

Thursday 25/03/99
14:45h

The day after the first night of NATO attacks on FR Yugoslavia

We sat glued to the TV last night, Wednesday 24th March 1999. We were watching psychological preparations for the first wave of NATO attacks on military targets in FR Yugoslavia. We are receiving here TV news from all major German channels, Sky News, CNN, TV BiH and Croatian state TV, as well as radio stations such as BBC, Deutsche Welle, Radio from Republika Srpska and other local stations, plus Radio B92 (through Email). Last night and today, Bosnian TV BiH continued on as usual with their programme broadcasting of South American soap operas and US serials. Last night in the main news at 19:30 TV BiH brought news about a round table tackling 'literature in BiH' attended by a handful of people. Later on TV BiH established an extra news desk tackling news about NATO attacks on FR Yugoslavia. Every now and then we could hear planes flying above Sarajevo, although we were not able to say where they came from or where they were heading. This morning we viewed a jet fighter above Sarajevo heading eastwards and then turning around just above the town.

We watched Sky News and CNN broadcasting the same pictures throughout the whole afternoon. They featured US B-52 bombers taking off from England, sequences of Milosevic's address to the nation, and refugees in a snowstorm that closed with a picture of a child travelling on horseback. We assumed that no TV pictures from Pristina were available for that particular day, because only 300km away, here in Sarajevo, the warm sunny weather was so different. (Things would have been a lot clearer if they had acknowledged that the pictures were indeed archive footage).

Watching TV BiH, a major TV station from the Federation of Bosnia and Hercegovina we got a big surprise when they showed pictures from Pristina made on the actual day that was being reported. So up to date footage was available. There was no snow or heavy weather conditions. The day had been bright and clear. We were particularly aware of the weather conditions because military experts were saying that NATO needed a clear day to ensure their attack on FR Yugoslavia would be accurate to their targets. Apparently their jet fighters cannot operate accurately in cloudy skies.

The air raids followed later and you have certainly heard plenty about them. Our main concern about these attacks is the result they will produce. The NATO decision to undertake military action against Yugoslavia could produce the effect of homogenisation within the population. Let's face it, being bombarded does minimise the space for any protest or opposition against war policy. As the number of casualties among the civilian population grows, so too will the support for the President.

In our experience of the past 24 hours there has been a minimal amount of reporting from inside Kosovo to cover what is happening on the ground to people who badly need a voice. The 'moral and humanitarian' protection of the Kosovo Albanians has been voiced so often as the justification for NATO bombing. Western media seems to be more interested in covering NATO's military arsenals and official statements, than they are in covering one of the major justifications for them. If in previous wars spy satellites have been able to capture square inches of information, why can't they tell us what is happening inside Kosovo.

We hear on BiH news that Yugoslav forces are hitting hard. Not just the strongholds of the UCK in Kosovo, but also the civilian population, causing floods of refugees. The British defence ministry has said that the Yugoslav security forces are attacking 'the innocent Albanian population in Kosovo. They forgot to mention the warring UCK who in the past, have besides Serbian police and military, often targeted civilians in terrorist attacks, as well as so called 'Albanian collaborators'. These collaborators include ethnic Albanians who have not joined the UCK but remained at their jobs working for 'Serbian' companies as e.g. forest watchers, postmen and similar.

Instead of preventing a humanitarian catastrophe by bombing military targets, NATO action will more than likely initiate unpredictable consequences and fierce fighting.

But let us go back to the chain of actions, which have lead to the present situation. It is indisputable that the Serbian regime has been brutally suppressing for years the legal rights of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, and their demands for autonomy. The human rights record of FR Yugoslavia is terrible and this has particularly effected the Kosovo Albanians. But not only them. The opposition within Serbia have also been heavily targeted in previous years. Remember that in March 1991, Milosevic ordered the crackdown of an opposition rally in Belgrade with the use of tanks and armed special police forces.

At the Rambouillet negotiations the Yugoslav delegation rejected the peace deal for two major reasons:

- A. They rejected the stationing of NATO troops in Kosovo but left the door open for UN troops. However the Kosovo Albanians insisted on NATO troops and UK and USA pushed for NATO troops to be stationed there to monitor the implementation of the political agreement. So the political platform could have been agreed upon. It failed due to the military part, which aimed at overlooking the implementation.
- B. They wanted perspectives of independent Kosovo to be excluded. Something which NATO countries officially still claim to agree with.

So how does all of this effect the situation in Bosnia? There is talk of a spill over of the conflict by 'military analysts' appearing on Sky and CNN TV. They mention Macedonia, Albania, Greece, and Turkey. Strangely they have completely ignored Bosnia as a possible region for conflict spill over. The radio station from Republika Srpska that we can receive in Sarajevo has been bringing ongoing reports about the situation in FRY, doing contact shows, where people are invited to 'express their emotions' about the events in Yugoslavia. The comments were transmitted between folk songs glorifying the Serbian nation, 'the Holy Land of Serbs - Kosovo' was played and a clear feeling of solidarity with Serbs in FRY was apparent.

On the streets of Sarajevo one could see today many more cars and buses than usual from various towns in FR Yugoslavia, indicating that people have sought shelter over here. Some reports that the Yugoslav borders have been closed to men and left open for women and children remain unconfirmed. The Serbian authorities claim that high numbers of men are volunteering for the military. The rage that NATO bombs have caused in FR Yugoslavia give Milosevic more support than he has had for years. NATO's claim to be waging strikes against Milosevic personally seems ridiculous when you consider how much support he is gaining.

All Bosnian and Croatian airports were closed yesterday, unlike Yugoslav airspace, which remained in use. Indeed it was only in the early afternoon of today that Sky news brought a particularly

interesting piece of news about yesterdays bombing. A Montenegrin civilian plane landed at Podgorica airport just a couple of minutes before the first cruise missiles hit the airport. The passengers fled across the airfield as they were showered with soil raining down on them from the blasts. It is to be assumed that the mighty NATO powers that targeted military installations could well see on their radar that a civilian plane was in view. At least we would like to think so. But for some reason this had not been considered a good enough reason to stop the action. Or perhaps these ingenious flying machines cannot change their commands very quickly in times of emergency. Which one of these options would you like to have flying over your head tonight?

At the moment of writing these lines there is the constant sound of jet planes outside. The government of Republika Srpska has forbidden NATO to use their territory for attacks on FRY and indeed NATO have said they have not used Bosnian air space.

Our thoughts are with the people in FR Yugoslavia. All of them. One young man wrote to us 'I am not scared of what is happening now, I am scared of what is going to happen when the bombing stops'. Another young woman talks of coming over to Sarajevo, but where will her mother stay? And what about her brother?

Yugoslavia is currently hosting the largest population of refugees in Europe.
What do these refugees do now?

Centre for nonviolent action - Sarajevo
Centar za nenasilnu akciju - Sarajevo

cna.sarajevo@gmx.net