervention proceeds. NATO's defensive character and internal unity also matter here; action should remain measured enough to avoid compromising the alliance's cohesion or its regional security standing.
- **Italy**
 - **Spain**
 - **Portugal**
 - **Turkey**
 - **Switzerland**
 - **Bulgaria**
 - **Ireland**

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- **Estonia**
 - **Latvia**
 - **Lithuania**
 - **San Marino**
 - **Monaco**
 - **Liechtenstein**
 - **Legalists** – This bloc centers its position on legality and sovereignty, arguing that any NATO action must remain within the bounds of international law rather than bypass it in the name of urgency. Respecting national sovereignty is treated as a core principle, not as a formality to be worked around. Where intervention is supported at all, it's conditioned entirely on staying legal, since that's seen as the only way to protect NATO's credibility rather than undermine it. Diplomacy gets weight here too, with a preference for avoiding escalation and giving negotiation more room to work rather than rushing into action.
 - **Greece**
 - **Hungary**
 - **Czech Republic**
 - **Poland**
 - **Luxembourg**
 - **Iceland**
 - **Slovakia**
 - **Cyprus**

- **Malta**
- **Ukraine**
- **Moldova**
- **Andorra**
- **Slovenia**
- **Croatia**



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