

Six Little Reasons

Пише: Slobodan Antonić
понедељак, 24 март 2008 22:16

On the anniversary of NATO's bombing of Serbia, March 24, 1999 - March 24, 2008



Serbia is the only European country that was bombed by NATO. The bombing was illegal, without UN Security Council authorization. While bombing Serbia, NATO committed atrocities against civilians. This is why Serbia cannot just join NATO. That might be possible only when Serbia receives a clear apology from NATO leaders, even if only for the “collateral damage” it suffered in 1999.

Such an apology has not come. Quite the contrary, NATO and U.S. officials incessantly repeat that the 1999 aggression was “necessary,” and don't mention atrocities at all. Numerous NGOs in Serbia, receiving a steady stream of funding from the U.S. and other NATO countries, keep telling the Serbian public that all Serbs must atone for crimes. Meanwhile, NATO is not only not atoning for its misdeeds, but considers it somehow rude of Serbia to even mention them.

This made it possible to have a welcoming ceremony for an U.S. Air Force Major in Belgrade on July 13, 2006. As a member of the 555th Squadron, Maj. Andrew Wiles took part in the NATO attack on Serbia; some Serbian media even claimed that it was his plane that cluster-bombed downtown Nis. That did not bother the Serbian Minister of Defense, who greeted Maj. Wiles and welcomed him to Serbia. It seems like the “Euro-reformers” in Serbia agree with U.S. Ambassador Cameron Munter, who told the weekly *Evropa* (November 22, 2007): “We believe that [the bombing of Serbia] was hard, but also necessary. It was needed to depose Milošević.”

Due to this belief, the “Euro-reformers” in Serbia have systematically endeavored to repress the memories of NATO's crimes. Today we remember only the bombing of the Serbian Television – and that not as a crime committed by NATO, but something for which a Milošević official was blamed. Even the memory of crimes has been subject to spin and political manipulation.

Serbia must clearly recall six “little” crimes of NATO, become aware of them, and challenge NATO to recognize them. Only after there is an explanation, Serbia and NATO can talk again. These six “little” NATO crimes are the six “little” reasons that Serbia, under current circumstances, should not join NATO.

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The first “little” reason is the 2-year-old Marko Simić. He went for a walk with his father Vladan, on May 31, 1999 at noon, in his hometown of Novi Pazar. When they reached the apartment building at Stefana Nemanje 74, there was an explosion. The building was struck by a missile probably intended for the nearby bus station. (Why the civilian bus station was targeted still remains a mystery.) Besides Marko and Vladan, nine more civilians were killed. Shortly after this tragedy, Marko's mother gave birth to a girl. When she grows up, maybe she will read the monograph “NATO Crimes in Yugoslavia” and find a photograph of her little brother, on a hospital bedsheet, his face bloody and his left leg gone.

The mother of 11-month-old Bojana Tošović, another “little” witness of NATO's un-atoned crimes, was six months pregnant. Then her house in the village of Merdare (near Kuršumljija) was hit by a bomb on April 10. Her husband Božin was holding Bojana when the ceiling caved in. Mother Marija could only watch helplessly as her husband, crushed by the concrete ceiling plate, died slowly with their daughter in his arms.

Three-year-old Milica Rakić, of Batajnica, is our (and God's) third “little” witness. On April 17, around 9:30 PM, she told her mother Dušica she needed to go potty. Dušica took her to the bathroom, put her on the chamber pot, and went to make the bed. They felt safe, because their house was four kilometers away from the military airfield. Then a bomb hit near the building. Right away, father Žarko ran into the bathroom. Milica lay there in a pool of blood, hit by a shrapnel from the bomb. They took her to a nearby emergency room, but she was beyond help. She, too, was photographed on the hospital bedsheet. The photo shows her bandaged left leg, and her deathly pale face, beautiful and gentle. The angelic face of a murdered child.

There is no picture of the dead Branimir Stanijanović, age six, of Aleksinac. With his father Vidosav and mother Divna, he was on a train that found itself on a bridge at Grdelica on April 12, twenty minutes before noon. The pilot, NATO officials later said, had the mission to destroy the bridge, but he saw the train too late. I guess that's why he came back a few minutes later and hit the train again. Not the bridge – the train. And in the same spot, cars number two and three. The entire Stanijanović family perished, along with another fifteen or so passengers. There is no exact count of the dead, since their charred bodies fell into the depths of south Morava River. Branimir's body was one of them. If the pilot who did this, and NATO spokesman Jamie Shea – who disavowed any blame for these deliberate murders – are interested in knowing whom they've killed, there is a picture of Branimir in existence. It shows him at a school pageant, serious, smartly dressed, with a bow tie. Maybe that is what he is wearing that now, walking in God's garden?

Eight-year-old Stefan and his sister, five-year-old Dejana Pavlović are in that garden now as well. They were asleep in their family home, in Rajča near Belgrade, when it was hit by a bomb on May 26. It remains unclear what target of any military importance could have possibly been nearby. Father Vladimir died with his children. Mother Branislava survived. Her only memory of her family, snuffed out in the blink of an eye, is a photograph. It shows the children in colorful pajamas, laid out on the blue bedsheet. Dejana's nose is slightly bloodied. Stefan looks untouched.

Those are the six “little” witnesses of NATO crimes, six “little” reasons why Serbia has to

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demand an explanation from NATO leaders. The explanation is simple. At the Tašmajdan park, there is a monument to children killed in the NATO bombing. (It is falling apart – of a statue of a girl with butterfly wings, only the wings remain. Perhaps some day the Belgrade authorities will set aside some funds to restore the monument; if they don't have enough, they should say something – the people will pitch in.) So, NATO Secretary-General Jap de Hoop Scheffer, or another NATO official, needs to come before this monument and clearly say, “Forgive us.” We don't need him to kneel, or light a candle. All he has to do is bring one flower and ask forgiveness. And Serbia will forgive.

Until then, there's nothing to talk about. Not in Belgrade, not in Brussels, not in Ohio. One flower at Tašmajdan – that's the condition for any further talks. One flower at Tašmajdan – and only then can both we and you be human again.

translated by Nebojsa Malic