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NATO BOMBING IN THE FORMER REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA

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Abstract: *Within this work, we approached the bombing operation in Yugoslavia, named „Allied Force”, that was a part of the War which led to the establishment of Kosovo’s status. The development period of this operation, including bombardment operations, was 78 days, between 24th of March and 10th of June, 1999. In the conducted study, we chose to use the scientific observation as method of scientific research as well as we used the comparative-historical method and in terms of the techniques used, we focused mainly on documentary analysis, available with an extensive bibliography. In the conducted study, we have highlighted some dealt less aspects of the subject, and also, items related to the strategy used by combatants during the conflict emphasizing the pros and cons of strategic air power. From these elements can be formulated numerous lessons learned useful in future conflicts, and also, possible research directions.*

Keywords: *Yugoslavia, NATO forces, bombing actions, aircraft.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The bombing operation in Yugoslavia was called „Allied Force” and was a part of the War led to the establishment of Kosovo’s status. The development period of this operation, including bombardments operations, was 78 days, between 24th of March and 10th of June, 1999.

The official code name of this NATO operation was „Operation Allied Force”. The United States called it „Operation Noble Anvil”, while Yugoslavia called it, incorrectly and ironic, „Merciful Angel”.

The result of this operation is provided in the Kumanovo Treaty: the Yugoslav troop’s withdrawal from Kosovo and the establishment of a NATO force in the area, known as KFOR (Kosovo Force).

The regulations, including the territorial ones, which took place during and after the actions of all kinds from this conflict area, were framed within the provisions of United Nations Security Council Resolution no. 1244. In fact, the separation of the Kosovo province (region) from Yugoslavia was performed under the temporary and interim administration of the United Nations and this is, including nowadays, strictly monitored by NATO troops that are camped in several areas of the province.

2. THE BELLIGERENT PARTIES

The belligerent parties were represented by the NATO coalition on the one hand, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the other hand.

The NATO coalition led by the US General Wesley Clark (SACEUR-Supreme Allied Commander of Forces in Europe) consisted of military forces of the following countries: Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States and other air, sea and land NATO forces. The military technique used by NATO troops totaled 1,031 aircrafts, 30 attack ships and submarines and the specific Force called „Hawk”.

The Yugoslav President, Slobodan Milošević conducted military operations of his own troops, and, at the end of the conflict, he was still in power. Thus, we could say that he survived the entire battle and he declared the outcome of the conflict represented a major victory for Yugoslavia. Many political figures stated this was an opinion shared by few people. At the end of the hostilities, he and other Yugoslav political seniors and military figures were indicted for war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. A very important aspect was the arrest of Milošević in case in which he would have left Yugoslavia. His orders and directives generated violent actions and made from Yugoslavia a country treated as a pariah by a lot of states belonging to the international community. The conflict badly affected the economy of the country, and a year later, the Yugoslav popular disillusionment with the Milošević regime led to his overthrow in October 2000.

After the ending of combat operations, in December 2002, the Queen Elizabeth II approved the awarding of the Battle Honour „Kosovo” to squadrons of the Royal Air Force that participated and conducted military actions in the conflict. The awarded military units were: Nos 1, 7, 8, 9, 14, 23, 31, 51, 101, and 216 squadrons. Also, this well-deserved reward was extended to the Canadian squadrons deployed to the operation, 425 and 441.

2.1. NATO Aviation. A major and very important element of the operation was represented by NATO air force elements, relying heavily on the United States Air Force and Navy.

The French Navy operated the Super Etendard, while the French Air Force operated the Mirage 2000 aircrafts.

The Italian Air Force integrated in this operation 34 Tornado aircrafts, 12 F-104 aircrafts, 12 AMX aircrafts, 2 B-707 aircrafts, while the Italian Navy designated and operated Harrier II aircrafts.

The British Royal Air Force provided and operated Harrier GR7 aircrafts, Tornado ground attack jets as well as some support aircrafts.

Other states as Belgium, Denmark, Germany and Turkey provided and operated F-16 aircrafts belonging to their Air Force structures.

The Spanish Air Force was designated to deploy a definite number of F-18s and KC-130 aircrafts.

The Canadian Air Force deployed a number of 18 CF-18 aircrafts, and it is believed that these aircrafts were responsible for 10% of all bombs dropped during the attack operations. These aircrafts were armed with both guided and unguided „dumb” ammunitions, including the Paveway series of laser-guided bombs.

This operation, respectively the bombing campaign marked the first time when Germany, through its Air Force structure actively participated in combat operations since the end of World War II.

However, NATO forces relied mostly upon the Americans and the proven effectiveness of its air power and air superiority by using the F-16, F-15, F-117, F-14, F-18, EA-6B, B-52, KC-135, KC-10, AWACS, and JSTARS aircrafts. These aircrafts operated from bases situated throughout Europe and from aircraft carriers in the region. Also, the American B-2 Spirit stealth bomber obtained its first successful combat role in „Operation Allied Force”, all while striking from its home base in the continental United States.

2.2. Yugoslav Forces. The Yugoslav armed forces were composed of military units from Air Force and Navy and were led by Yugoslav president at the time, Slobodan Milošević (who was also the Supreme Commander of the Yugoslav Army), by Dragoljub Ojdanić (the Chief of Yugoslav



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Military Staff), by Svetozar Marjanović (the Deputy Chief of Yugoslav Military Staff) and by Nebojša Pavković (the 3rd Army Commander). Thus, Serbia engaged in this conflict about 114,000 soldiers, 20,000 policemen, 15,000 volunteers, 14 MiG-29 aircrafts, 46 MiG-21 fighter planes, 34 fighter jets Soko J-22 Oraos, 1,400 artillery pieces, 1,270 battle tanks and 825 armoured fighting vehicles.

During the military actions, in terms of military technology, NATO lost 2 AH-64 Apache helicopters, one F-117A Nighthawk aircraft was shot down, a second F-117A Nighthawk aircraft was damaged, and two A-10 Thunderbolt II aircrafts were also damaged. However, an F-16C aircraft was shot down, an AV-8B Harrier aircraft was destroyed and 21 UAV-s were reported lost. In terms of human lives, NATO officials stated that three soldiers were captured and two soldiers died in the crash of one of the two shot down AH-64 Apache helicopters. This second AH-64 Apache helicopter crashed 40 miles from Tirana. The two crewmen, Army Chief Warrant Officers David Gibbs and Kevin Reichert died after the impact.

On the other hand, Serbia's balance sheet is much higher, respectively 1,031 killed soldiers and police officers and 299 wounded soldiers. According to NATO estimates, there were between 5,000 and 10,000 killed Serb soldiers and in terms of military equipment and technique, there were shot down or destroyed 6 MiG-29, 4 other planes were destroyed at the ground, one J-22 Orao aircraft was also destroyed and 22 armoured vehicles and artillery pieces were destroyed during military operations from Kosovo, including 14 tanks.

The bombardment on Yugoslavia conducted by NATO was a military operation that has not been authorized by the UN and aimed the discouraging or the ending of the

conflict that was triggered for determining the status of Kosovo province.

The operation was, itself, the first time when NATO used military forces without the approval of the United Nations Security Council against a sovereign nation that has not brought a threat to a NATO member.

The bombings carried out by NATO during this operation is the second major operation in the history of this organization, after the campaign of 1995 - the bombing campaign carried out by NATO troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina, also against the Yugoslav troops.

The bombings from 1999 led to the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces from Kosovo province, to the establishment of an UNMIK mission (an interim UNO mission in Kosovo) and ended the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s.

3. THE STRATEGY

The „Allied Force” Operation consisted, mainly, of aerial missions carried out at high altitudes had the aim to destroy the Yugoslav military infrastructure. The ground forces were not used because NATO wanted to minimize the risk of losing their soldiers and, also, the avoiding of the media and the public eye criticism on the possibility of inefficiencies that could be proven during the conduct of actions carried out by these forces.

NATO aviation bombed strategic, economic and social objectives, such as bridges, military facilities, government buildings and official institutions buildings, strategic facilities, instalations in Belgrade and Pristina and, also, some factories. To hit the well camouflaged and heavily defended targets, NATO used long range cruise missiles.

After the third day of bombing, NATO destroyed almost all strategic military targets in Yugoslavia.

Long time after these events, it was discussed whether not the capitulation of

Yugoslavia in the Kosovo War from 1999 was the result of the air power established by NATO forces.

Despite of all actions of NATO forces, the Yugoslav Army troops continued to attack the fighters of the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army).

A big minus sign for NATO during this stage of the campaign was the controversial bombing from the People's Republic of China embassy in Belgrade. Most notably was the fact that three Chinese reporters were killed and twenty others were injured, and NATO claimed that this incident was a mistake.

3.1. Arguments for strategic air power.

As stated by John Keegan, the capitulation of Yugoslavia in the Kosovo War marked a turning point, a milestone in the history of the conduct of a war. This conflict „demonstrated that a war can be won only because of the power and air supremacy”. By comparison, the diplomatic efforts failed even before the war started itself, while NATO officials decision to develop a big land force represent the moment when the Yugoslav president, Slobodan Milošević, accepted a peace agreement.

In order to be conducted in an uniform manner and without the support of other combat elements, it is necessary that the air power to meet several factors. These factors can be met all together very rarely, but they were met all together during the conduct of the military operations in Kosovo. These factors refer to:

a) the bombardment must be able to cause significant damages, but it is necessary to minimize the generation of human victims. At the same time, it aims to create a certain pressure among the population and must determine the fighting parties to end hostilities, not to extend them. It is said that the way how the air power was exercised in the Kosovo war was able to create this kind of pressure.

b) the regime must be resistant reported to the pressure among the population. As it was demonstrated, by the overthrow of Milošević's regime a year later, the Serbian government has shown a low authority and it depended very much by the income support within the country.

c) there must be a difference in military capabilities so that the opponent (the enemy) to be unable to fight or even to inhibit the exercise of air superiority over its territory. Serbia, a relatively small and poor Balkan state, faced a much stronger opponent, respectively NATO coalition, which included both the UK and USA, extremely strong nations in terms of military capabilities and, implicitly of air forces capabilities.

d) Carl von Clausewitz once defined „the essential force of the enemy” as the „the gravity center” of this. Thus, if the gravity center of the Yugoslav fighting force had been destroyed, the will to resist of the Yugoslav state would also be removed. In Milošević's case, the gravity center was the holding, respectively the maintaining of a total control in his hands. He had the ability to manipulate the inflation (causing a hyperinflation), he also imposed sanctions and restrictions on the demand and supply and he granted various facilities to the strong business owners from Serbia to the idea of support him during his mandate. But the deteriorating of economic power of the Serbian state, which reached a point of minimum profit, determined the major players to threaten Milošević with their un-support in the case in which the air campaign will continue and will cause major and costly damages that will affect the infrastructure so necessary for the proper performance of their business.

3.2. Arguments against strategic air power.

1. In terms of diplomatic:

1.1. According to British Lieutenant-General, Mike Jackson's declarations, Russia's decision from 3rd of June, 1999, to support the West cause and to determine Milošević to surrender was a turning point that took „the greatest contribution to the completion of hostilities”. Thus, the capitulation of Yugoslavia took place the same day.

1.2. Milošević's condemnation by the United Nations as a war criminal (on 24th of May, 1999) gave Russia the possibility to diplomatic support the United Nations, which seemed unlikely at the beginning of hostilities.

1.3. The Rambouillet Pact from 18th of March, 1999 (agreed also by Yugoslavia) would have



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been accorded NATO forces the rights for transit, bivouac, maneuver, camping and access on the entire territory of Serbia. But once Milošević capitulated, NATO forces were granted access only in Kosovo region.

1.4. The International civil presence in Kosovo was held under UN control, which allowed the Russian veto and prevented the emergence of some threats to the interests of the Serbian nation.

2. The competing land operations - KLA itself undertook operations in Kosovo and achieved some success against Serb forces. The Yugoslav army abandoned a border point in Morinë area, situated next to his outpost at Kosare, in the north-west part of this area. But, the outpost from Kosare remained under the command of Yugoslav forces during entire period of the conflict, which led to the establishment in the province of a power line, a point of supply and subsequently led to the domination of the territory from Junik area. Also KLA broke and entered few kilometers area in the south-west part of Pastrok Mount region. Notwithstanding, the biggest part of this area remained under Serb control.

3. The potential land attack - the American General Wesley Clark was „convinced” that the planning and the preparations of a land interventions would be determined Milošević to concede. The Yugoslav troops capitulation occurred on the same day that USA President, Bill Clinton, held a conference, highly mediated and publicized, with the four chiefs of American Services in order to discuss the options for the deployment of a land force in case in which the conduct of air operations would have been failed.

4. With all these stated, France and Germany vigorously opposed to a ground offensive and continuously supported this position for several weeks, as of April 1999. French estimates suggested that an invasion would require an army of about 500,000 people in

order to reach the proposed target. These estimates clarified the position of NATO leaders, especially those from USA, that a land operation would not have had any support and maybe no plausible success. In the light of these analyzes and comparisons, American leaders strongly reaffirmed their faith that an air campaign is much more indicated. NATO leader's refractoriness to use ground forces created serious doubts about the idea that Milošević would have been capitulated by facing or by fearing of a land invasion.

4. THE OPERATION

On 20th of March, 1999, the OSCE monitors of Kosovo Verification Mission withdrew from the province, stating „the deteriorating security situation” and on 23rd of March, 1999, Richard Holbrooke returned to Brussels announcing the failure of peace talks and negotiations. A few hours before this statement, Yugoslavia announced on national television post the emergency situation, respectively an „imminent threat of war ... against Yugoslavia by NATO forces” and started a massive mobilization action and began of troops and resources. On 23rd of March, 1999, at 10:17 p.m. UTC, NATO Secretary General, Javier Solana, made the announcement that he ordered General Wesley Clark the „initiation of an air operation in the air space of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia”. On 24th of March, 1999, at 19:00 UTC, NATO troops started the bombing campaign against Yugoslavia.

4.1. NATO Operations. The bombing campaign conducted by NATO in Serbia involved 1,000 aircrafts which operated from air bases from Italy and Germany, and the USS Theodore Roosevelt transport ship that was stationed in the Adriatic Sea.

At the dusk of 24th of March, 1999, F/A-18 Hornets aircrafts of Spanish Air Force were

the first NATO aircrafts planned to bomb Belgrade and perform operations such as SEAD (Suppression of Enemy Air Defence). In the same time, from the ship and submarines, there were also launched BGM-109 Tomahawk cruise missiles.

During the ten weeks of the conflict, NATO aircrafts performed over 38,000 combat missions. The air power was reinforced by an Apache helicopters battalion belonging to US Army.

Originally, the campaign was intended to destroy the Yugoslav air defense, the military objectives of strategic importance and units of the Yugoslav ground troops. Among other targets, there were also taken in the viewfinder objectives as: the bridges across the Danube, factories, power stations, telecommunications facilities, buildings belonging to the Yugoslav party „Leftists” (political party led by Milošević's wife), and Avala Television Tower, too.

On 14th of April, NATO planes bombed areas near Koriša, regions populated by Albanians ethnics, who were used by Yugoslav forces as human shields.

4.2. Yugoslav Operations. The Serbian Television declared in several times that more refugees columns fled the Kosovo region because of the bombings carried out by NATO aviation and not due to military operations undertaken by Yugoslav troops.

The Yugoslav part and the Western supporters stated that the big refugees' exodus was caused by a massive panic among the Kosovo-Albanian ethnicity population, panic that was generated, mainly, by the fear of bombings carried out by NATO aviation.

4.3. Air combat. An important part of the war was represented by the struggle between the Yugoslav Air Force and Allied Air Forces. F-15s and F-16s aircrafts of the US Air Force (USAF), flying mainly from the air bases from Italy attacked the defense of Yugoslav forces, as well as the Yugoslav combat aviation but, mainly, sought to incapacitate, as soon as possible, the Yugoslav MiG-29 aircrafts, which was known they were in a pretty bad shape due to the lack of spare parts and due to the lack of a proper maintenance of these.

4.4. Incidents that took place due to air combats. During the night of 24th to 25th of March, 1999, Yugoslav Air Force arised the first five MiG-29 aircrafts in order to combat the first attacks of the Allied troops.

Two of them took off from the airport in Niš were vectored to intercept targets situated in southern Serbia and southern Kosovo region, but, on their flight path, they were intercepted by NATO fight aircrafts.

One of those two MiG-29s, piloted by Major Dragan Ilić, was forced to an emergency landing due to the failure of one engine, and later on, during the conflict, this aircraft was used as bait. The second MiG-29 aircraft, piloted by Major Ilijo Arizanov, was overthrown by a USAF F-15C, piloted by Lieutenant-Colonel Cesar Rodriguez.

The second pair of MiG-29 aircrafts took off from the Batajnica Air Base, being piloted by Major Nebojša Nikolic and Major Ljubisa Kulačin. They were engaged by a USAF aircraft, piloted by Captain Mike Shower who managed to strike and to knock down the aircraft piloted by Nikolić, while Kulačin missed the firing with the rockets. During this air combat, a part of MiG-29 flight systems broke and determined him to make great efforts to return to base. Finally, arriving at the Batajnica Air Base, he realized that he could not land because the air base was under the fire of Allied forces and he decided to change the flight path to „Nikola Tesla” Airport from Belgrade, where, otherwise, he managed to land safely. There, he hid this MiG-29 under the tail of a nonfunctional airliner plane that was parked on the airport.

The fifth and the last MiG-29 aircraft rose by Serbs that night in order to combat Allied aerial targets was piloted by Major Predrag Milutinović. Immediately after the takeoff, the aircraft's radar and the electric generator failed. Shortly after these incidents, he was warned that he was spotted by one fire control radar, but he managed to escape the enemy due to several evasive maneuvers. In his attempt to avoid other unwanted meetings, he approached to the airport from Niš with the intention to land, but the plane was hit by a 2K12 Kub missile fired by Yugoslav troops and he was forced to catapult.



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So, in that night, Yugoslav Air Force raised five MiG-29 aircrafts, three of them were shot down, one of them was badly damaged, and the fifth returned to base in a poor condition and it was no longer used for waging warfare. No pilot was killed; only one of the five pilots was injured and needed a few days to recover.

A closer examination of the available data indicates the fact that Major Arizanov was hit and shot down by Colonel Rodriguez while Major Nikolic and Major Kulacin were engaged by Captain Showers, who, at least, hit and shot down Nikolic.

On the morning of 25th of March, Major Slobodan Tešanović, due to some technical malfunctions, damaged the MiG-29 aircraft which he piloted it, near the landing area of the Ponikve Air Base, after a previous landing attempt, being also forced to catapult.

During the war from Yugoslavia, the J-22 Orao and G-4 Super Galebs attack aircrafts conducted approximately 20-30 combat missions against KLA, on Kosovo territory. The attacks were carried out from low altitudes and caused many human casualties. In one of these missions, deployed on 25th of March, 1999, Lieutenant-colonel Života Duric died when the plane he piloted it, a J-22 Orao plane, hit a hill in the Kosovo region. There has never been established, in a firmly way, which was the cause of this aeronautic event: a malfunction during the aircraft flight, a pilot error or an enemy attack carried out by KLA forces. The certain aspect of this fact is that NATO representatives stated they had no implication in shooting down of this aircraft.

In the afternoon of 25th of March, 1999, two Yugoslav MiG-29 aircrafts took off from the Batajnica air base with the mission to combat a NATO aircraft that flew towards Bosnia. During this mission, the two pilots crossed the border line. Thus, they were engaged by two F-15 aircrafts of USAF. Both MiG-29s were hit and shot down by Captain

Jeff Hwang. One of the MiG-29 pilots, Major Slobodan Perić launched at least one rocket before being hit, then he managed to catapult. Later, he was found and brought back to Yugoslavia by the Republika Srpska Police. The other pilot, Captain Zoran Radosavljevic did not eject (there are not known the reasons why he did not proceed at catapultation) and died due to the violent impact.

On 27th of March, 1999, the 3rd Battalion belonging to the 250 Missile Brigade, commanded by Colonel Zoltán Dani, equipped with Isayev S-125 „Neva-M” missiles (called by NATO as SA-3 Goa missiles) shot down a F-117 Nighthawk american plane. The Yugoslavs operators from the observation and identification equipment in the composition of air defense system found out that they are able to detect F-117 planes with Soviet radar stations considered „obsoleted” due to the fact that these operated on long wavelengths. The hit pilot managed to catapult, being recovered by search and rescue forces, somewhere near Belgrade. This was the first and the last time, so far, when an invisible plane was hit and shot down.

On 5th, 6th and 7th of April, Yugoslav MiG-29 aircrafts were tasked to intercept NATO aircrafts, but each time, the Yugoslav pilots were out of combat due to malfunctions or different damages of the aviation systems from the aircrafts board.

On 30th of April, 1999, some American sources confirmed that a second F-117A aircraft was damaged. Although the aircraft returned to the base, it is believed that it has never flown again.

On 2nd of May, 1999, a USAF F-16 aircraft was shot down near Šabac, by a SA-3 missile, launched by the 3rd Battalion of the 250 Missiles Brigade. The pilot was ejected and he was rescued. In the same day, an A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft that deployed an aerial mission in the airspace over Kosovo region

was heavily damaged by a Strela 2 surface-air missile launched from a portable shoulder device. The pilot was forced to make an emergency landing in Skopje. Also, a Harrier jet piloted by an American pilot crashed while returning from a training mission towards on its way to USS Kearsarge, the amphibious ship designed for assault and transportation. The pilot ejected and he was also saved.

On 4th of May, 1999, a Yugoslav MiG-29 aircraft piloted by Lieutenant-Colonel Milenko Pavlović was shot down at a low altitude, just above his native town of Valjevo, after a air fight with two F-16s of USAF. It is possible that the airplane to have been hit by a Strela 2 rocket fired by Yugoslav troops. Following this event, the Yugoslav pilot lost his life.

On 11th of May, an A-10 aircraft was slightly damaged during the execution of a task carried out in the airspace over Kosovo.

Also, NATO forces lost two attack helicopters AH-64 Apache (one on 26th of April and the second on 4th of May, in Albania, near the border with Yugoslavia, during a training mission. That event resulted in the death of the two members of the crew, as it is written in the beginning of this article).

NATO officials reported they lost 21 UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles), due to technical problems or malfunctions or due to enemy actions. A part of these UAVs, at least seven, were from German troops and five of these UAVs belonging to the French troops. While the Third Yugoslav Army Commander stated that 21 UAVs belonging to NATO forces were shot down by Yugoslav forces, another Yugoslav general affirmed that the Yugoslav air defense, along with units of the land forces shot down 30 UAVs.

5. CONCLUSIONS & ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Attitudes towards the campaign - In favor of the campaign. NATO leaders were convinced that all their decisions, regarding the airstrikes, were deeply justified. Also, their decisions were directed for the keeping of calm situations. We found out that official sources from Clinton's Secretary of Defense alleged that the appalling accounts of mass

killing in Kosovo and the pictures of refugees fleeing Serb oppression for their lives makes it clear that this is a fight for justice over genocide. Also, it was clear that approximately 100,000 military-aged men missed, and most probably these may have been murdered.

Another important aspect of our study is the position of NATO leaders and their Allies, due to the fact that, before the beginning of the operations, they were not decided whether they support or not the leadership of Yugoslav President, Slobodan Milošević. Following this study, we are able to state that NATO forces operations prevented the ethnic cleansing; the genocide in Kosovo region, and, in this way, NATO leaders undertook a lot of efforts. All the actions conducted by Serb forces determined many civilian casualties and due to this fact, we could make a comparison between the events from Kosovo and the events occurred during the Holocaust, but at a smaller scale. We can affirm that Serbian forces committed genocide or that there are many evidences of the genocide created by Serbian forces. Through their violent, criminal and inhuman actions, Yugoslav forces determined abhorrent actions on a large scale. Nevertheless, after few months there were presented the conclusions of NATO bombing. Between these conclusions, it is interesting to remark the number of dead found bodies that was approximately 2,200, with a total estimate not exceeding eleven thousand.

On 11th of March, 1999, the American officials voted a plan committing 4000 troops to the NATO peacekeeping mission.

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