

US drops largest non-nuclear weapon on Afghanistan: A crime against humanity

Bill Van Auken, David North
14 April 2017

The US military's dropping of the largest non-nuclear weapon in its arsenal on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border Thursday is a crime against humanity. Even as the US government and the mass media were engaged in a lying propaganda campaign denouncing Syria and Russia for the use of poison gas, the American military was positioning the monstrous weapon—the Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB)—for use in Afghanistan.

While the Pentagon has released few details about the impact of the bombing, one can be certain that the total number of deaths resulting from the dropping of the MOAB is a massive multiple of the number killed in the alleged Syrian gas attack, assuming—and this is by no means certain—that the gas attack even took place.

Seventy-two years after the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, American imperialism has proven once again that it is the most ruthless and criminal force on the planet.

The use of the MOAB has implications that extend beyond Afghanistan. It demonstrates—and this is, in fact, the principal aim of the attack—that there are no restraints on what the US military is prepared to do in pursuit of the interests of American imperialism.

In the context of mounting military tensions from the Korean peninsula to Syria to eastern Europe, the detonation of the massive bomb over Afghanistan represents a warning to Russia, Iran, North Korea and any country that dares to challenge Washington's interests that there is no limit to the level of violence that US imperialism will unleash against them.

The weapon, officially known as the GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast, designated by the Pentagon as MOAB, or “mother of all bombs,” detonates nearly 20,000 pounds of explosives in mid-air, igniting the atmosphere and creating a massive concussion that obliterates everything within a radius of 1,000 yards. Its shock waves are capable of killing people within a radius

of up to 1.7 miles. The impact of the explosion is the equivalent of a nuclear weapon for those caught in the target zone.

Designed for use in the “shock and awe” campaign unleashed with the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, it was never utilized in combat over the course of 14 years. Even as the Pentagon carried out a war and occupation that claimed some one million Iraqi lives, the weapon was seen as too destructive to serve US strategic purposes.

Planning for the use of this horrific weapon in Afghanistan began under the Obama administration.

According to the Pentagon command, this genuine “weapon of mass destruction” was dropped for the first time on a remote district of Afghanistan's eastern Nangarhar Province in order to obliterate alleged caves and tunnels used by elements of the Afghan affiliate of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

There is no immediate tactical, much less strategic, justification for the dropping of such a massive weapon on a small, poorly armed band of Islamist guerrillas—a Pakistan-based group that merely adopted the ISIS logo. Instead, the attack has all the earmarks of a calculated demonstration of American military might, the most terrifying one that could be staged short of a nuclear attack.

The bombing comes just one week after Washington carried out a naked act of military aggression against Syria, firing 59 cruise missiles into a government airbase and killing at least 15 Syrians, the majority of them civilians.

That attack was justified in the name of retaliation for an alleged chemical weapons attack blamed on the Syrian government. Damascus denied using any such weapon and, the endless lies of the Western media notwithstanding, all objective evidence points to a provocation staged by the CIA and the Al Qaeda-linked fighters that it supports in Syria.

Even as the US government and media churned out war propaganda over the fabricated “chemical weapons” attack in Syria, Washington was preparing to drop its largest non-nuclear weapon on Afghanistan.

The Pentagon has claimed that it “took every precaution to avoid civilian casualties with this strike.” Such promises, made repeatedly as the US military has killed millions across the Middle East, are utterly worthless. According to initial reports, there are several villages near the target area and, in all likelihood, civilian deaths and injuries will be massive.

At this point, no one knows what the real toll from this attack is, and, if left to the US media, no one will ever be told. The same editorialists for CIA house organs like the *New York Times*, and television news talking heads who have parroted the government’s denunciations of the Assad regime over the chemical weapons provocation in Syria, are completely indifferent to the loss of life caused by the massive US bomb dropped on Afghanistan.

Similarly, the media largely ignores the ongoing carnage inflicted by US bombs and missiles upon the people of Iraq and Syria. On Wednesday, a US airstrike in western Mosul killed 13 civilians while injuring another 17, most of them seriously. On the same day, a UN agency described the devastation wrought by the US siege of the Iraqi city, where hundreds, if not thousands, of men, women and children have died: “Homes are being destroyed. Schools and health centers are damaged and crucial public infrastructure including electricity and water stations are in ruins,” according to the report, with the destruction turning over 300,000 people into homeless refugees.

Meanwhile, in northern Syria, US warplanes carried out a “friendly fire” airstrike that killed 18 Kurdish fighters, while the Syrian government reported that a US bomb hit an Al Qaeda weapons depot, spreading chemical agents that may have killed hundreds of civilians. None of these incidents are given any significant coverage; much less do they provoke the moral outrage of those crying crocodile tears over the victims of the alleged chemical attack for which the Syrian government has been framed.

Who are these people to lecture anyone on “human rights,” much less to posture as opponents of “terrorism?” Once again, US imperialism has demonstrated to the world that it is bound by absolutely no constraints of international law, much less morality. Its violent and predatory actions on the world stage are a direct expression of the criminal and parasitic character of the American capitalist ruling class, personified in the

loathsome figure of Donald Trump.

This latest atrocity comes fifteen and a half years after the US invaded Afghanistan, toppling the Taliban government, installing its own puppet regime and carrying out a bloody war and occupation ever since. Conservative estimates put the Afghan death toll since 2001 at some 200,000, with hundreds of thousands more wounded and millions turned into refugees. From the outset, the purpose of this intervention was to subjugate the Afghan people to semi-colonial American domination and to further US imperialism’s drive to assert its hegemony over the energy-rich region of Central Asia.

The timing of the bombing was significant. It came on the very eve of talks called for April 14 in Moscow on a peace settlement in Afghanistan. Russia has called the meeting together with China and Pakistan, with the participation of nine other countries, including India and Iran. The Taliban has indicated that it may join the talks. While invited, Washington failed to confirm whether it will attend, and US military commanders have made repeated baseless allegations of Russian support for the Taliban.

Whether an armed confrontation takes place between US and Russian warplanes in the skies over Syria, in a military strike against North Korea or in a provocation on Russia’s western borders, the next step from the weapon dropped on Afghanistan is the launching of nuclear missiles.

Workers and young people in the US and internationally must respond to these ominous events with utmost seriousness and a determination to stop US and global capitalism from engulfing the planet in a third, nuclear world war.

Protests must be organized across the United States and around the world against the latest US atrocities in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq as part of the struggle to build a mass antiwar movement based upon the working class and the program of socialist internationalism. At the very center of this struggle lies the need to build the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International—the only consistent political opponents of world imperialism—as the revolutionary leadership of the working class.



To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wswp.org/contact