

Military Resistance 13L5



**“No More Bombs” Say Raqqa’s
People:
“Storms Come From All Directions
To Raqqa, And Its People Are
Scared”
“They Look With Apprehension At
The Sky, And Can No Longer Tell The
Nationalities Of The Planes Planting
Death Around Them”**

“Everybody Bombed Raqqa.” “For Us, It Doesn’t Matter Which Bombs Are Killing Us”

3 December, 2015 By: Karim Traboulsi; al-Araby al-Jadeed

It may be too early to talk about the impact of UK airstrikes on the civilian population in Islamic State-held Raqqa, but Raqqans both inside the city and outside are already anxious.

True, it is likely British strikes, which add little firepower to the anti-IS operations already underway by the US-led coalition, will be more precise than either Syrian regime or Russian raids. The British strikes on Thursday morning did not lead to reports of civilian casualties.

But advanced precision weaponry or not, airstrikes on a populated city like Raqqa will most certainly kill civilians, and in no small numbers either.

UK-based monitor Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) puts the number of civilians killed in coalition airstrikes in Syria already at close to 400 since September 2014. The number of Syrian civilians killed by Russian warplanes is at least twice that figure.

There is an estimated 500,000 people in the city, and one million people in Raqqa province, including almost 150,000 children.

During the debate on UK intervention in Syria, leader of the opposition Jeremy Corbyn quoted a refugee from Raqqa, who urged him to ask the prime minister whether he could guarantee the safety of his family in the city.

Even the recent focus on oil facilities controlled by IS, apart from questions about its effectiveness, will have both a direct and indirect toll on civilians.

“Can someone really be happy if his city is bombed by everyone? No,” Abu Ahmad, identified as a refugee from Raqqa, told The Observer last week.

“Everybody bombed Raqqa. Anyone who was just annoyed by their wife decided to come and bomb Raqqa. Jordan, UAE, US, Russia, France,” he added.

“Why is this just in response to ISIS? Why was no one moved when the regime was bombing us in Syria? Is it just because (terror) came to western countries?”

“For us, it doesn’t matter which bombs are killing us,” said Mona, a teacher and activist also from Raqqa.

The British newspaper was speaking to a number of Raqqan exiles in Turkey ahead of the debate in the British parliament. Most of them feared that more bombs would cost

more innocent lives in a city where the civilian population is now held prisoner by IS “to serve as a human shield.”

Many were baffled and frustrated that the city’s fate was being decided in distant capitals and conference rooms where the people of Raqqa have no presence or a voice.

According to the Raqqa Post, an online outlet covering news from the city, IS has imposed an “electronic embargo” on Raqqa as Russia, France and now the UK stepped up their airstrikes. Activists quoted by the Raqqa Post said IS shut down all internet cafes to carry out “security checks” on their computers, to prevent locals from broadcasting news.

Meanwhile, tough security measures imposed by the jihadist de-facto rulers of the city have forced people to remain home. The activists said IS is preventing civilians from fleeing the city and other areas under its control, including by destroying their travel documents.

All this makes it difficult to contact people in Raqqa.

However, the group of clandestine activists known as Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently has posted an initial reaction to the UK airstrikes on Twitter, defying the electronic embargo, though they had not responded to emails from al-Araby al-Jadeed at the moment of writing.

“We are against the UK strikes on Raqqa; all the world is bombing Raqqa; UK will not make any change in the situation Syria,” RBSS tweeted. “If UK want to help people then they should accept Syrian refugees in their country and not close the border (Sic),” it added.

Apart from the concern for civilian casualties, many Syrians are anxious because the strikes are not part of a strategy to oust Assad, who has arguably killed orders of magnitude more civilians than IS and other jihadists.

Many believe the best course of action would not be more airstrikes, but rather some kind of a “no-fly” or “no-bomb” zone that would rein in both IS and the Syrian regime, as well as spare civilian lives. This, they argue, would also put pressure on the regime and its allies to offer serious compromises towards ending the Syrian conflict. People in other parts of Syria that Britain also intends to strike will no doubt have similar views.

Raqqa is a strategic city linking Iraq and Syria. It has a rich history extending to the Umayyad period.

Under the rule of the Assad regime, and despite the discovery of oil nearby, it suffered from neglect and underdevelopment, pushing many of its people to emigrate. Raqqa joined the rebellion against the regime of Bashar al-Assad and fell outside of Assad’s control in 2013.

However, the Syrian opposition’s neglect and rivalries among rebel factions made it easy prey to IS, which took complete control of the city in early 2014. Raqqa since then became the de-facto capital of the self-declared IS caliphate. Before the international

coalition joined the fray, Raqqa was a frequent target for the regime's air force, carrying out dozens of massacres against its civilian population while targeting rebels then IS.

"Raqqa's people do not know hatred, and are tolerant and cheerful," said resident Abdul-Karim al-Hassan to the Raqqa Post.

"Never had it witnessed so much destruction, killing its youths or destroying their dreams. Today, storms come from all directions to Raqqa, and its people are scared.

They look with apprehension at the sky, and can no longer tell the nationalities of the planes planting death around them," he added.

YOUR INVITATION:

Comments, arguments, articles, and letters from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Write to Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657 or email contact@militaryproject.org: Name, I.D., withheld unless you request publication. Same address to unsubscribe.

ACTION REPORTS

“Are You From Oath Keepers?” [Outreach To New York City Troops, 12.7.15]

From: Alan S
To: Military Resistance Newsletter
Sent: December 08, 2015
Subject: Outreach to NY City Troops

Approaching a young soldier in a commuter terminal, a Spanish-speaking sergeant, I was asked whether “I was from Oath Keepers.”

I told the sergeant no and gave him our card plus a copy of MR 13K5 printout I've been handing out to troops which concerns Greek soldiers organizing to refuse action against migrants.

He told me he had joined Oath Keepers “about 3 years ago.” “I don't go to meetings but keep up with their news,” he added. I said to read our material to find out our point of view.

Two other young soldiers were near so I handed them the same issue plus giving a DVD of "Sir! No Sir!" to one plus our card.

Outreach 12/8/15

Today at another terminal 6 more copies of 13K5 and 4 other newsletters, 6 DVDs (3 of "Sir! No Sir! Plus 3 more of "Authority and Expectations") and 10 intro cards were handed out.

Authority & Expectations: An Iraq Veteran Against The War condemns the war and their government:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyfkLubnyBw>

Sir No Sir: Military Resistance Vietnam Days

http://www.sirnosir.com/the_film/storefront.htm

MORE:

ACTION REPORTS WANTED: FROM YOU!

An effective way to encourage others to support members of the armed forces organizing to resist the Imperial war is to report what you do.

If you've carried out organized contact with troops on active duty, at base gates, airports, or anywhere else, send a report in to Military Resistance for the Action Reports section.

Same for contact with National Guard and/or Reserve components.

They don't have to be long. Just clear, and direct action reports about what work was done and how.

If there were favorable responses, say so.

If there were unfavorable responses or problems, don't leave them out. Reporting what went wrong and/or got screwed up is especially important, so that others may learn from you what to expect, and how to avoid similar problems if possible.

If you are not planning or engaging in outreach to the troops, you have nothing to report.

NOTE WELL:

Do not make public any information that could compromise the work.

Identifying information – locations, personnel – will be omitted from the reports.

Whether you are serving in the armed forces or not, do not identify members of the armed forces organizing to stop the wars.

If accidentally included, that information will not be published.

The sole exception: occasions when a member of the armed services explicitly directs identifying information be published in reporting on the action.

MORE:

Military Initiative

Organizing Committee Mission Statement:

July 4, 1776

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.

But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

1. Members of the armed forces have the right and duty to defend civilians from dictatorships and to aid civilian movements against dictatorships.

This applies whether dictatorship is imposed by force of arms or is imposed when those in command of the resources of society use their wealth for buying politicians to control the government.

The armed forces are not for use by politicians or corporations to attack movements fighting for improvement in the lives of working class citizens, or to attack the rights and liberties of Americans written in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution

2. The armed forces are not for use in wars of Empire.

Military Initiative is for immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Afghanistan and Iraq.

Members of the armed forces organizing to defeat wars of empire will receive encouragement and support.

The long term objective is to assist in eliminating wars of empire by eliminating all empires.

Nations attacked by Empires have the right to independence and to resist invasion.

3. Efforts to increase democratic rights in every society, organization, movement, and within the armed forces itself will be encouraged and supported.

This applies to the armed forces of every nation. There is no national government at this time organized by, for, and under the control of its citizens.

4. Military Initiative does not advocate individual disobedience to orders or desertion from the armed forces because members of the armed forces working together is most effective.

That said, Military Initiative will assist in the defense of troops who see individual desertion or refusal of orders as the only course of action open to them for reasons of conscience.

5. Military Initiative practices organizational democracy.

This means control of the organization by the membership, through elected delegates to any coordinating bodies that may be formed, whether at local, regional, or national levels. Anyone elected is subject to recall, by majority vote of the membership.

Any coordinating bodies will report their decisions and votes to the membership, and may be overruled by a majority of the membership.

6. It is unnecessary for Military Initiative to be in complete political agreement with other organizations to work together toward a common objective.

Organizations working together on common objectives need to discuss differences about the best way forward.

7. The mission of Military Initiative is to bring together in one organization members of the armed forces and civilians who are dedicated to these objectives.

In order to be prepared to defend and extend human rights and economic justice, we will meet together to organize wherever we may be, engaging in such activities as may be necessary, reasonable and effective.

Membership Requirements:

8. Civilian member participate in organized action to reach out to and work with active duty armed forces.

9. Military Initiative or individual members may choose to support candidates for elective office who are for immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan and Iraq, but do not support candidates opposed to immediate, unconditional withdrawal.

10. Members may not be active duty or drilling reserve commissioned officers, or employed in any capacity by any police or intelligence agency, local, state, or national.

11. I understand and am in agreement with this mission.

I oppose bigotry against people because of their race, religion, national origin, gender, or sexual orientation.

I pledge to defend my brothers and sisters, and the democratic rights of the citizens of the United States, against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

----- (Signed)

(Date)

----- (Application taken by)

Military Initiative: Contact@militaryproject.org
Box 126, 2576 Broadway,
New York, N.Y. 10025-5657

MORE

You Can Take Action That Makes A Difference: Join The Military Initiative: MILITARY INITIATIVE MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name (please print): _____

Armed Forces? (Branch) _____

Veteran? Years: _____

Union: _____

Occupation: _____

Mailing address: _____

E-Mail: _____

Phone (Landline): _____

Phone (Cell): _____

\$ dues paid _____
(See next: Calendar year basis.)

Armed Forces Members	@	Dues waived
Civilians	@	\$25
Students/Unemployed	@	\$10
Civilian/Military Prisoners	@	Dues Waived

Comments:

NOTE: Civilian applicants will be interviewed, in person if possible, or by phone.

**Military Initiative: Contact@militaryproject.org
Box 126, 2576 Broadway,
New York, N.Y. 10025-5657**

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

**Afghan Forces Cut Off In Battle
For Helmand District:
“Security Forces Were Holding On
In The Governor’s Compound And
Police And Army Headquarters”**

“Surrounding Areas Were All In The Hands Of The Insurgents”

“Operations Were Also Being Hampered By Supply Interruptions And The Chronic Problem Of Desertions”

13 Dec 2015 Reuters

LASHKAR GAH, Afghanistan

Afghan forces are battling to hold Marjah district centre in the volatile southern province of Helmand that Taliban insurgents have cut off as part of a months-long campaign in which they have taken three districts and threatened the regional capital.

Helmand police chief Abdul Rahman Sarjang said on Sunday security forces were holding on in the governor's compound and police and army headquarters but that surrounding areas were all in the hands of the insurgents.

“Afghan police and army have a presence in Marjah district centre and the rest is controlled by Taliban,” Sarjang said.

Helmand, an arid, semi-desert region and major centre of opium cultivation, has long been one of the Taliban's heartlands and they have put increasing pressure on security forces since the withdrawal of international troops from combat last year.

Major Taliban attacks in Kandahar and the capital Kabul last week underlined the Islamist movement's ability to strike high-profile targets and heaped pressure on the government of President Ashraf Ghani.

But its steady advances in Helmand pose a potentially more serious threat to the U.S.-backed government.

In a campaign with distinct echoes of the build-up to September's attack on the northern city of Kunduz, their biggest success in the 15-year war, Taliban forces have picked off a series of districts around the provincial capital Lashkar Gah.

Over recent weeks, insurgents have taken the districts of Musa Qal'ah and Now Zad in the north of the province as well as Khanishin, a significant drug smuggling hub, to the south as they have tightened their grip on the province.

The fighting has been going on around Marjah for more than a month and the main road linking the district to Lashkar Gah some 35 km (21 miles) away has been cut with around 12 km of the route under Taliban control.

“We plan to launch an operation to clear this area from the Taliban but they have planted hundreds of bombs which is making it very difficult,” said Sarjang.

Operations were also being hampered by supply interruptions and the chronic problem of desertions. Operations were also being hampered by supply interruptions and the chronic problem of desertions among the badly squeezed security forces.

Around 10 percent of the 10,000-strong police and army forces are absent from duty.

MILITARY NEWS



Follow Eric J Garcia at [garciaink@twitter](https://twitter.com/garciaink) or friend Eric J Garcia on facebook.
[Thanks to SSG N (ret'd) who sent this in. She writes: “War is a Racket.”]

Islamic State Controls Of Iraq’s Water Supplies: “IS Has Cut Off Water Supplies To Areas In The South”

27 November 2015 BBC

So-called Islamic State (IS) controls six dams in Syria and Iraq, including most of Iraq’s upper reaches of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

This gives IS control of the country's water supplies.

Southern Iraqi provinces have been suffering a worsening drought and desertification for the past few years.

IS has cut off water supplies to areas in the south and also released water to immerse some areas and prevent government forces from advancing.

When dictator Saddam Hussein was in power he drained the country's marshes in an attempt to combat rebels. Up to 500,000 people had to seek refuge.

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS



“At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. Oh had I the ability, and could reach the nation's ear, I would, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke.

“For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder.

“We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake.”

“The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppose.”

Frederick Douglass, 1852

I say that when troops cannot be counted on to follow orders because they see the futility and immorality of them THAT is the real key to ending a war.
-- Al Jaccoma, Veterans For Peace

Laotian Whore



Photo from the portfolio of Mike Hastie.

From: Mike Hastie
To: Military Resistance Newsletter
Sent: December 06, 2015
Subject: Laotian Whore

Laotian Whore

This is a picture of a Medevac Helicopter I took in Vietnam. I think the name is fitting for who America was during that horrifying genocide. To be honest with people, I'm not sure any of us have really witnessed freedom.

We are all the offspring of Empire. Even if you don't pay your taxes, and live off the grid in this country, you are still not what I would call free.

I think the closest we come to freedom is working in the antiwar movement, knowing that you can't be totally free here as long as you continue to live in the Empire of the United States. I have benefits living here, whether I like it or not. In all the years I have

worked in the antiwar movement, I keep every receipt that involves peace and justice issues. I have several thousand receipts. I do that to remind me that I am not freeloading. If you disagree with me, please define freedom for me.

I like to think people were pretty free in this country long before the white man landed here.

However, when I realized I was the enemy in Vietnam, and my government was the true barbarian, I reflect on a statement I wrote many years ago: I was born in America, but my heart is Vietnamese.

Maybe... that is close enough in being able to understand the word freedom. When I discovered the truth, I became a global citizen.

Mike Hastie
Army Medic Vietnam
December 6, 2015

Photo and caption from the portfolio of Mike Hastie, US Army Medic, Vietnam 1970-71. (For more of his outstanding work, contact at: hastiemike@earthlink.net) T)

One day while I was in a bunker in Vietnam, a sniper round went over my head. The person who fired that weapon was not a terrorist, a rebel, an extremist, or a so-called insurgent.

The Vietnamese individual who tried to kill me was a citizen of Vietnam, who did not want me in his country. This truth escapes millions.

Mike Hastie
U.S. Army Medic
Vietnam 1970-71
December 13, 2004

**Americans Unite To Welcome 10,000
Syrian Refugee Dogs:
“The Department Of State Declined To
Comment On What Had Happened To
The Owners Of The 10,000 Adorable,
Loveable Puppies”**



WIKIMEDIA IMAGES.

NOVEMBER 27, 2015 Duffle Blog

WASHINGTON – Americans from across the political spectrum have united to welcome 10,000 displaced Syrian refugees into their hearts and homes, after Air Mobility Command flew them out of the war torn country last week.

“There were a lot of concerns about safety, disease, and precedent-setting,” said Malcolm Thomas, a spokesman for the Department of State Refugee Service. “But then I look into these eyes and there’s just no way I can say no to them. They’re so soulful, almost human.”

The homeless Syrians have been placed in 18 states, mostly at nice farms upstate where they have plenty of room to play.

“Oh, I have room on the floor of my house for one more, and these guys have been through so much.” said Meghan Richards, who took in one of the refugees. “Let’s be honest though. Give it a week and they’ll be sleeping in the bed.”

Ruth’s Chris Steakhouse has stepped forward to support the effort by providing a chopped steak dinner to each displaced individual.

Each refugee will follow a strict protocol of a quarantine period, during which they will be de-wormed and receive all vaccinations required in the United States.

“There was some concern that it would be unsafe to bring these guys home. But then I just look into those eyes, and I think

“Does that look militant? No, that doesn’t look militant. That looks like a good, good boy,” said Richards, petting her refugee. “Here you want to give him a treat?”

“We’ve long had the motto ‘don’t shop, adopt.’ Pick up one of these cuddly little displaced war casualties, and you get to do both!” said Nelson Riley, a spokesman for the ASPCA.

Several governors claim that the program sets a dangerous precedent and have asked for more rigorous screening procedures. “These animals could be wolves in, er, dogs’ clothing,” said Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant.

In response, the refugee service has gone on record saying that the current process is already a lengthy “12 – 16 dog years.”

The dog adoption program has been so successful that the State department has looked into similar programs for other animals.

At the time of printing, however, protest groups have stepped up to stop a similar program because “ all cats are born radicalized.”

The Department of State declined to comment on what had happened to the owners of the 10,000 adorable, loveable puppies.

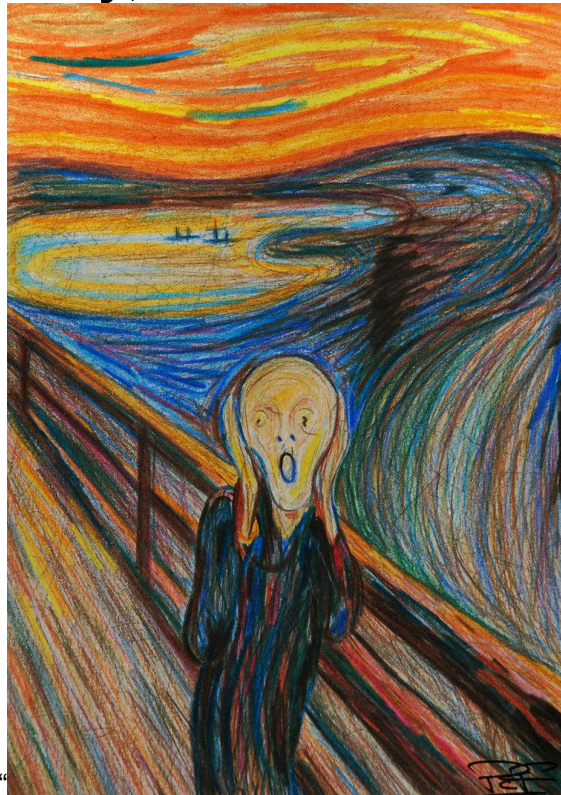
DANGER: CAPITALISTS AT WORK



“Junk Bonds Stagger As Funds Flee”

**[Wall Street Journal Front Page
Headline Dec. 14, 2015]**

“Large Price Declines In The Securities Of Firms That Are Rated Well Above Distressed Levels”
“An Unwelcome Sign That Some Investors Were Selling Stronger Securities To Raise Cash”
“I’m Not Normally A Doom-And-Gloom Type Of Guy, But This Is Scary”



The Wall Street Journal invites you to panic now and avoid the rush later. [Portrait by Muench]

Dec. 13, 2015 By Matt Wirz, Mike Cherney and Corrie Driebusch; The Wall Street Journal

Traders and regulators have fretted for more than a year that mayhem might ensue if U.S. mutual funds sought to sell rarely traded bond investments.

After junk-bond prices posted their largest drop since 2011 on Friday, investors say they are bracing for another difficult week, likely featuring hectic trading and large splits between buy and sell orders.

Gaps as wide as 10% between the price bondholders are willing to accept and buyers are willing to pay are likely to be commonplace until at least the conclusion of the Federal Reserve's two-day meeting Wednesday, hedge-fund and mutual-fund managers said.

The worst selling lately has hit bonds of especially risky, or distressed, companies, reflecting the turmoil at the Third Avenue Focused Credit Fund, the junk-bond fund that shook markets when it halted investors' withdrawals last week, they said.

But some traders were focusing on large price declines in the securities of firms that are rated well above distressed levels, which they took as an unwelcome sign that some investors were selling stronger securities to raise cash.

Jon Sablowsky, head of trading at Brownstone Investment Group, a fixed-income investment firm, pointed to the declines in debt of telecommunications provider Frontier Communications Corp. and packaging firm Ball Corp. A Frontier bond fell 2.75 cents to 93.25 cents on the dollar, according to MarketAxess. A Ball bond fell 2.6 cents to 99.35.

The declines were "a little more aggressive than I would have expected," Mr. Sablowsky said. "It was a pretty good (reversal) from what happened on Thursday," when the market appeared to stabilize after a weeklong rout driven by a plunge in oil prices.

A hedge-fund manager said he tried Friday morning to sell loans issued by Clear Channel Communications, now known as IHeartMedia Inc., one of the Third Avenue fund's largest holdings, at 71 cents on the dollar, the price Wall Street traders quoted him.

No buyers materialized until late afternoon when he received a single bid at 64 cents on the dollar, an offer he refused.

Declines in the prices of investment-grade corporate bonds, especially those of commodity-linked firms like Anadarko Petroleum Corp. and Freeport-McMoRan Inc., caught investors' attention. Anadarko, whose debt is rated triple-B, fell 2 cents to 86.2 cents. Freeport, with bonds rated triple-B-minus, the lowest investment grade, fell 2.5 cents to 58 cents.

The deterioration in higher-rated corporate bonds bodes poorly for stocks, which reside next to junk bonds on the investment risk spectrum and offer fewer protections to investors in a downturn.

"If it's got any hair on it, it's got no buyer," says Sandy Rufenacht, founder of Three Peaks Capital Management LLC, who runs one of the best-performing junk-bond funds this year.

Mr. Rufenacht said the declines were exacerbated by the absence of large banks, whose trading has been curtailed by new regulations that make holding bonds costlier. He turned bearish on high-yield debt two years ago.

The junk-bond tremors come at an inconvenient time for the Federal Reserve, which is expected to raise short-term U.S. interest rates for the first time since 2006 following its meeting Tuesday and Wednesday.

The yield spread between junk bonds and safe-haven U.S. Treasurys, a widely watched metric reflecting the perceived risk of holding lower-rated debt, surged to 6.72 percentage points Friday, up from six points a week earlier and 4.83 points at the start of 2015.

The latest spread readings are considerably higher than at the start of any of the previous three Fed rate-tightening cycles, a contrast that is likely to concern policy makers given the junk bond market's reputation for predicting economic downturns.

At the same time, U.S. stocks have largely avoided the worst selling, even after the Dow industrials declined 1.8% on Friday. The Dow is down 3.1% this year but is only 5.7% below its all-time high set in May.

"The equity market has run up and the economic growth hasn't manifested itself," Mr. Rufenacht says. "That puts the Fed in a tough position."

The downturn hasn't rattled everyone. Some analysts say U.S. economic fundamentals remain healthy, so it is imprudent to quickly move in or out of positions.

Jeff Feldman, owner of Rochester Financial Services in Pittsford, N.Y., has about one-third of his clients' 40% fixed-income stake in higher-yielding bond funds, including MainStay High Yield Corporate Bond Fund. He said he has seen situations like this before, such as in 2014.

"The default rate on double-B bonds is still quite low, and the economy is doing fine, so this is probably a buying opportunity," he said, referring to defaults on some of the highest-rated non-investment-grade debt.

He added it could be risky to buy right now due to the panicked state of the market.

Others said they had been preparing for junk markets to seize up.

Brian Kloss, a portfolio manager at Brandywine Global Investment Management, said his firm bought higher-rated junk bonds and sold lower-rated ones over the past year, in part due to concerns that lower quality firms would be more difficult to trade during periods of market stress.

"There's definitely concerns" about the ability to complete large trades without taking significant discounts, he said.

Ryan Wibberley, chief executive of Gaithersburg, Md.-based CIC Wealth, said the liquidation of the Third Avenue credit fund likely won't be an isolated incident.

"I'm not normally a doom-and-gloom type of guy, but this is scary," he said.

**Venezuela's Defeated Ruling
Party Split By Post-Election
Conflict And Scorn:
“Each Faction Inside The
Government Looking To Defend
Its Own Interests ‘With Their
Knives Between Their Teeth’”
“Government Of Widespread
Corruption And Nepotism”
“No One Can Stand It Anymore!”**

Comment: T

If socialism means elimination of the class of capitalists who dominate a nation-state for their own benefit, some of them private, some governmental, then Venezuela is not socialist now, nor ever has been.

Before grubby reformist politicians grabbed hold of the term to put a mask in front of who they really are, mere capitalist reformers, socialism was generally understood to mean social ownership of the productive wealth of society under elected democratic control via revolutionary overthrow and abolition of the class of capitalists.

What the course of the Venezuelan regime illustrates, with its thieving oligarchs, cocaine dealers, and corrupted top politicians filling their own pockets, is that radical reform of capitalism is simply not a real prospect.

It must fail and, more or less rapidly, has failed everywhere in our time. There is no middle ground anymore

Rosa Luxemburg was right: The choice is socialism or barbarism.

The eventuality of socialist organization is being driven on today by the material reality of increasingly wealthy but unstable, failing regimes ruling and exploiting us everywhere.

“Nothing has more revolutionary effect, and nothing undermines more the foundations of all state power, than the continuation of that wretched and brainless régime, which has the strength merely to cling to its positions but no longer the slightest power to rule or to steer the state ship on a definite course.”
-- Karl Kautsky; The Consequences of the Japanese Victory and Social Democracy

DEC. 9, 2015 By WILLIAM NEUMAN. New York Times

CARACAS, Venezuela —

There they were, two of the gray-haired confidants of Hugo Chávez, Venezuela’s late leftist leader, voicing their indignation at the government bumbling that led to Sunday’s stinging electoral defeat of his United Socialist Party.

“We are facing a disaster,” said Héctor Navarro, a former cabinet minister. “This is not the time to act like an ostrich.”

But in the middle of the news conference on Wednesday, with dozens of journalists jammed into a dingy meeting room in a downtown hotel, a shrill siren wailed and in burst a band of agitators, some in the red shirts of Mr. Chávez’s die-hard supporters.

“You are traitors to the revolution!” shouted one man.

“Rats! You are sewer rats!” shrilled another.

And they began to chant the name of President Nicolás Maduro.

Handed its biggest setback at the ballot box in 17 years — with the opposition winning control of the National Assembly for the first time, and by a wide margin — Chavismo, the movement founded by Mr. Chávez, has turned inward to attack its own.

“This type of defeat creates a lot of internal tensions,” said Margarita López Maya, a historian. “Chavismo does not have much capacity to process this type of conflict. It’s not used to that. It doesn’t have a real democratic character or disposition for debate or tolerating dissidents.”

In his last televised speech to the nation in December 2012, Mr. Chávez called on his followers to preserve the movement’s unity above all else.

Yet since his death the following March, after a long battle with cancer, the top levels of government have increasingly been split among rival factions — a splintering that the election debacle seems likely to widen.

“Chávez was in charge,” said Jorge Giordani, the late president’s longtime planning minister and economic guru, who spoke at the news conference with Mr. Navarro. “Now everyone is in charge. Because there is a crisis of power.”

He said that each faction inside the government was looking to defend its own interests “with their knives between their teeth.”

He warned that things would get worse after the election. “There are even more groups!” he shouted.

“No One Can Stand It Anymore”

“Because no one can stand it anymore!”

After the Maduro supporters burst in, Mr. Giordani walked down a back staircase, through a kitchen and into a restaurant of the hotel where the news conference took place.

One man called for a broom to bar the restaurant’s doors to protect Mr. Giordani. Then he was shepherded out a back door and into the street where he met up with Mr. Navarro.

Both men, leftist icons in their time, were fired from the government after Mr. Maduro was elected to replace Mr. Chávez.

They are among a small number of former officials who have openly criticized Mr. Maduro’s leadership — and been ostracized for doing so.

Mr. Navarro was kicked out of the top ranks of the United Socialist Party for defending Mr. Giordani after he had released a letter critical of the government.

On Tuesday, neither of them mentioned Mr. Maduro by name, although they repeatedly appeared to allude to him in their criticism.

They accused the government of widespread corruption and nepotism, and Mr. Navarro said that he and Mr. Giordani had repeatedly warned that Mr. Chávez’s movement was headed in the wrong direction.

But to hear Mr. Maduro talk, Chavismo’s historic losses were not his fault.

The president was praised for going on television immediately after the initial results were announced early Monday to accept his party’s defeat — the opposition won a commanding two-thirds of the seats in the National Assembly.

But since then he has done virtually nothing to suggest that he accepts responsibility for the loss or intends to work with the opposition-controlled Assembly, which is to be sworn in Jan. 5.

His tone has turned ominous. In a speech outside the presidential palace on Wednesday, Mr. Maduro cast the opposition victory as a victory for “the fascist right wing,” with Mr. Chávez’s leftist revolution on the other side. “Either we get out of this quagmire through the route of revolution or Venezuela will enter into a great conflict that will affect all of Latin America and the Caribbean,” he said.

The night before, on his weekly television program, he outlined a series of steps he would take to block the incoming legislature from pursuing its agenda.

He vowed to sign a decree barring the firing of public employees for the next three years and said he would block the incoming lawmakers from freeing political prisoners like Leopoldo López, a political party leader who was sentenced to 13 years in prison for his role in antigovernment protests last year.

The election hinged on the nation's disastrous economy, with triple-digit inflation, a deep recession, shortages and long lines to buy food and other basics.

But rather than acknowledge errors in government policy, Mr. Maduro has blamed the defeat on what he has called an economic war waged against the government by shadowy capitalist enemies.

That is a continuation of the party's main message during the campaign, which failed to persuade voters.

And he has continued the scare tactics used during the campaign, accusing the opposition of planning to revoke a law protecting workers' rights and to eliminate social programs — which the incoming lawmakers have denied they intend to do.

Rather than propose changes to economic policy, Mr. Maduro suggested on Tuesday that the problem was that the party had not gotten its message across, and he said he would print and distribute up to three million posters of Mr. Chávez to cheer up his followers.

But there were more menacing signs as well.

"I ask anyone who is thinking of holding a press conference, think of the morale of the people," Mr. Maduro said during his Tuesday program, apparently a reference to the news conference called for the next day by Mr. Giordani and Mr. Navarro. Then he stared and pointed into the camera and said: "That's for you. He knows who I'm taking about. Don't go dividing the people."

He said he had doubts about whether to continue a housing program because some of the people who had received government-built apartments were "celebrating and dancing over the opposition victory."

There were other moments that seemed to reflect pure pique.

Appearing on Mr. Maduro's television program, Diosdado Cabello, the current head of the National Assembly, said he would transfer the ownership of a television station and a radio station operated by the Assembly to the employees who work there. The move was meant to prevent the incoming lawmakers from taking over the stations, which currently operate as blatant propaganda arms for the socialist party and the Maduro government.

Mr. Maduro also announced that he had signed a decree to transfer to a foundation ownership of the Caracas fort where Mr. Chávez's tomb is on display and which has

been converted into a shrine to the leader — to keep the new Assembly from trying to close it.

At one point during the program, Mr. Maduro, his vice president, the defense minister and a group of uniformed military officers all stood around Mr. Chávez's tomb with their hands resting palms down on its stone surface, in an unsettling image that evoked a séance.

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Pro-Regime Writer Admits The Obvious: Capitalism Rules In Venezuela; “A Rentier State, Capitalist System, Historical Corruption, And Big Business’s Campaign Of Economic Sabotage”

December 8th 2015 By Tamara Pearson, TeleSUR English [Excerpt]

[T]he opposition has attracted some of the less politically aware social sectors to its anti-Chavismo discourse, the government has also lost some ground from conscientious and solid revolutionaries, partly due to its lack of a solid response to the opposition's “economic war”.

Although it's easier said than done to combat a rentier state, capitalist system, historical corruption, and big business's campaign of economic sabotage, Maduro has only announced things like national commissions to deal with the situation.

While people spend up to seven hours a week lining up for food, and while many of them understand that the government isn't directly responsible for the situation, the lack of a serious response and significant measures hasn't helped support for the government.

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“Chávez Won Loyalty By Distributing Hundreds Of Billions Of Petrodollars To Lift

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“The Advances That They Achieved Under The Government Of Chávez Have Disappeared Completely In The Last Two Years”

“Instead Of Taking Us Out Of Poverty, This Government Has Left Us Poorer Than Ever”

Dec. 2, 2015 By Kejal Vyas, Wall Street Journal

FILA DE TURGUA, Venezuela—Late President Hugo Chávez won loyalty by distributing hundreds of billions of petrodollars to lift millions of Venezuelans out of poverty.

The money has run out for his handpicked successor, President Nicolás Maduro.

Less than three years into Mr. Maduro’s tenure, Venezuela’s economy is in shambles amid low oil prices, and poverty is more prevalent than it was when the leftist Chavismo movement took power nearly 17 years ago.

The country’s economic malaise has made poverty a central issue ahead of Sunday’s parliamentary elections, in which polls show the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela could lose its parliamentary majority as residents struggle with triple-digit inflation, chronic food shortages and a broad collapse in state welfare institutions that once handed out seemingly limitless cheap food and free housing.

“Instead of taking us out of poverty, this government has left us poorer than ever,” said Yamileth García, a school aide who has lived for 26 years in this impoverished mountainside enclave just south of the country’s capital, Caracas.

The struggles faced by the some 20,000 residents of Turgua, which has four public-health clinics but no doctors, reflect the nationwide decay in living standards that is pushing many Venezuelans back into poverty.

Many of the town’s residents live in tin-roofed, hillside adobe houses with limited supplies of water and power.

The government-run Mercal market limits shoppers to buying one week’s supply of deeply discounted goods at a time, but recently it stayed closed for three weeks in a row. When it opened, it allowed customers a slab of beef each and otherwise offered only rice, pasta and powdered milk.

“This is not enough for a family,” Ms. García said. “We really need a change.”

A new study conducted by a consortium of Venezuelan university professors called Encovi says 76% of citizens are now living in poverty when measured by income, the highest level since 1975. That compares with a peak of 55% and a low of 21% during Mr. Chávez’s tenure.

Measuring poverty, tricky anywhere, is complicated in Venezuela by a dearth of data. Mr. Maduro’s government stopped publishing poverty statistics after it took over in 2013 and hasn’t released basic economic indicators like inflation or output since late 2014.

Adding to the puzzle is Venezuela’s cumbersome foreign-exchange system, which has produced four vastly different conversion rates for the U.S. dollar, making it difficult to compare Venezuelan incomes on an international level.

At the official exchange rate of 6.3 bolivars a dollar, Venezuelans appear to be earning a strong \$1,500 a month. But calculated at the black-market rate commonly used on Venezuela’s streets, the wage comes out to around \$12 a month—half the income of the average Cuban.

The government’s price caps, which keep staples like rice and corn flour cheap, also cause distortions. Controlled items are scarce, prompting most Venezuelans to pay several times more than government-set prices on the black market.

A typical Venezuelan household needs to earn the equivalent of eight minimum wages to buy one month’s supply of food, according to research group Cenda.

A recent poll by the Caracas consultancy Consultores 21 found nearly a third of Venezuelans unable to eat three meals a day.

“In general, the advances that they achieved under the government of Chávez have disappeared completely in the last two years,” said Daniel Fermín, a policy researcher at Andrés Bello Catholic University, who has studied the collapse in public services in Turgua.

The town is just a few miles from the capital, but few public buses brave the rough, semi-paved roads to get here.

In October, the government supplied three maroon Chinese-made Yutong buses to ease the isolation. But given the decrepit condition of the roads, local officials say it is just a matter of time before the new buses end up like the last three the government provided, rusting in a vacant lot because dollar shortages have cut the country's capacity to import vehicle parts.

"The government just throws the buses at us without any maintenance support," said Gustavo Cisneros, a community council spokesman. "It's such a waste."

The decline in living standards has become all too apparent for Ludiana Altuve, director of the privately run Mano Amiga La Montaña school here in Turgua.

After investigating teachers' complaints that two students—aged 4 and 6—were turning up to class weak and disoriented, Ms. Altuve found the brothers' family could no longer afford breakfast.

The hungry boys had been asking for help from a school security guard, who himself could only sometimes afford to buy them food. The children were added to a free breakfast program run by a Catholic charity that now feeds more than twice as many students as a year ago.

"The problem is the government didn't bring anyone here out of poverty by giving them an education or something sustainable," Ms. Altuve said.

Rampant crime, another hardship that disproportionately weighs on Venezuela's poor, has also hit her school and the surrounding community, turning the village into an anarchic breeding ground for violent gangs who recruit disillusioned youth and kidnap victims for ransom.

Last year, the body of a pro-government Caracas city councilman, Eliecer Otaiza, was found in Turgua with four bullet holes. One morning earlier this month, Ms. Altuve recounted, students arriving to Mano Amiga found the body of a man shot to death left at the school's gate. In August, one of her teachers was murdered by a young family member who she tried to pull out of a gang.

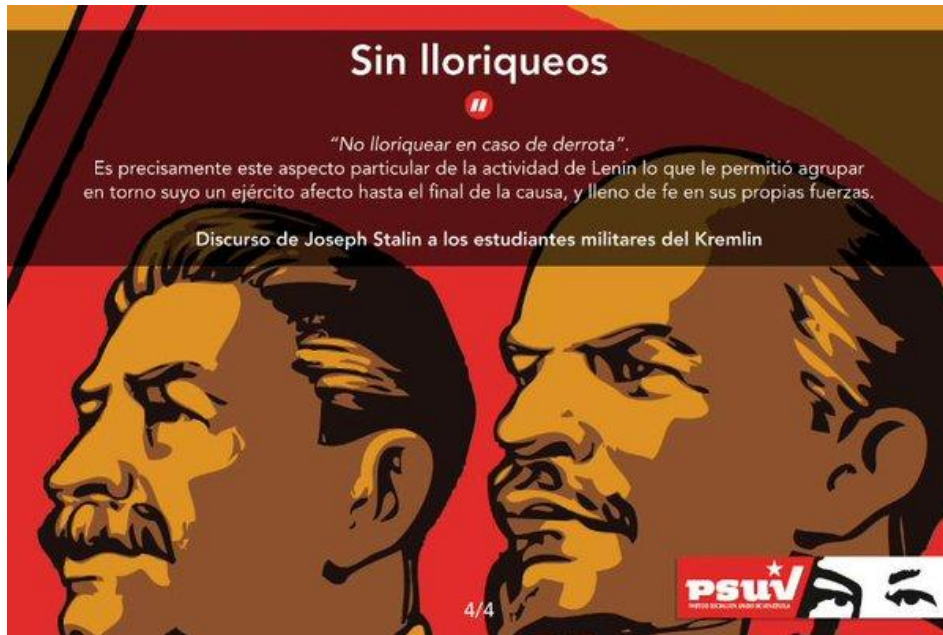
At the state-run Creación Turgua School, located just up the hill, director Elvis Andrade says the 10-room facility is often hit by blackouts, and in recent weeks has been looted of a TV, three computer monitors, fans and even one of the building's two water pumps.

"I try not to think about it too much and just push on," Ms. Andrade said.

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12.8.15: Twitter post by PSUV (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela)

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