

Military Resistance 14E10



Afghanistan's Many Turning Points

**“The Government Is Very Dependable
On Afghanistan Turning Points”
“It’s All For Political Survival And Has
Nothing To Do With Reality”**

From: Don Bacon, The Smedley Butler Society
To: Military Resistance Newsletter
Subject Afghanistan's Many Turning Points
Date: May 12, 2016

Afghanistan's Many Turning Points. by Don Bacon based on an original work by Joshua Foust.

Introduction

By Don Bacon

Joshua Foust got me started on it, provided the initial facts and inspired me, about five years ago and I just kept adding to it.

The government is very dependable on Afghanistan turning points.

Foust writes:

“Every year—literally, every single year—the military or government gets a reporter to run a story about how this time, NATO is trying to get it right, and it will change the tide of the war. Don’t believe me?...”

<http://www.registan.net/index.php/2011/03/15/afghanistans-many-annual-turning-points/>

There were never any turning points on Iraq, because the US victory was assured. Never in doubt.even now when actually Iran controls Iraq -- Iran says thank you Uncle Sam.

But Afghanistan was different, they sort of always knew and understood that Afghanistan has been the graveyard of empires, that they were in over their heads, that things needed to change...and so they proclaimed that things would change...even now.

It’s all for political survival and has nothing to do with reality.

PBS news report

It’s been 15 years since the fight began in Afghanistan. There are signs that the Taliban is now strengthening again. And ISIS is making its presence felt, too. . . We spoke to people in Lashkar Gah. That’s the provincial capital of Helmand province. And they are very concerned. . . the new commander here, General Nicholson, is conducting a 90-day review as to what should happen next.

It looks like we might be at a “turning point” in Afghanistan. Of course it wouldn’t be the first.

Afghanistan’s Many Turning Points

*Feb 2, 2016: Campbell: “Afghanistan is at an inflection point”

*Oct 5, 2015: Campbell: “ Where they [ANA] were just a couple of years ago to where they are today is pretty astounding.

*Feb 12, 2015: Campbell: “[Resolute Support] represents a significant paradigm shift.”

*Dec 29, 2014: Campbell: “What a change from the day that President Ghani took over.”

*Dec 28, 2014: Campbell: “we can see that Afghanistan and our Coalition are at a critical turning point.”

*Dec 28, 2014: Obama: "2014, therefore, is a pivotal year. Together with our allies and the Afghan government, we have agreed that this is the year we will conclude our combat mission in Afghanistan."

*Dec 23, 2014: General Campbell: 2014 proved to be a time of critical transition in Afghanistan

-----also see Campbell: May 9, 2011: MajGen John Campbell: "But I really do think that as people look back, and they'll say 2010 was the year in Afghanistan. It's the year that we finally put more resources in here. We had the right leadership, the right strategy. And I think that was a turning point."

*Dec 15, 2014: Obama: So, stepping back for a moment, we're at a turning point [in Iraq and Afghanistan].

*Nov 6, 2014: NATO's Stoltenberg: "Next year, we will open a new chapter. The future of Afghanistan will be in Afghan hands."

*Oct 11, 2014: Kerry: "History will hopefully be able to judge that [the unity government] was a turning point."

*Jun 16, 2014: Dunford: The next several weeks will be important.

*May 2, 2014: Dempsey Calls Election 'Turning Point' for Afghan Forces

*Apr 26, 2014: Voters are hoping the election marks a turning point in the troubled country.

*Mar 27, 2014: Obama: 2014, therefore, is a pivotal year

*Apr 5, 2014: Gateway House: Afghanistan: At a Turning Point

*Apr 2, 2014: Kerry called the elections "a pivotal moment after more than a decade of sacrifice and struggle."

*Mar 28, 2014: Stoltenberg will take over at a turning point in NATO's history.

*Nov 15, 2013: Hillary Clinton: 'Turning point' for Afghan women

*Oct 19, 2013: Defense Minister Thomas de Maiziere, who remarked in a speech that that Kunduz had been "a turning point not only for the Bundeswehr, but also for German society."

*Aug 17, 2013: The handover of responsibility on Tuesday marks a significant milestone in the nearly 12-year war and marks a turning point for American and NATO military forces.

*Jun 18, 2013: The handover of responsibility marks a turning point for American and NATO military forces

*May 3, 2013: Kerry: This is a pivotal moment for both Afghanistan and Pakistan

*Mar 8, 2013: Hagel: I believe that we are at a very important moment in this campaign

*Mar 8, 2013: NYPost: (Hagel's) unannounced visit comes at a turning point in the conflict.

*Dec 12, 2012: Panetta: We're at a turning point. You know, we've been in war for 10 1/2 years, almost 11 years, since 9/11. It's the longest period of warfare in the history -- continuous period of warfare in the history of this country. And we're now seeing a turning point: brought the war in Iraq to an end. In Afghanistan, where I'll go next, get a chance to look at the campaign plan that General Allen put in place to ultimately draw down in Afghanistan by the end of 2014.

*Dec 14, 2012: Panetta: In many ways, look, we're at a turning point.

*Nov 20, 2012: Panetta: We are at a turning point after 10 years of war -- over 10 years of war.

*Sep 27, 2012: Panetta: We did turn a very important corner.

*Sep 17, 2012: Panetta: Let me just say a few things. As I've said before, I think we're at a turning point, certainly after 10 years of war,

*June 7, 2012: Panetta: We are, as I said, at a turning point after 10 years of war.

*May 3, 2012: Panetta: 2011 was really a turning point. In 2011 the Taliban was weakened significantly. They couldn't organize the kind of attacks to regain territory that they had lost, which is something they have done in the past. So they've been weakened.

*April 18, 2012: Panetta: As I've said, 2011 was a real turning point. It was the first time in five years that we saw a drop in the number of enemy attacks.

*April 17, 2012: Panetta: NATO at 'Pivotal Point' in Afghan Mission

*Dec 18, 2012: Leon Panetta cites turning point in Afghanistan war

*December 14, 2011: Panetta was less than 34 miles from the Pakistan border when he told U.S. troops they have reached a turning point in the war.

*Jun 23, 2011: A White House official said Obama hoped that Americans would see Wednesday night's speech as a "pivot point" in the almost 10-year-old war

*April 21, 2011: Gates: "I think it's possible that by the end of this year we will have turned a corner just because of the Taliban being driven out, and, more importantly, kept out."

*May 9, 2011: MajGen John Campbell: "But I really do think that as people look back, and they'll say 2010 was the year in Afghanistan. It's the year that we finally put more resources in here. We had the right leadership, the right strategy. And I think that was a turning point."

*March 15, 2011: “FOB DELHI: International troops in Afghanistan face the prospect of a spring offensive by the Taliban every year – but this time the US-led alliance believes it could mark a real turning point in its favour.”

*Aug 31, 2010: Nick Clegg said NATO’s military campaign in Afghanistan was “turning the corner” today

*Aug 7, 2010: The British withdrawal from Sangin . . . represents a major turning point, possibly the beginning of the end for British forces in the country.

*Jun 14, 2010: The discovery of the minerals could certainly represent a significant turning point for Afghanistan

*Mar 31, 2010: NATO sees Kandahar battle as Afghan turning point

*Feb 26, 2010: UK General Sir David Richards: “A year ago the Taliban thought they had us on the run, but now the tables have been turned.”

*Feb 20, 2010: “Western officials believe that a turning point has been reached in the war against the Taliban, with a series of breakthroughs suggesting that the insurgents are on the back foot for the first time since their resurgence four years ago.”

*Sep 29, 2009: NPR: A Turning Point For Afghan War, And For Obama

*Sep 9, 2009: Exum: A Grim Turning Point in Afghanistan?

*August 31, 2009: “Monday marks the end of August, a month with both good and bad news out of Afghanistan — and the approach of a key turning point.”

*Aug 31, 2009: TIME: Both elements signal the arrival of a pivot point in Afghanistan , and one that is looming in Washington.

*February 6, 2008: “But the ties that bind NATO are fraying badly – and publicly – over just how much each member state wants to commit to turning Afghanistan around. ‘It’s starting to get to a turning point about what is this alliance about,’ says Michael Williams, director of the transatlantic program at the Royal United Services Institute in London.”

*Aug 16, 2007: Defence Secretary Des Browne said in an interview published Thursday that Britain’s mission in Afghanistan could be at a turning point to bringing increased stability there.

*July 23, 2007: “Taken together these may reflect a turning point in how the war in Afghanistan is to be waged.”

*September 12, 2006: “The Afghan front is at a critical turning point that imperils many of the hard-fought successes of the early phase of the conflict and the prospects for snaring bin Laden.”

*September 22, 2005: "Abdullah Abdullah, Afghanistan's foreign minister, called the recent parliamentary elections 'a major turning point' on his country's path to democracy."

*January 27, 2004: "A statement from U.S. ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad called the enactment of the constitution a 'turning point for the Afghan nation.'"

*February 26, 2003: "The growing aggressiveness by guerrillas is a relief for US forces, who greet the possibility of a real engagement with the Taliban as a possible turning point in the war. 'We want them to attack us, so we can engage them and destroy them,' says one Special Forces soldier from the US firebase at Spin Boldak, who took part in the initial firefight that led to Operation Mongoose."

*December 2, 2002: "But in 'Bush at War' there's a glaring omission. Woodward misses the turning point in the war in Afghanistan against the Taliban and al Qaeda forces. It's as though the most important scene had been left out of a movie, say, where Clark Kent turns into Superman."

MILITARY NEWS



[Thanks to SSG N (ret'd) who sent this in. She writes: "We used to call it a buncha Mickey mouse junk."]

**Govt Wants To Ignore The
Legacy Of Toxic Burn Pits:
“Built In Close Proximity To Where
Military Members Were Housed”
“The VA Denied Burn Pit Victims
Disability Benefits, Telling Veterans
Their Illnesses Are Not Service-
Connected”
60,000 US War Veterans Suffering From
Health Problems The Govt Wants To
Ignore**

May 23, 2016 By Joseph Hickman, AlterNet. Joseph Hickman is a former U.S. Marine and Army sergeant. He is the author of *The Burn Pits: The Poisoning of America's Soldiers* (Hot Books/Skyhorse).

There are over 60,000 U.S. veterans who served in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan who are now sick and dying. But the Pentagon denies there is such a health crisis, and the Department of Veterans Affairs is denying these suffering men and women the benefits they desperately need and deserve.

These veterans are not the victims of enemy fire. They are suffering from medical ailments associated with the open-air burn pits that were constructed on over 230 military bases across Iraq and Afghanistan.

These fiery pits, which were hastily dug in violation of the military's own health and environmental regulations, were used to dispose of the mountains of trash created by war.

Every type of refuse imaginable was thrown into these burn pits, including such toxic materials as plastics, metals, medical waste, batteries, tires, old ordnance and even human body parts.

The open-air burn pits were massive in size—some as large as 10 acres—and many were built in close proximity to where military members were housed.

They burned 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with each pit incinerating as much as 50 tons of trash a day.

Soldiers stationed on these bases grew accustomed to the black plumes that filled the sky and the clouds of ash that sometimes enveloped them. The noxious pollutants wafted everywhere in these camps. In a desperate effort to block the foul-smelling fallout, some soldiers blocked the vents in their barracks with towels when they went to sleep, waking in the morning to see the once-white towels blackened with soot.

The burn pits were built and operated by KBR, which was then a subsidiary of Halliburton, the huge energy services company once headed by former Vice President Dick Cheney.

For seven years, the pits went completely unregulated, seemingly exempt from all government oversight. Only after service members barraged their representatives in the Senate and Congress with complaints did the Government Accountability Office launch an investigation into the burn pits, finally prompting the Defense Department to put in place pollution-control measures in 2009.

During that investigation, the GAO discovered that the burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan were releasing over 1,000 toxins and carcinogens into the air.

Many doctors and environmental scientists have voiced concerns about the open-air burn pits, which operated in violation of EPA regulations and in fact would never have been permitted in the United States.

One medical researcher, Anthony Szema, a professor at New York's Stony Brook University Medical School and a former Veterans Health Administration physician, has conducted numerous studies on the health effects from burn pit exposure.

In one such study, Dr. Szema found that among 15,000 soldiers deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan who were exposed to pollution from the burn pits, 70 percent complained of respiratory problems.

A separate report conducted for the U.S. Central Command in 2006 by Lieutenant Colonel Darren Curtis, an environmental scientist with the U.S. Air Force, stated, "There is an acute health hazard for individuals and the possibility of chronic health hazards associated with the smoke from the burn pits."

Some burn pits proved particularly damaging to the health of service members. These were the pits located on U.S. military bases that were constructed on the ruins of former Iraqi military bases that were leveled by U.S. bombs. At least five of those former Iraqi bases housed chemical weapons storage facilities containing old stockpiles of mustard and sarin gas produced by Saddam Hussein's regime in the 1980s and '90s.

According to chemical weapons experts I have interviewed, these toxic stockpiles were blown up during the U.S. bombardment of the Iraqi bases, contaminating the ground where military contractor KBR later dug some of its burn pits.

Retired Army Reserve Lieutenant Colonel Rick Lamberth, who oversaw construction of some of those military bases for KBR, said his former employer “knew the ground was hot” (meaning it was contaminated) when they were building bases like Camp Taji, where old chemical weapons stockpiles were later found by the U.S. military.

Lamberth told me that KBR didn’t take any soil samples or test for ground contamination prior to or during construction of the base and its burn pits.

Now, many veterans who served at Camp Taji and other bases in Iraq that were former chemical weapons bases are showing signs of mustard gas exposure, for which the Pentagon has no official explanation.

Soldiers returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began complaining as early as 2004 to the Veterans Health Administration, the vast medical network operated by the VA, about illnesses they felt were related to burn pit exposure. I began researching these complaints in 2011 after receiving a phone call from a former soldier who had served at Camp Taji.

Throughout our conversation, I heard him wheezing and coughing, until he finally was wracked by a coughing fit that lasted for minutes. When he finally recovered, he said, “Excuse me, I brought some of the burn pit back from Iraq with me.”

It was the first time I had heard of the burn pits, though I was a Marine and Army veteran who had served around the world. The phone call set me on a journey to find out more about the health problems that my caller said were afflicting many of those with whom he had served in Iraq.

I spent the next four years researching the burn pits and their victims, conducting over 1,000 interviews with veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and with numerous scientists and medical experts. These veterans were convinced there was a link between their serious health problems—which included rare respiratory ailments as well as cancer—and the burn pits.

Every expert I interviewed who had studied the widespread complaints came to the same conclusion.

None of the ill and dying soldiers I spoke with are well known; they performed their service for their country with the usual anonymity of rank-and-file soldiers. But the burn pits might well have claimed the life of at least one celebrated veteran: Beau Biden, the son of Vice President Joe Biden, who served as major with the Army National Guard at two Iraq bases, Camp Liberty and Joint Air Base Balad, both of which had massive burn pits in close proximity to where soldiers slept, ate and worked.

Prior to his deployment, Major Biden was declared perfectly healthy, easily passing the Army physical fitness test and an extensive health examination. But eight months after Major Biden returned home from Iraq, his health started to deteriorate. He began suffering from headaches and numbness in his limbs, often feeling fatigued and weak. In August 2013, Biden was diagnosed with brain cancer, an illness that eventually took his life in May 2015, at age 46.

There is not enough evidence to link Beau Biden's cancer directly to his burn pit exposure. But I found that Biden was among a cluster of cancer victims who had served at Camp Liberty and Balad. I was shocked to learn that, among the 112 service members and military contractors I interviewed who served at these two bases, 31 later developed different forms of cancers and brain tumors.

Dr. Szema's research suggests there could be a relation between this high incidence of cancer and the burn pits.

His research team conducted lung biopsies on several former service members who were stationed at Camp Victory, and very high levels of titanium were found in all of the veterans' lungs. Dr. Szema strongly believes the titanium dust particles found in the soldiers came directly from the burn pits. Titanium has been listed by the National Institutes of Health as a possible carcinogen.

One former VA official has called the burn pits crisis the "Agent Orange scandal" of our day.

But as with the widespread health problems associated with Agent Orange, the defoliant sprayed by the U.S. military over much of the Vietnam jungles during the war there, the Pentagon and the VA once again are proving stubbornly reluctant to acknowledge their responsibility for the extensive damage done to our soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan by the burn pits.

The Veterans Health Administration has denied burn pit victims disability benefits, telling veterans their illnesses are not service-connected, despite a growing body of medical evidence to the contrary.

It took 27 years before the U.S. military finally acknowledged the truth about Agent Orange and began giving benefits to Vietnam War veterans damaged by chemical warfare. By then thousands had already died.

Once again veterans who bravely served their country are suffering the same sort of double betrayal by their commanders—exposed to harmful chemical agents, not on the battlefield, but in their own barracks, and then abandoned when they fell ill.

Veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan should not be forced to wait decades for help like Vietnam vets were.

They need help now.

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.

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

Marxists know that democracy does *not* abolish class oppression. It only makes the class struggle more direct, wider, more open and pronounced, and that is what we need.

The fuller the freedom of divorce, the clearer will women see that the source of their “domestic slavery” is capitalism, not lack of rights.

The more democratic the system of government, the clearer will the workers see that the root evil is capitalism, not lack of rights.

The fuller national equality (and it is *not* complete without freedom of secession), the clearer will the workers of the oppressed nations see that the cause of their oppression is capitalism, not lack of rights, etc.
-- V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, 4th English Edition; Vol. 23

Agent Orange Children Vietnam 2016



Photograph by Mike Hastie

From: Mike Hastie
To: Military Resistance Newsletter
Sent: May 13, 2016
Subject: Agent Orange Children Vietnam 2016

Full Disclosure

The Vietnamese people have suffered beyond human comprehension, and that suffering will go on for many more generations.

The U.S. Government gives monetary compensation to Vietnam veterans who have medical problems related to Agent Orange exposure.

I have several friends who are suffering from Agent Orange illnesses. Three of my friends have died from cancer as a result of this awful illness, one of them was my brother-in-law.

I have met very few Vietnam veterans who did not have at least one friend who died from Agent Orange exposure. VA hospitals across the United States have treated countless Vietnam veterans for Agent Orange exposure.

As of 2016, the United States Government has done nothing to compensate Agent Orange victims in Vietnam, because our government has said there is no absolute conclusive evidence that Agent Orange is responsible for genetic abnormalities or cancer.

So, the W A R goes on in Vietnam, and I saw it when I went to three orphanages while I was recently there. I also saw many people on the streets who were affected with birth abnormalities.

For the vast majority of Agent Orange victims in Vietnam, they are being cared for at home with minimal medical help.

A deadly herbicide is the legacy of Vietnam, Depleted Uranium will be the deadly legacy of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Be all you can be...

Mike Hastie
Army Medic Vietnam

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**

Memorial Day

[From GI Special, May 22, 2008]

From: Dennis Serdel
To: GI Special
Sent: May 22, 2008 5:07 PM
Subject: Memorial Day by Dennis

By Dennis Serdel, Vietnam 1967-68 (one tour) Light Infantry, Americal Div. 11th
Brigade, purple heart, Veterans For Peace 50 Michigan, Vietnam Veterans Against
The War, United Auto Workers GM Retiree, in Perry, Michigan

Memorial Day

Depression is crashing down on the Soldier
from clouds in the air reflecting dead heroes
he can't seem to shake anything off
it has seeped into his body and brain
like hounds on the loose chasing enemies
inside himself that won't come out
that can hardly be seen except for Americans
who send him cards and packages that
he doesn't open anymore because he doesn't know
them or his family or himself or anybody anymore
as the dust flies behind his Humvee waiting
for their death, his death it doesn't
matter anymore, nothing is important
driving into his death he hopes because
he can't take it anymore he needs to be rescued
but helicopters never land
until it is too late everybody dead
except him or everybody is alive
except him as he screams in the air of the desert
but he is only screaming at himself
as the needle goes in and the doctor
tells him not to worry he will be with
his fellow Soldiers in no time, no time at all
but time has stopped there is no history
nothing in the future except for now and dead heroes
between nothingness and nothingness
between half life and half death
he no longer cares about going on living
for what, this ugly world is just evil
the way it takes people, squeezes happiness,
feelings of love out of them, leaving empty cartridges
on a highway in Baghdad motors running
full speed ahead and as he cries to God but God is dead
and the highway he has traveled is bloody
red and black, black and red
a game of dangerous
his family doesn't know him anymore
as he sits on the porch and stares with dead eyes
waiting for someone to give him a gun again.

ANNIVERSARIES

June 1913: A Heroine In Action; Elizabeth Gurley Flynn



Cover illustration by Arthur Machin for *The Rebel Girl*. Words & Music by Joe Hill (Ithaca, NY: Glad Day Press, 1940, c1915).

“The Rebel Girl” In Person



Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, June 1913, speaking against capitalism and for working class revolution to a mass audience. www.youtube.com

Joe Hill dedicated his song “The Rebel Girl” to her a few months before he was executed November 19, 1915 by firing squad in Utah for organizing workers to join labor unions affiliated with Industrial Workers Of The World.

CLASS WAR REPORTS

**“Masks Are Falling, The Government Will Fall, Too”
10,000 In Belgrade Demanded Resignations Of Officials:
“The Whole Protest Is About Accusing The Authorities Of Corruption And Violence”**

Serbia's Regime Controlled Media Suppress News Of Demonstration



Thousands of people in front of Radio Television of Serbia, RTS, protesting. Photo: BIRN

26 May 16 by Sasa Dragojlo, BIRN

Belgrade

It is not surprising that most Serbian mainstream media either ignored or only selectively reported on a rally in which more than 10,000 marchers demanded resignations over the controversial demolitions in the Waterfront area.

People at the rally carried banners reading, “You will not get away with this”, “Remove the masks”, “Phantom of the Assembly”, “Vucic knows everything”, “Masks are falling, the government will fall, too,” and small flags with the slogan “Whose city - Our city”.

If you only followed the biggest media outlets in Serbia, you would certainly not have learned much about Wednesday’s protest in the centre of Belgrade.

That day, more than 10,000 people demanded resignations of city and state officials because of their silence over the strange events that took place in Belgrade at the end of April.

That was when 30 masked men demolished buildings and maltreated citizens in the city's riverside Savamala area, where the state-backed Belgrade Waterfront complex is to be built.

On the night of April 24, a group of masked men demolished several sites on the riverbank in the Savamala. The city police ignored calls for help and, later, the police, city and state authorities claimed they knew nothing about the events.

Activists from the campaigning group “Let’s not Drown Belgrade”, who organized the latest protest, believe the nocturnal demolition work was carried out to clear space for the Belgrade Waterfront project, a controversial development funded by an investor from the United Arab Emirates.

However, although Wednesday’s protest was large in scale for such a proverbially apathetic society, most mainstream media either completely ignored it, or reported on it selectively.

Viewers of Belgrade city’s television station, Studio B, would not even have known that the protest took place. It did not report about it at all.

On Wednesday evening, while the rally was being held, Studio B instead aired promotional videos about the Waterfront project.

Their editorial choice was interesting since “Let’s not drown Belgrade” is one of the biggest opponents of the Waterfront project - and the whole protest is about accusing the authorities of corruption and violence linked to plans to redevelop a popular area into an upscale housing and shopping complex.

Studio B, widely seen as a symbol of the Serbian capital, was sold last August to the marketing agency, Maxim Media, for 530,000 euros.

Studio B’s importance and reputation grew during the era of Slobodan Milosevic, when it became an emblem of free journalism and independent thought.

However, its reputation has declined sharply since then and many believe that, since privatization, it has become just another openly pro-government mouthpiece.

Serbia’s state news agency Tanjug, which is still producing news and receiving money from the budget - even though the government closed it last October 2015, after failing to find a private buyer - also did not report anything about the protest, although it might have been considered a basic professional duty as a news agency.

Only too aware of Serbia’s problematic media, protesters at Wednesday’s rally staged a march to the headquarters of the media outlets Politika, Novosti and national broadcaster RTS, accusing them of not reporting on the issue.

Jovana Gligorijevic, editor of the weekly Vreme, said on Wednesday that if they relied only on the mainstream media, people would never have found out about the controversial demolitions in Savamala, saying that Serbia’s public broadcaster, RTS, is not fulfilling its duty as an objective public service financed by all citizens.

Journalist Dusan Cavic made a speech noting that RTS is starting to look like the infamous RTS of the 1990s, when Serbia's authoritarian strongman Slobodan Milosevic controlled it, and when around a thousand journalists were fired for disobedience.

“The public broadcaster is supposed to report objectively and not on the politicians’ orders. That is why we are paying you,” he said.

In fact, RTS did report somewhat selectively on the protest, saying on its website that some protesters “went for a walk in support of journalists” but of course not mentioning the explicit harsh criticism of its own work.

RTS said only in its report that the organizers of the march “were unsatisfied with the work of some journalists”. It did not say how many people gathered at a rally.

Politika, the oldest Serbian daily paper, where the marchers also stopped to express their dissatisfaction with their (non)reporting on the incidents, tucked the news away on page five under the headline “Protest walk in the centre of Belgrade”.

“The initiative Let’s not drown Belgrade gathered several thousand citizens who stopped traffic on the point between the Square of Nikola Pasic to Takovska Street,” it noted.

The question of press freedom is increasingly shaking the media scene in Serbia, as more and more journalists and journalists association complain of censorship and self-censorship.

They also fear that Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic is tightening his grip on the media, who now overwhelmingly report in favour of him or his party.

Most recently, several journalists association have condemned the wave from dismissals from RTV, the public TV station in Serbia's northern province of Vojvodina, accusing Vucic's ruling Serbian Progressive Party of ordering their removal.

The dismissals at RTV came after the Progressive Party won political control of the province following the recent elections, ending 16 years of dominance by the Democratic Party.

Firstly, the TV station's program director, Slobodan Arezina, was removed on May 5 in what some said was a political move but which the station's bosses insisted was for “commercial reasons”.

Two weeks later, seven editors of two other shows on RTV were informed by telephone by RTV management on Tuesday that they would not edit their shows the next day.

Almost the entire team of the morning show “Good Morning Vojvodina” was dismissed, and some journalists at RTV claim there are hints that dismissals will continue.

According to the latest Freedom House report, Serbia is on a list of 19 countries where media freedom declined fastest in the course of a single year.

The government denies putting any political pressure on journalists.

However, the excuse that all the staff changes that have taken place during Vucic's four-year reign are down to "marketing reasons" - the usual official excuse for sackings - is starting to wear thin.

**Macedonian Prisoners
Organizing Resistance:
"106 Female Prisoners From The
Main Prison In Idrizovo Went On
Hunger Strike On The 25th Of
April"
"The Prisoners' Demands Exposed
The Substandard Conditions"
"The Absence Of Leniency In Granting
Reduced Sentences For Less Serious
Crimes Pales In Comparison To Those
Committed By Members Of The Corrupt
Elite"**

May 30, 2016 by Adela Gjorgjioska, LeftEast [Excerpts] Adela Gjorgjioska is a PhD Student living in Rome, researching the social representations of human rights and justice. Her research interests include contemporary radical politics, social representations of the Left and of the Ottoman Empire, and conflict resolution.

Already in September 2015, hunger strikes spread across Macedonia's prisons, with prisoners demanding pardon for less serious crimes to combat overcrowding and inhumane conditions in the country's jails.

The initiative gained momentum following pressures made by relatives of individuals imprisoned for up to 5 years.

A large number of people, for example, had been arrested for transporting refugees across the country in the period before this was made legal in July 2015. The prisoners

and their families started an initiative for submitting an amnesty bill to pardon inmates convicted of lesser crimes who have served 40% of their sentences.

Following half a year of impasse, the Presidential amnesty for officials in mid-April produced an echo of amnesty demands such as a letter by 2,200 prisoners addressed to the President, asking for a reduction of their prison terms by 30-50%.

Following the his refusal to grant the pardon, on the excuse that the blanket amnesty of politicians had been in the national interest, which doesn't apply in the case of other prisoners, 106 female prisoners from the main prison in Idrizovo went on hunger strike on the 25th of April whilst a more general strike across 13 penitentiaries across the country was scheduled for the 5th of May.

However, on the day of the scheduled strike, reports came from the management of the main prison in Skopje (Idrizovo), denying that the strike had taken place, and media circulated reports of attempts at coercing the convicts and their families against striking, with threats of subjecting them to worsened conditions in prison, or promising reductions of penalties in exchange for their foregoing of the strike.

Three key issues were exposed with the prisoners' demands and the subsequent Presidential refusal to grant them an amnesty.

The first one relates to the selective justice, which was exposed through the impunity reserved for over fifty members of the corrupt political elite. Amongst those pardoned were individuals pardoned for up to 16 charges.

The amnestied charges ranged from covering up murder, rigging elections and massive embezzlement of public property and money.

Juxtaposed with the absence of leniency in granting reduced sentences for less serious crimes, which pale in comparison to those committed by members of the corrupt elite, the vulgar extremes of selective justice in the country were illuminated.

Secondly, the prisoners' demands exposed the dire conditions in the country's penitentiary institutions. Indeed, one of the key arguments put forward in the case for the amnesty have been the substandard conditions in Macedonia's prisons.

According to the Helsinki Committee of Human Rights for Macedonia, there is overcrowding of 156%, with 156 people on average accommodated in spaces that can take only 100.

As of 12th of April 2016, the number of people in one of the 13 penitentiary institutions across the country is 3,446 whilst the capacity for accommodation is 2,026. *(There is a discrepancy between the figures provided by the Helsinki Committee, and the Directorate for the Execution of Sanctions within the Ministry of Justice, with the former saying the capacity is 2026 as of April 2016 and the latter 2519 as of January 2016).*

In addition to overcrowding, the Helsinki Committee reports also on inadequate healthcare, inefficient legal support, failure to implement re-socialization programs, bad hygiene, infestation and abuse by the prison management.

Additionally, their reports confirm that almost everything can be bought from the prison, from mobile phones and drugs to conditional release to better accommodation in the prison.

The second part of the problem relates to the fact that the justice system is sending more people to prison, and for longer periods, than the prison capacity allows.

This problem requires that in addition to the problem of capacity, the causes of prison overcrowding are also addressed in relation to the crime levels in the country and their rootedness in the degradation of the welfare state in the years following the onslaught of neoliberalism and the accompanying state capture in the hands of corrupt establishment figures, especially during the last 10 years under the leadership of the governing coalition of DPMNE and DUI.

According to the Directorate for the Execution of Sanctions, the number of convicts in prisons has been on a consistent rise, having increased by 46% from 2010 to 2016.

According to the latest figures out of a total 3,016 convicts, in 2014, the largest majority of 1,303 prisoners falls under the category of Crimes against Property. This is a category where we find robberies, most likely inflicted by those most badly affected by poverty and the inability of the welfare state to answer their needs.

Another subcategory in this group is also the theft of electrical energy, which is directly related to the privatization and monopolisation of electricity provision in the country, which has resulted in widespread energy poverty across the country.

The second largest category of convicts consists of 466 convicts imprisoned for Crimes against Health. It is here that we find a subcategory of drug addicts, which in the state's inability to open and manage appropriate rehabilitation centers means that the large majority is being sent to prisons.

While some in the prison reform movement may welcome the expansion of capacity to decrease overcrowding, the experience in general of such expansions has simply meant an expansion of the prison population itself (with little to no relief in terms of overcrowding); this is especially true in cases where the prison system itself becomes a substitute for social welfare provision, mental health programs, and a coherent anti-poverty and anti-homelessness policy.

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OCCUPATION PALESTINE

**“The Horror Of Ethnic Cleansing
Campaigns Carried Out Against
Hundreds Of Palestinian Villages
In 1948 By Zionists Militias Still
Haunt Survivors”
Elder Palestinian Refugees In Gaza
“Recall Lost Homes And ‘Torn
Bodies’
Long For Return”
‘I Am Dreaming Of Going Back To My
Village Again”**



86-year-old, Amna was preparing for marriage when her town was ethnically cleansed by Zionists militias in 1948. (Photo: Yousef M. Aljamal, PC)

May 14 2016 By Yousef M. Aljamal. Yousef M. Aljamal is the Palestine Chronicle Correspondent in the Gaza Strip.

The horror of ethnic cleansing campaigns carried out against hundreds of Palestinian villages in 1948 by Zionists militias still haunt survivors 68 years on.

Palestinians in Gaza, 80 % of whom are refugees, still recall the mass exodus that Israel celebrates as “Independence Day”.

Subsequent Israeli attacks on Gaza have always made the Palestinian memory so impossible to forget, despite the Israeli desire that “The old will die and the young will forget”.

Three Nakba survivors spoke to The Palestine Chronicle about their experiences in 1948 and the trauma experienced when they had to leave their towns and villages and ended up in Gaza’s refugee camps.

These three refugees recalled the good life they led with their families until they were kicked out of their towns and had to endure endless suffering.

“We Owned 80-Dunums And Enjoyed Our Life”



Misbah Ballour poses in his house in Alnusierat refugee camp (Photo: Yousef M. Aljamal, PC)

“We owned 80-dunums and enjoyed our life”

Misbah Mahmoud Ballour, 83, from the village of Aqir recalled how his family owned approximately 80-dunums of land: “Life was nice, the family connection was strong, and villages maintained good relationships with each other.”

“When someone got married, the whole village would stand by him. Even when someone died, people from other villages would come and offer condolences as death was a very big thing back then.” Ballour recalled how the lifestyle of Palestinian peasants

was different from that of today. "People would wake up early in the morning, have their breakfast, and go with their kids to work in their lands," he explained.

The adjacent villages of Aqer used to have a very famous season called Robeen, in which they would take days off work and enjoy festivals and shopping.

The day the Zionist militias attacked Aqir is still vivid in Ballour's mind.

"In 1948, Jewish militias surrounded the village at night and asked for the handing over of weapons held by some fighters in the village. If their demands were not met, they threatened to occupy the village."

As the village was placed under siege, "We feared for our lives and started to leave. They killed some villagers to terrorise the rest of the inhabitants and make them leave."

The ethnic cleansing of Aqir was part of the Dalit Plan, which aimed at kicking out the inhabitants of villages and towns in the surrounding areas of Jaffa.

"At the beginning of May 1948, the villagers fled to the adjacent village of Yibna, and then the battle of Bisheet took place. We used to hear the names of people killed inside the village. We then fled to Majdal through the coastal road," added Ballour.

"I remember the day we were forced to leave clearly. We walked all the way from Yibna to Gaza. We were 44 people from the same family, all my uncles and cousins. My feet got swollen," the 83-year old recalled, touching his feet.

Among the people killed in the village was, according to him, Ibrahim Shakfa, Abu Bassam Jabir and Hassan Abdallah Mousa.

Upon arrival in Gaza, Ballour explains, "We found nothing to eat. Aid groups came to provide us with our needs. The United Nations provided Palestinians with tents, and people had great hopes to return to their villages".

He explained the life he lived in comparison to his current existence: "Life today is completely different; we used to have security, respect, and co-existence.

'I am dreaming of going back to my village again.'

Ballour laments the narrowness of refugee camps today compared to the spacious land his family owned: "Palestinians had spacious land to grow their crops and take care of their animals, and we planted all sorts of vegetables and fruit."

The story of Ballour is not different from that of Ameena Abdallah Qanan, 86, or as she is known in Gaza, Um Jawad Abu Silmia, from the village of Jorit Askalan.

Um Jawad spoke the dialect of her village and recalled the fig and grape fields that surrounded her village.

"Preparing for Marriage"



86-year-old, Amna was preparing for marriage when her town was ethnically cleansed by Zionists militias in 1948. (Photo: Yousef M. Aljamal, PC)

“We were peaceful people farming our lands and taking care of our animals. We were leading a very comfortable life. People from my village would sell their crops and produce in adjacent villages and towns such as Fallouja, Iraq Swidan and Jaffa,” is how she began her speech, with sorrow in her eyes.

“My father was a soldier with the Turkish army and he fought with them for forty years. He travelled to Morocco, Spain and Turkey.”

The week Um Jawad was expelled from the village along with her family and her old father, she was preparing to get married. She recalled that experience with a smile on her face, “I was supposed to get married the week we were forced out of the village. My husband proposed to me a year later in Gaza, but my father refused and swore that the wedding would never take place except in our village. My husband brought a group of figures with him who pressured my father and he finally agreed. They told him: “You could do another wedding when we would return to Jorit Askalan, but that second wedding never took place.”

Moshe Dayan led an attack against the village which Palestinians defended with the little weapons they had.

“Moshe Dayan brought armored vehicles and started shooting at us in orchards and on the roads. Planes threw powder barrels on our village killing some 170 people. Rumors spread that the Jews will attack us, so women started to leave the village. We spent seven nights in orchards. They told us we would be back within a week. We are still refugees until this day.”

According to Um Jawad, the victims of this massacre included Mohammed Ayoub and his three kids, eight other people from the Alwan family, and three kids of Hamouda Abdulghani.

“There was a man with the name of Asmail Ayoub Ghrab from Jaffa who rented a house in our village. 15 people from his family were killed in the massacre,” said Um Jawad.

Jewish warships took part in the attack. “Saleem Abujahjouh was killed. His son was born a day before he was killed,” Um Jawad recalled.

“We have never thought that we will be made refugees for this long period of time. We ended up in Gaza and we stayed near the Gaza Valley. Then we stayed in Rafah until 1956. Then we moved to Khan Yonis for 40 more years and we finally ended up in Al Nuseirat.”

Israeli soldiers shot Jawad, the eldest son of Um Jawad, dead in 1986 when he took part in a student protest in the West Bank town of Birzeit.

Um Jawad still has hope that she will return to her village. Women who are older than the state of Israel have message for it: “You will go away just like other foreign nations that occupied Palestine went away. We will never lose hope.”

“I tell young people: never forget your lands and towns. I remember the Valley of Ants, the grape fields, and the orchards of Askalan.

“I remember the good days in Jaffa when I sold birds that I caught near the hills of Yibna. I remember Iskandar Awad and the Balabseh Markets as well as the Bridge and the Seaport Streets in Jaffa.

“They were the best days. One day we will return.”

“100-Year Old Aysheh Zaqout From Asdod Shares Um Jawad’s Hope Of Returning To Her Village”



Aysheh Zaqout, 100, still longs for her town and dreams of returning. (Photo: Essam Zaqout, PC)

100-year old Refugee, Aysheh Zaqout's life in Asdod

The 100-year old Aysheh Zaqout from Asdod shares Um Jawad's hope of returning to her village, and her pain of losing her son. In 1989, and just after the Eid prayer, Israeli soldiers shot her son, Mohammed, dead, leaving nine kids, a wife and a sorrowful mother behind, whose memory of what happened in 1948 is still vivid.

"When Zionists drove us out of Asdod in 1948, I was married with two kids, Zaki and Hussain. We were living in our 60-dunum-orchard, which was planted with sesame, peaches, apricot and figs. Our house was located to the West of Asdod, near the main station. It was made of mud, and we had a simple and beautiful life. In fact, we were very happy."

This happiness, however, did not last too long, as Jewish militias started attacking the city. "Jewish gangs attacked us through the fields and farms. They came from the western side of our orchard and opened heavy gunfire on us. We could see bullets hitting our house," recalled the 100-year refugee.

"Bombs were falling on us everywhere. I saw the bodies of Palestinians scattered on cactus trees across the road from our house. A huge bomb fell near the house of Mohammed Saleh, our neighbor. We managed to escape by riding on the backs of our donkeys and mules. We moved along with hundreds of refugees through the fields and farms. Our destiny was unclear. We decided to go to Gaza."

Aysheh Zaqout still remembers the details of her town and longs to return. "Just show me the Ghabin café and I will accompany you to our house," she bragged. The 100-year old is ready to do whatever it takes to return to her town "I am ready to take up arms and fight with my grandchildren to return to our village."

Until someone shows Aysha the Ghabin café, takes Misbah back to his orange orchard, and accompanies Ameena to Iskandar Awad's market, millions of Palestinian refugees will continue to long for homes that once were theirs.

“South African Human Rights Activist, Itani Rasalanavho, Detained And ‘Humiliated’ By Israeli Authorities At Ben Gurion Airport” “Strip Searched Before Deported From The Country”

May 14 2016 PalestineChronicle.com

South African human rights activist, Itani Rasalanavho, was detained and 'humiliated' by Israeli authorities at Ben Gurion airport. He was strip searched before deported from the country.

Rasalanavho said he was pulled out of a queue upon arrival at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv last Friday.

"I was interrogated about the purpose of my visit. I told them I was here for church human rights work, but instead I was detained and strip-searched," he told Anadolu Agency in an exclusive interview.



South African deported from Ben Gurion airport after bring strip searched and humiliated

According to Rasalanavho, he was travelling to Palestine to join the Christian Peacemakers Team (CPT), an organization engaged in worldwide human rights work, including in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

"I was detained for three hours at the airport before being taken to a detention facility where I spent a whole day," he said.

The activist says after confiscating his passport, Israeli officials escorted him to the airport the next day where he was flown to Ethiopia and later back to South Africa.

"I was seriously humiliated by their actions," he said.

Rasalanavho is among numerous South African activists who have been deported from or denied entry into Palestine by Israeli authorities. South African Higher Education Minister, Blade Nzimande, was also denied entry to Palestine by Israel in 2015 despite travelling on official government business.

Israeli Ambassador to South Africa, Arthur Lenk, claimed not to know the details of the case in question.

Lenk said in a private Twitter conversation that, "Every country, South Africa and Turkey included, doesn't let in all foreigners for a wide variety of reasons. Would SA or Turkey allow an 'activist' that wants to enter to verbally (or otherwise) attack it?"

Rasalanavho says while he is relieved to be home safe, his resolve to assist the Palestinian people is stronger than ever.

To check out what life is like under a murderous military occupation commanded by foreign terrorists, go to:
<http://www.palestinechronicle.com/>
The occupied nation is Palestine. The foreign terrorists call themselves "Israeli."

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