

Novelist A.C. Frieden Investigates the 1999 NATO-Serbia Conflict

BELGRADE, Serbia (Sept. 18, 2010) – Chicago-based fiction author A.C. Frieden arrived in Belgrade, Serbia to investigate key aspects of the country’s 1999 military conflict with NATO as part of his research for an upcoming thriller. As a result of clashes between pro-independence rebels and Serbs in Kosovo, NATO launched a major bombing campaign against the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The strikes lasted from March 24, 1999 to June 11, 1999, causing extensive damage to the country’s military and civilian infrastructure. “This was a major conflict in geopolitical terms,” said Frieden, “with some lingering effects we are only seeing now, especially in connection with China’s evolving global foreign policy objectives and strategy.”



Photo above: Author A.C. Frieden stands at the gates of the former Embassy of China, which was heavily damaged by precision munitions dropped from a U.S. B-2 bomber on May 7, 1999. The building, located in the more modern western part of Belgrade (Novi Beograd), is still in the same condition as it was after the bombing.

The bombing was also the first major conflict in the post-Cold War order, opening a new era in global gamesmanship amongst the major powers, particularly the U.S., Russia, China, France and other Western European members of NATO. The war also created significant shifts in political and military alliances, with Hungary, Romania and Albania actively supporting NATO's military operations against their Balkan neighbor. The conflict was also the first large-scale combat military mission for the German Air Force since World War II. "These are just some of the reasons why Belgrade is a key connector for the back story and plot in one of my upcoming thrillers," added Frieden, as he walked past the ruins of the Yugoslavian Army Headquarters on Nemanjina Street.

NATO's bombing campaign involved over a thousand aircraft from various NATO countries operating from air bases throughout the operational theatre, including Italy, Germany, and aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean. A large number of cruise missiles and other long-range munitions were launched from outside the borders of Serbia and Montenegro. The campaign was initially designed to destroy Yugoslavian air defenses and high-value military targets, but when the military operations were not as successful as anticipated, the U.S. led the NATO alliance to broaden the targets to include civilian infrastructure, dual-use communications centers, bridges, power stations, factories, sewage treatment facilities, media outlets and transportation networks, resulting in accusations that NATO was violating the Geneva Conventions.



Photos above (left): The major downtown complex housing the Yugoslavian Army Headquarters and Federal Police was heavily bombed in late April 1999; **(right)** The Ušće Tower in Novi Beograd was by a total of 12 Tomahawk cruise missiles but never collapsed. Built in 1964 as one of the tallest buildings in the Balkans, at the time of the NATO bombing it housed many radio and TV stations and the headquarters of the Central Committee of the League of Communists in the former Yugoslavia. Amazingly enough, the tower was fully repaired in 2003 and today serves as a modern business center.

One of the most controversial events of the conflict was the attack on the Chinese Embassy, which according to many experts was a deliberate strike by the U.S. to put a stop to China's active meddling in the conflict (despite U.S. claims that the bombing was an accident). During his stay in Belgrade, Frieden looked into the embassy bombing and was able to confirm with knowledgeable local contacts that China had indeed operated what one expert called "a robust weapons collection program" throughout April 1999. The Chinese military attaché, with the help of engineers and field agents, including at least two operating under the cover of journalists, gathered, analyzed and shipped various NATO weapons components that the Yugoslavs were willing to exchange in return for "various favors". These components included guidance, targeting and control systems for cruise missiles, UAVs and related equipment, as well as communications and encryption means used by NATO aircraft. In addition to losing an F-117A Stealth Fighter and an F-16, NATO used JDAMs, cruise missiles, various drones, anti-radiation missiles and other munitions, all of which were of interest to the Chinese, even if damaged. Russian and Ukrainian experts were also given access to various components in the months and years following the bombing.



Photo above: The cockpit canopy, pilot's seat, helmet and accessories of the stealthy U.S. F-117A Nighthawk aircraft shot down over Serbia on March 27, 1999. These parts, along with a large section of the plane's left wing, are on display at the Serbian Aviation Museum.



Photo above: This U.S. Humvee was captured by Yugoslavian troops along with three U.S. soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division who were patrolling the Yugoslav-Macedonia border during the NATO airstrikes. The men were released a month later with the help of Rev. Jesse Jackson. The vehicle and personal equipment of the U.S. servicemen are on display at the Military Museum in the Kalemegdan citadel in Belgrade.



Photo above: A Yugoslav Air Force MiG-21 in service at the time of the NATO bombing. Many aircraft used during the Cold War are on display at the Aviation Museum adjacent to Belgrade's international airport.

A sizable NATO-led land force had also mobilized in Bosnia, Macedonia and Albania, in preparation for a possible full or partial invasion of Serbia. However, few policymakers in Western governments contemplated such a move, given the high casualties on both sides that would have resulted from a land campaign, in part because of the difficult terrain, an abundance of inhabited towns and villages, and Serbia's potent land-based defenses and camouflage.

Overall, the NATO bombing and Serbia's eventual ceding of Kosovo was successful, but the conflict has remained an interesting debate in political circles, particularly at a time now, ten years on, when China and Russia are reasserting their regional and global presence and have learned valuable lessons from the various military campaigns by the U.S. and NATO since 1999.

Photo below: The Aviation Museum hosts several downed reconnaissance UAVs used by NATO during the bombing campaign, including a reassembled U.S. military Predator UAV hanging from the ceiling.





Photo above: A large section of the U.S. F-117A Nighthawk's port wing, including the outer flaps and leading edge assembly, is on display at Belgrade's Aviation Museum.

About the author: A.C. Frieden is a Swiss-Brazilian novelist and lawyer living in Chicago. He is currently working on several political novels and thrillers, including a sequel to his latest thriller *Tranquility Denied*, as well as various other fiction and non-fiction literary projects. For more information, visit his website at www.acfrieden.com and his literary travel/research blog.

All images copyrighted 2010 by A.C. Frieden. All rights reserved. No photo reproductions permitted without prior written consent.

To contact the author, visit his official website or send correspondence to:

Avendia Publishing Inc.
Attn: Media Relations Dept.
444 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1200
Chicago, IL 60611
Email: media@avendiapublishing.com