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15 years from NATO bombing of Serbia (FR Yugoslavia)

by Nikola Milošević - Monday, March 24, 2014

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Short story

It was 23rd of March 1999. Quite a tough time in Serbia, you could tell it by smelling the air. People around were nervous because NATO intervention was expected to happen. Everyone was hoping that it will not start, but there were signs that it will begin soon. In my home, it was intense as well. I was the 5th grade in primary school. My parents sent me to bed quite early and stayed watching television. I woke up, at 2 am in the morning, they were still watching television. They usually sleep by that time. It was a bit awkward, but I continued sleeping. Next day was Wednesday, so I had to go to school quite early in the morning.

At 5 am my father woke me up. He was in the army uniform. I don't usually see him dressed like that. He was a normal civilian, with a decent job. However, the reserve of the army was called and with them my father. I asked what is going on? He replied that my mother and I are going to Slovakia. I asked, "What about school?". He just waved his hand, and just told me to dress up. We went to train station. It was quite intense moments, since we were leaving to Bratislava, and one hour after that my father had to board the army bus to the positions of his unit. We said farewell, my parents kissed, and my mother and I boarded the train.



We had a family in Slovakia, so we travelled there quite often - at least twice a year. However, this travel was different. While we were still in Serbia, you could see army preparing for the attack in the fields near the railroad, putting in place and hiding anti-aircraft cannons and missiles. On the other hand when we passed Hungarian border, we could also see on the boarder more army that it was usual. Then I looked at the sky and there was every couple of minutes plane formations going by. We had to change train in Budapest. My mother was trying to find some piece of information about whether it started. She told me that Javier Solana the night before gave order for air strikes on Yugoslavia. Still it have not started. By the night we arrived to Bratislava, Slovakia. We entered Taxi to go to my grandpa's home. My mom asked taxi driver if he knows anything about Yugoslavia. He said that he heard that it had begin about hour ago. It was quite unbelievable...

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We were unable to process the fact that it really happened. It was not right and by that fact totally unbelievable. When we arrived, my grandpa confirmed that it had started. Then we realized it is serious.

When we arrived we called my father. It was still vague what was going on. The news in Slovakia, as well as in other countries reported that attacks will be just on Kosovo. However, my father told us, that within that first few hours, Belgrade was attacked. Funny thing was, that my uncle who was living at that time in Berlin, Germany called my father to tell him not to worry, because there will be not attacks on rest of Serbia. However, my father had to disappoint him, telling him that his government lies, and that attacks are already going on in Belgrade and rest of Serbia and Montenegro as well.



What you do when you are 5th-grade kid, you are out of the country you lived in, which is under NATO bombing, and your father is in the army? You watch the news, to try to get as much information as possible about the situation back home. So did I. I was switching between Slovak news channels, CNN, BBC and many others which were reporting about Yugoslavia. It is just hard for a kid like that to bare and understands it all. I still cannot rationalize situation now. A mix of sadness, hate, anger and confusion comes to you. A lot of your friends just stayed there. You are out of danger and feel a bit guilty for it. Then your father is in the fighting position, trying to prepare and give as much resistance as possible. But the danger of death is quite near all the time, and I knew it. My mother tried to stop me from thinking so much about it. First, she tried to make me go out. I was going out, even played football with other kids. But many times when I saw flying NATO warplanes above, I was trying to shoot them down with stone or by shooting a ball as high as possible. None of it worked, since they were flying too high, but what else you can do as a kid? My aunt was a teacher in primary school in Slovakia, so she and my mother decided to put me in school to keep my thought away.

So I started to go to school. At the beginning it was fun. I make some friends. Most of the class was ok. And it really kept me a bit busy from thinking what was going on back in Serbia or Yugoslavia.

One day a group of Skinhead kids called me to talk with them. It was quite awkward, since they were the most feared kids in school, bullying other. They asked if I am from Serbia, I replied positively. They were quite amazed by the thing what was going on in Yugoslavia, said that they respect how the country is fighting against these global powers and globalization. Also, they offered help if I need some. Probably, this is my only positive interaction with skinheads ever, since some 10 years later, I got blacklisted by Serbian skinheads as a traitor of the race, because of my work and some opinions are given on my website www.starisloveni.com. But it was some support, and any support at that time was needed. All the media back there was labeling Yugoslav people as evil, so it was quite hard for a helpless kid, to carry on and try to explain it is not true. The media was so strong, that at some point kids I was quite ok with started to hate me, just because of the thing from

where I came. They started telling me that they don't want me in their class. That Serbs are evil, so am I. One guy started petition amongst other kids to kick me out of class. About half of class signed it. Then he started talking about that he wants to fight with me. So he started preparing himself, bringing some fighting glues to school. However, there were some quite intense pauses between classes, when I didn't know will he attack me or not. However, he never got enough courage and still, I could get some help from those skinheads (not that I liked it, but I didn't mind to use them to help myself).



Another awkward situation and quite hard to cope with when you are the kid is when you see other kids in the park playing with plastic guns, shouting around let's play Kosovo.

Luckily, after 78 days and 78 night, it stopped. I finished my 5th grade there. My father came, for summer holidays, and then together we returned to Belgrade. My mother got the job in Bratislava and got some connections, so she could employ my father, by he rather wanted to return. So we went back.

Rollback to some facts about NATO Bombing

After the personal story, and telling you how these time affected me, how hard was it for me, even thou I was quite far away from the bombs, lets roll back to some facts.

NATO General Wesley Clark wrote in his book "Modern warfare" that planning of airstrikes started in mid-June 1998. and was finished by the end of August same year. So one year before it actually started.

FR Yugoslavia was attacked as a guilty side for humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo and unsuccessful negotiations in Rambouillet and Paris. However, FR Yugoslavia was actually protecting their citizens against UCK terrorist groups attacking and killing both Albanian and Serbian people that were cooperating with the government and trying to get independence by force. Negotiations in Rambouillet and Paris was actually not negotiations, but the place where the ultimatum was placed. Since Yugoslavia refused to let NATO troops in his territory, NATO attacked on 24th March 1999 at 19:45. Nineteen countries of NATO were involved in the bombing of Yugoslavia from ships in Adriatic sea and bases in Italy.

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During the bombing, more than 3000 (by some sources more than 4000) people died, and more than 12.500 were injured. Yugoslav army and police lost about 1000 men together, rest were civilians. So 2 times more civilians died during the bombing. About 6000 civilians were injured during the bombing and 2700 children amongst them. 88 children died.



Civilian refugee colon hit by NATO bomber

Damage of about 100 billion US dollars was made.

NATO losses were never published. The government in Yugoslavia argued that few tens of aircrafts were shot down, which was never admitted. Russian agency APN stated that NATO lost 400 soldiers and more than 60 air crafts, while American president stated on 10. jun 1999 that NATO had no loses.

In the museum of air crafts in Belgrade are hold remaining of shot down F-117, F-16, several drone planes and cruise missiles.

During the bombing it was destroyed or damaged 25.000 residential buildings, it was destroyed 470 kilometers of roads and 595 kilometers of rails.

There was destroyed or damaged 14 airfields, 19 hospitals, 20 health centers, 18 kindergartens, 69 schools, 176 cultural heritage buildings, 82 bridges.

During the bombing, there were 2300 air strikes on 995 objects around the county. About 1150 war crafts were deployed by NATO, who launched around 420.000 projectiles of the total mass of 22.000 tons.



NATO launched 1300 cruise missiles and dropped around 37000 cluster bombs, from which died around 200 people and several hundred were injured. Use of cluster bombs are prohibited by international convention, because of the risk it causes to the civil population. However, NATO hasn't stopped there but also used bombs with depleted uranium. These weapons were prohibited in 1996 by the International Court of Justice and United Nation. These weapons are causing an increase in cancer and tumor illnesses around the Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo.

The bombing of Yugoslavia stopped on 10. June 1999. at 13:30. Serbian armed forced left Kosovo, and 37200 KFOR soldiers entered Kosovo. More than 200 000 Serbs were forced to leave Kosovo, and they never returned. By this fact it is obvious that NATO aided ethnic cleansing. Some NATO officials tried to claim that bombing was humanitarian intervention. But I would like to hear an explanation how 4000 dead civilians and 13 000 injured civilians and 200 000 refugees are humanitarian? In the aftermath, Kosovo proclaimed Independence, by violating international law. However, International Court of Justice claimed that it was not the violation of International law. This conflict has still today very large geopolitical consequences. The independence of Crimea and its joining to Russia was same violation of the same law as was Kosovo independence, but western powers liked to break law in Kosovo and they don't like when someone else breaks it without their consent. Also, this conflict was launched without the consent of UN Security Council did not allow the military intervention. Similar then happened in Iraq, Libia, Afghanistan, Syria...

The World become a nasty place where the force rules and there is no law unless the one with the most force want it.

If you are interested in some more personal stories, I think this could be a good documentary with a lot of personal stories from that time:

[youtube=<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxDcvhH2Ypc>]

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