

Comment: Our Latest Lost War

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Serbia has triumphed, and the UN has been forced into Kosovo. The gas is out, but love for our president will keep us warm.

Exactly 11 weeks after the start NATO's spectacular visit to Serbia, the air war against this small, poor and tolerant country has finally ended, Radio Television Serbia (RTS) reports.

The news was broken only in the third broadcast, Wednesday evening, June 9, around 10:30 PM. The television presenter, a woman, began by smiling. Then winking. Then smiling again. Flirting with the audience, she could not contain the come-on sparkle which was, no doubt, ordered by the station's proprietors, the ruling Socialist Party of Serbia.

The bombardments, she announced, have ceased. The peace policy of Serbia and our president, Slobodan Milosevic, has won. It is all over, we have triumphed, and everything is cool.

The heroic Yugoslav Army, RTS informed us, is withdrawing from Kosovo victoriously, while the fascist troops of the New World Order enter Holy Serbian soil as cowards.

This is more than victory, the charming face explained, this is catharsis, nirvana. This, dear viewers, is orgasm.

To be sure, all listeners will be overjoyed that 2.5 ton bombs will no longer fall into our homes. But there is more: now we will sleep like logs--and in our dreams we will thank our president, Slobodan Milosevic, who has personally defended us for 77 days.

Does it really matter that five or six or seven or eight or nine or even ten thousand soldiers and civilians have died? For, you see, the UN is in Kosovo. Spaniards, Frenchmen, Englishmen, Germans, Americans--this is what we all wanted from the very beginning. We wanted them to strengthen the sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. And, Foreign Ministry spokesman Nebojsa Vujovic reminded us, we wanted them to help our Albanians to come back, to enjoy a comfortable life here with us.

Where were we during all these events? Nowhere. What were we doing? Nothing.

But who cares? Only a few minutes after the television address, Belgrade burst out with the sound of machine guns, Kalashnikovs and Uzis. The citizens, who are in love with Slobodan Milosevic, immediately expressed their trust in the victory by demonstrating with light artillery and bombs. They fired in order to express their love of the peace project which we have imposed on the NATO forces. The famous graffito in Leskovac had suddenly come true: "NATO surrender! We are all dying."

But what, really, are we celebrating?

Take your car (if you can find petrol) and you cannot drive to Veljevo, Uzice or Nis. North or south, all is destroyed. Bridges no longer exist, the motorway is history, the energy system is trashed and the electricity out. The entire country is ruin: bricks, cement, shards of glass. We have been bombed into the past.

There is no economy. Optimists say that more than 3 million are unemployed, while pessimists project the figure at 4 million. The post office does not function, newspapers look like fascist party bulletins, the state of war remains in place.

Yet what is this compared to the fact that the policy of our president has won? Isn't it sexy not to have water but to know that you have out-smarted NATO?

Already we are obsessed by winter, when there will be no gas, no heating. I am already perversely observing my carpet and thinking: From which side--round about January, near my birthday--shall I start to burn it? We have nothing to keep us warm but our love for our president--and for Kosovo.

Our army withdraws from Kosovo to a country without a single military building left standing. Nervous, angry, furious, depressed, soldiers who for 77 days have prayed not to get hit by a NATO parcel--where will the uniformed men go? We will welcome them to our homes, to organise our territorial defence from the windows of tower blocks.

The night shooting is terrifying--less tonnage but more chaos (and alcohol) than NATO. But the morning is truly horrible. The radios play joyous music, the newspapers are ecstatic with reports about the peace. No one mentions the dead, the wounded, the disappeared, the devastated troops. The sun is the same, the sky is still blue. But the mood is grey--defeat, humiliation, one more grade in the war report card of student Milosevic. Our latest lost war.

This war of 77 days was created to be lost. Its ending is the point: the happiness of this moment overshadows all the glorious successes of the regime. Who will remember those days when a monthly salary of 20 DM (\$11) seemed like a fantasy, when scenes of demolished houses, hospitals and factories all buttressed our moral strength?

No one has heard the statements from the West that Serbia will not get any financial help as long as Milosevic remains in power. Intoxicated by peace, touting placards of our president and reports that Kosovo has defended itself, we, the zombies of Yugoslavia, know that we are the Best, the Strongest, the Brightest, the Heavenly. It will just take a few centuries for the rest of the world to acknowledge it.

See you in the next war.

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