The transition from *debating intervention* to *unarmed intervention* was orchestrated by Richard Holbrooke. The American diplomat persuaded Slobodan Milošević to comply with the demands made by Security Council Resolution 1199. Provided with ammunition by NATO’s Activation Warning, which was issued immediately after Resolution 1199 was passed, Holbrooke embarked on what he believed was a final diplomatic mission to Belgrade. Using diplomacy backed with force, he persuaded Milošević to accept a series of demands including the reduction of troop levels in Kosovo to that before the outbreak of violence in 1998, the imposition of a general ceasefire, an international mission to verify compliance, and a deadline for the beginning of meaningful political dialogue based on a revised version of the Hill plan. The despatch of the OSCE KVM to verify the agreement marked the start of a more intrusive international engagement. However, the KVM never deployed its full complement of 2,000 and by the beginning of January 1999 it was quite obvious that the Holbrooke–Milošević agreement was unravelling in the face of renewed violence.

The defining characteristics of this period derive from the nature of the KVM, which was widely perceived in the West as Milošević’s last chance to avoid war with NATO:

- The KVM was a traditional peacekeeping mission in the narrowest sense. It was there with Yugoslav consent and it was widely understood that it could not operate without that consent.
- NATO’s co-operation with OSCE verification in the form of the aerial reconnaissance mission, ‘Operation Eagle Eye’, and the stationing of a European-led NATO ‘extraction force’ in Macedonia to provide a rapid withdrawal capability for the KVM suggested a growing militarisation of international policy.
The continuation of negotiations and subsequent revisions of the Hill plan suggested that there was hope of finding an interim political settlement though the portents for failure were also present as deadlines passed without progress.

The KVM was based on an agreement between the West and Slobodan Milošević. The Kosovar Albanians were neither included nor consulted during the negotiations. As a result, the agreement was generally viewed in a negative light by the Kosovar Albanian community and elements of the UÇK believed themselves to be not bound by the accord though its leadership did conclude a separate ceasefire agreement with Holbrooke.

The Milošević–Holbrooke agreement

The Milošević–Holbrooke agreement, which was finalised between 13 and 15 October 1998, was facilitated by the increased likelihood of NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia. With key alliance members such as the UK and US suggesting publicly that Resolution 1199 provided enough authorisation for air strikes the Alliance moved to link the decision on whether to use military force directly to the fate of Holbrooke's diplomatic mission in Belgrade.¹ The decision to link force and diplomacy was based on the belief that it was this that ultimately brought the parties to Dayton in 1995. In fact, no such link had existed. Back then, although Milošević believed that Holbrooke had the power to call in air strikes, the use of air strikes during the negotiations was not at Holbrooke's behest, though the American diplomat noted that they greatly enhanced his negotiating position.²

The move to turn NATO's Activation Warning, which called upon member states to contribute forces and commence planning, into an Activation Order that gave the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) control of the air assets and authority to actually begin attacks commenced in early October 1998, in tandem with Holbrooke's diplomatic mission. On 9 October, the North Atlantic Council approved the operations plan for a phased air campaign and for the first time began to examine the possibility of a limited deployment of ground troops. This would be ‘after a ceasefire or in order to monitor a ceasefire’. The Council stressed however that no decision had been made on this latter possibility and no Activation Warning had been issued.³ The move to back diplomacy with a credible threat – and possible use – of force was emphatically endorsed by the European Parliament. Hans van