

American missile kills a dozen children in Serbian town

By Martin McLaughlin
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An American cruise missile destroyed a large portion of the village of Surdulica Tuesday in southeastern Serbia, about 200 miles from Belgrade, killing at least 20 people, including a dozen children between the ages of 5 and 12. Some 50 homes were completely destroyed and as many as 600 damaged, a staggering toll in an agricultural town with a population of 15,000. The missile struck near the center of the town, leaving a crater 20 to 30 feet across.

Most of the dead had gone for shelter into the basement of a home on Belgrade Street belonging to Alexander Milica, according to local officials. A visiting Associated Press reporter found that bodies had been blown apart by the force of the blast or charred beyond recognition. He wrote that in the basement where 11 of the victims died "all that remained were small pieces of burned flesh stuck to bedsheets."

As angry residents of Surdulica denounced NATO with chants of "fascists!", rescue workers sought to find survivors beneath the rubble. They were hampered by the lack of electrical power, telephone service and running water, all of which have been knocked out by the NATO bombing. The only illumination in the town comes from lights powered by emergency generators at the local hospital and a spotlight set up near the missile crater to aid the rescue effort. "One third of the town was totally destroyed," said Surdulica's mayor, Miroslav Stojilkovic.

There was no military target anywhere near the farming town. A military barracks in Surdulica has been abandoned since the air war began March 24, and the nearest active Yugoslav Army facility is five miles away.

Surdulica is only the most grisly of the daily incidents of US-NATO terror bombing. The same day three cruise missiles smashed into a residential

neighborhood in the town of Paracin, in northwest Serbia, causing extensive damage to homes, although no casualty toll was released by Yugoslav authorities.

The day before the Surdulica atrocity, Cornelio Sommaruga, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, publicly criticized NATO for civilian casualties caused by the bombing raids and for the destruction of Yugoslavia's civilian infrastructure. The government of Yugoslavia, in a letter to the United Nations Security Council, said that 1,000 civilians had been killed in NATO air attacks and several thousand had been maimed for life.

Vice premier Vuk Draskovic, who was fired April 28 for criticizing the policies of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, said that more than 1 million people have been made internal refugees in Serbia, forced from their homes by the NATO bombing. This total approaches the number of Kosovar Albanian refugees, but there has been almost no reporting in the Western media about the flight of Serb civilians from cities like Belgrade, Nis, Kragujevac and Novi Sad, which have been hit repeatedly by bombs and cruise missiles.

A report from the French news agency Agence France Presse provides further evidence refuting the US-NATO claim that the war against Yugoslavia has been launched out of humanitarian concern for the plight of Kosovar Albanians. NATO officials have admitted that their warplanes are dropping cluster bombs over Kosovo.

AFP reported that hundreds of people have been wounded in Kosovo and an unknown number killed by these weapons. Five children, all cousins in an ethnic Albanian family from the village of Doganovic, 30 miles south of Pristina, were killed by a cluster bomb which they thought was a toy when they found it in a

pasture. Two other children, Besnik Hoxha, 14, and Ardijen Hoxha, 2, suffered shrapnel injuries in the same explosion.

A reporter for the French news agency interviewed Rade Grbic, director of the main hospital in Pristina, the Kosovo capital, who said that his staff has treated "between 300 and 400" people wounded by cluster bombs since the NATO attacks began. "I have worked in this crisis region for 15 years and treated many injuries," Grbic said, "but I have never seen such horrific wounds as those caused by cluster bombs. These wounds lead most often to disability, people lose their limbs."

The CBU-87 cluster bomb consists of 200 bomblets loaded in a dispenser which is dropped from an aircraft. At a certain height the dispenser releases the bomblets, which float down in individual parachutes, scattering widely as the wind blows them. Each bomblet is powerful enough to penetrate seven inches of armor plating, and has incendiary capability as well. The casing of the device breaks up in the explosion, producing fragments which can easily shred flesh and bone.

Dozens of unexploded cluster bombs have been seen in the southern, southeastern and northern regions of Kosovo. Many villages in the province have been rendered inaccessible because of the unexploded bombs. The effects will be long-lasting--hundreds of children are killed and wounded every year in Vietnam because of similar explosives left over from the US bombing campaign, which ended more than a quarter century ago.

One of the hallmarks of imperialist war is the systematic effort by the government and mass media to inure the public to the bloody consequences of military action and to prevent any sympathy for those who are being annihilated in the "enemy" country.

NATO officials hardly bother to maintain the pretense that civilian casualties are an unintended consequence of the air war. Their "apologies" for the Surdulica atrocity were distinctly perfunctory, and combined with a promise to continue and intensify the bombing campaign.

The facts outlined above have been downplayed or effectively ignored in the American media. The *New York Times*, for instance, reported the missile attack on Surdulica in a small article on page A20, while a

front-page article focused on criticism that the US-NATO bombing campaign was not doing enough damage to Serbia and its population.

Last week the *Times* published a column by its foreign affairs specialist Thomas Friedman which declared that the war had to be waged against the entire Serbian nation, not simply the government of President Slobodan Milosevic, and that bombing should be intensified enough to reduce the economy and infrastructure of Serbia to the level of the Middle Ages.

When two teenagers walked into a Colorado high school April 20 and used guns and homemade bombs to kill 12 fellow students and a teacher, millions of Americans were transfixed before their television screens, horrified by the event and concerned about its implications for American society. That reaction was entirely natural and human.

One week later, when an American missile killed 12 children in a Serbian town, in an event no less bloody and heinous than the massacre in Littleton, there was little media coverage and not a single protest from within the US political establishment.

In targeting Serbian television and radio stations, US and NATO war planners have declared that the Serb media is a key instrument of the Milosevic regime, enabling it to keep the Serb population ignorant of the atrocities being carried out against the Kosovar Albanians. The American media is playing the same role in relation to the atrocities being carried out by American bombs and missiles against the Serbian people.

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