

NATO cluster bombs kill 100 Albanians in Kosovo: Where is the outrage?

The Editorial Board
15 May 1999

NATO warplanes struck the village of Korisa in Kosovo province Thursday night, dropping eight cluster bombs which killed at least 100 Albanian Kosovar refugees, most of them women and children. It is the worst single atrocity since the US-NATO war against Yugoslavia began seven weeks ago.

The village, near the city of Prizren, about 40 miles southwest of Pristina, was crowded with hundreds of Albanian refugees who had fled into the hills and woods 10 days ago, when intense NATO bombing of the area began. The refugees were staying overnight in Korisa on their way back to their homes.

Each cluster bomb releases up to 200 bomblets which shower a wide area with explosive charges. Used against massed armor or troop formations, a single cluster bomb can kill hundreds of people. The impact of eight on a small village created a charnel house.

One ethnic Albanian said that seven members of his family had been killed in the attack. Reporters brought to Korisa from Pristina described a grisly scene, with charred and dismembered bodies strewn across a large area, many of them still smoldering from the series of explosions.

NATO officials initially denied any knowledge of the Korisa atrocity, but they admitted that the surrounding area had been targeted for heavy air strikes that night, using cluster bombs to break up alleged Serbian troop formations. It was the heaviest night of bombing since the war began, with 679 strikes, most of them in Kosovo. Other strikes knocked out electrical power in the three largest cities in Serbia--Belgrade, Nis and Novi Sad.

A politically calibrated slaughter

While conducted with a cynical fig leaf of humanitarianism, the US-NATO war against Yugoslavia is one of increasing savagery. It has gone

well beyond the point where one could speak of accidental deaths, unintended consequences, or, in the language of the Pentagon bureaucracy, "collateral damage."

NATO's intentions in Yugoslavia are revealed, not by the words of presidents and press spokesmen, but by its actions. More than 1,200 Yugoslav civilians have been killed by NATO bombing, according to Yugoslav officials, and the total is likely much higher. More than 5,000 have been wounded, and many of these wounded will die--especially when they are taken to hospitals without electrical power or medicines.

This colossal suffering is intentionally inflicted. It is the deliberate purpose of American and NATO war planners to kill thousands of Yugoslav citizens in order to compel President Slobodan Milosevic to accept terms dictated by Washington. As the most bellicose American commentators now increasingly declare, this is a war, not against the Milosevic government, but against the Serbian nation as a whole.

The intentional character of the killing in Yugoslavia is demonstrated as well in the careful ratcheting-up of the air war during the weeks since March 24. US and NATO generals have steadily expanded the scope of the attacks, both in the geographic area to be hit, the types of targets, the duration and intensity of the bombing, and the kinds of munitions used.

This escalation has been calibrated, not so much for military reasons, but with an eye to public opinion in the United States and Western Europe. At each point, the US-NATO war machine tests out new tactics and targets, watching to see if there is a reaction, and attempting to inure the public to evermore bloody results.

America and the world

Every day the American government is murdering

people in one country or another. On Wednesday, US warplanes bombed a Bedouin encampment in northern Iraq, killing 12 people, two of them children. The nomadic herdsman were hit by laser-guided bombs which also killed 200 head of cattle. The US command at Incirlik, Turkey claimed that US jets had bombed seven missile sites after they were targeted by Iraqi radar.

The increasingly aggressive and reckless use of military power is contributing to a radical change in how the United States is seen around the world. The most spectacular expression has come in the mass anti-American protests in China. But there are more and more expressions of concern, even from sources long friendly to the American political establishment, about the direction of American foreign policy.

Human Rights Watch, a New York-based group frequently allied with the US State Department, sent a letter May 13 to NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana, raising "serious concerns about whether NATO is targeting civilian objects," including hospitals, power plants, media facilities and factories unrelated to military production.

A columnist in the *Los Angeles Times*--a professor of international law in that city--warned that NATO officials, military officers and even ordinary soldiers could be prosecuted by a UN war crimes tribunal which has jurisdiction over crimes such as "wanton destruction of cities, towns or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity."

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, on a visit to Yugoslavia, publicly criticized the conduct of the NATO bombing campaign, calling the civilian casualties "extremely high." NATO warplanes dropped anti-personnel cluster bombs on Nis while Robinson was riding through the city. Two schools were hit and at least a dozen people were wounded.

Both UN and Red Cross officials have arrived in Kosovo to assess damage from civil war fighting and NATO bombing, for the first time since they pulled out March 29. The Red Cross will begin shipping humanitarian supplies into the province, for both Serbian and Albanian victims, despite a NATO embargo on all aid to Yugoslavia.

The role of the working class

Amid this mounting unease internationally over the

implications of the US-NATO war on Yugoslavia, the US and European working class remain on the sidelines. In Europe, the warmongers are exploiting the political disorientation produced by the propaganda about alleged "genocide" in Kosovo, and the collaboration of the social-democratic parties, as well as once-radical tendencies like the German Greens.

In the United States, with a more backward political environment that excludes any specifically working class politics, the Clinton administration takes advantage of the mood of confusion, apathy or indifference which predominates.

These factors may explain the lack, up to now, of any major working class opposition to the war in the Balkans, but they do not justify it. Working people, whether in Europe or the United States, cannot defend their social and class interests if they remain indifferent to the crimes being committed against the working people of Yugoslavia by the US and allied governments.

To be blunt: the lack of public reaction in America and Europe is one of the principal factors in permitting the continued escalation of the war. How far will this go? How many more have to be killed? Will the US-NATO onslaught escalate to the firebombing of cities? Will tactical nuclear weapons be used?

This gruesome and bloody exercise must be stopped. American and European working people must bestir themselves. They must inform themselves of what is being done in their names by the US and NATO, and they must actively oppose it.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact