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President Kostunica of Yugoslavia has urged restraint amid new calls for action against ethnic Albanian militants in the Presevo Valley, along the buffer zone between Serbia and Kosovo.

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The president said that this was not the time for war drums -- it was dangerous and irresponsible to respond to extremism with more extremism. President Kostunica said Yugoslavia had no right to wage war in what he called an impoverished country, where the population had already been hit by repression, sanctions and bombs. The President was referring to a call by his political ally, Zoran Djindjic, for early action against ethnic Albanian militants, who killed four Serb police officers in the region last month.

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Mr Djindjic, who is expected to become the next Prime Minister of Serbia after elections later this month, said the government had the right to defend its territory. Under the 1999 peace agreement, a five-kilometre zone was created between Kosovo and the rest of Serbia.

Correspondents say that ethnic Albanian militants from Kosovo have been operating in the zone in an attempt to drive Serbs from predominantly Albanian areas in the Presevo Valley, which is not part of Kosovo.

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