

'Education is key to the emancipation of Afghanistan': An interview with Malalai Joya

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Malalai Joya achieved international recognition in December 2003 when [she bravely denounced the presence](#) of warlords in the meeting of Afghanistan's Loya Jirga that had been elected to develop a new constitution for the war-torn country. In her autobiography, [Raising My Voice](#), she describes the following years of her life as one of being on permanent guard against all forms of intimidation, including death threats.

In 2021, Malalai Joya, under threat from the re-imposed Taliban regime, was forced to leave Afghanistan and live in exile. Below Joya discusses the background to the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the shape of resistance today with Dick Nichols for *LINKS International Journal of Socialist Renewal*.

Background to today's Afghanistan

In [Ghosts of Afghanistan—The Haunted Battleground](#), Guardian journalist Jonathan Steele describes the country's tragedy as that of a civil war between traditionalists and modernisers into which outsiders (first Russia, then the United States) intervened to take sides in pursuit of their own interests. Is that accurate?

I want to say that I don't agree with this way of posing the issue, as if the primary responsibility lay with the divisions in Afghan society and not with the ambitions of these great powers. Under the banners of noble causes both these countries, both these imperialist governments, occupied our country for their own dirty agendas.

For example, Russia occupied Afghanistan in the name of socialism, under the nice banners of decent clothing and housing for the people and providing them with good food and social services etc. The US as a superpower occupied Afghanistan in the name of "democracy", "human rights", and the "war on terror".

I used to say, on behalf of my people and I repeat it here, that it would have been better if they had changed those banners to that of "War on the Innocent Afghan People!" What resulted was not democracy but a mockery that betrayed all democratic values.

Both countries occupied Afghanistan for their own strategic, regional, economic and political interests, and the people of Afghanistan were the victims. Both powers supported their own puppets, brought them to power, and imposed them on the Afghan people. Both needed an unsafe Afghanistan for their own interests, for their own evil plans: they didn't care about the wishes of ordinary Afghan people, just as they didn't even care about the lives of their own people or their own soldiers.

For example, if we talk about the US government over the past 20 years, what the US did was to have a [troop surge](#) in Afghanistan, sending them there with the message that "you are going there to

fight against Taliban backwardness, extremism and for women's rights."

But their intervention brought the Taliban back into power. This was not a last-minute decision in the face of Taliban advances, but a possible outcome that had been entertained for some time. In 2014, for example, [the Obama administration released five Taliban leaders](#) who were being held in Guantánamo without charge as part of the "war on terror", and took them off the black list. This was the Taliban condition for opening negotiations with the US over a withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, which then ended with the [February 2020 US-Taliban agreement](#).

In fact, they betrayed the blood of their own soldiers as well as the money of their own taxpayers. They betrayed the Afghan people, the American people, and effectively they just replaced one of their puppets by bringing back another puppet.

So, it seems that the US supported the Taliban, or at the very least accepted at some point that they could not be stopped from eventually taking power in Afghanistan — even as it pretended to be fighting them on behalf of the "democratic" and "independent" Karzai government. But what was the alternative to the US-led expulsion of the Taliban in late 2001 and the creation of the Karzai regime, leading only in early 2021 to the eventual withdrawal of all US-led forces? What should have happened?

Before answering that question, let me review, briefly, the history of the past four decades of Afghanistan, four decades of the war.

During the Cold War, the US nourished the extremist fundamentalist warlords, and after the Soviet Union ended, [these warlords came to power, from 1992 to 1996](#). They killed our people — more than 65,000 innocent people in Kabul alone — and they destroyed our country and our national unity. And that after all the people of Afghanistan had come together to fight against the Russian occupation.

These fundamentalists first damaged our national unity and then they attacked women's rights. These misogynist extremists looted our museums, burned our libraries, and gave a very bad impression to the people of the world about Afghan people and Afghan culture. At that time there was no serious international attention to what was happening: Afghanistan, unfortunately, was already forgotten.

During that time the US cultivated the Taliban as potential alternative protectors of the [Turkmenistan-Pakistan pipeline projected by the oil company UnoCal](#). As for the Afghan people, when the Taliban came to power, they thought that they would perhaps be better than the warlords, especially as they stressed that they were a Muslim movement, and most people of Afghanistan are also Muslim. But they didn't know what the Taliban — effectively the alternative option of the US for Afghanistan — really were. When they came to power, the people very soon recognised that there was no difference between the Taliban and the warlords: they committed the same crimes and barbarism against our people.

Then 9/11 happened and the world understood what the Taliban were, and a small ray of hope was lit in the hearts of ordinary Afghan people. I was in contact with them: they thought that maybe this time, for the first time, foreigners would be honest with them. Why? Because their own innocent American people had been killed in the 9/11 tragedy. But very soon, [at the conference of Bonn](#), they recognised that the US was not being honest with them.

They pushed Afghanistan from the frying pan into the fire, they replaced the barbaric regime of the Taliban again with the fundamentalist warlords who had been visited on the Afghan people from 1992 to 1996 and were responsible for the civil war. Even if we called that period a second, a

smaller, Holocaust, it would not be an adequate description.

Most of these warlords, but not all, changed their physical appearance — with beards removed and dressing in suits — and they learned how to talk about democracy and women's rights, but behind this mask they remained extremists seeking power. They were accompanied by western technocrats like Hamid Karzai, who was also a puppet of the US, and they imposed their destiny on the Afghan people.

Then, after 20 years of their corruption, crimes, barbarism, and human rights violations, again they brought back the Taliban, because this longest war in the history of the US [had cost a lot](#), even more than the Vietnam War. The Taliban had not expired as an option for the US, and they wanted to end this huge expense and bring in another puppet who wasn't so costly for them.

So they decided to allow these terrorists — this “talent” created in the madrassas of Pakistan and advised and controlled by the [Inter-Services Intelligence \(ISI\)](#) of Pakistan — to shamelessly come into power and impose themselves on the destiny of Afghanistan.

So, was there any alternative?

When 9/11 happened we had many progressive people, well-educated people, and especially people who had returned to the country after the Russian invasion. This was the time to open the door to a progressive future for Afghanistan.

However, that was not to the benefit of the US, because Washington had its own plans and they needed their own puppets under their control, and they had invested billions of dollars since the Cold War on them. They were playing their great chess game with them, and are still playing it, and using Afghanistan as a springboard for their own interests.

In forty years of war, none of these regimes have had the support and trust of the people of Afghanistan. That's why each one was in turn weak and like its predecessor could easily be collapsed. Because none of them had the strong support of the suffering Afghan people, nor the solidarity of other peoples.

As a result, Afghan people, especially progressive Afghan people, have again become refugees, leaving the country mainly because of war, joblessness, poverty and all the other problems they are facing.

In Afghanistan, the progressive forces were always under suppression. Anyone who raised their voice got eliminated or they had to leave the country. My own life story is an example. I could not leave the house; I had to live underground; I had to have bodyguards. Several assassination attempts were committed against me, and all sorts of obstacles placed before me because of what I was doing.

Of course, I was not alone. There were many other progressive people who were not known, but they were resisting. But there was no chance, not even a small chance, for a progressive alternative to impose itself. Not because of lack of popular support: during our contact with people, we had a huge positive impact, raising their political awareness, leading them in the right direction, getting them to organise, to be united for a good cause. But that was what the US didn't want. They didn't want a progressive alternative to emerge at the head of the country.

And not only the US. I mean, that has always been the nature of the imperialist interest in Afghanistan, like the British Empire in its time. For example, [King Amanullah Khan](#) was the hero of Afghanistan, who won its freedom and brought huge progressive reforms. The people loved him. But again, the British at that time mobilised extremists against him, and he had to go into exile. Just like

us today.

I have met [people in the Afghan diaspora who are nostalgic for the Najibullah government in the period after the Russian troop withdrawal \(1989-1992\), which collapsed once Russian president Boris Yeltsin decided to cut off support. After the Russians left in 1989, there were three years when Najibullah tried to apply a policy of national reconciliation. What is your assessment of Najibullah's administration?](#)

If it's true when you ask people to compare Karzai's corrupt regime with the terrorist, misogynist Taliban — these two puppets — one or other gets a higher score. The same goes regarding Najibullah. He was a puppet of the Russians and he even worked in the KGB and Afghan intelligence services and was responsible for torturing people. He was part of that regime.

Regarding Najibullah, what I want to say is that, at the end of the Russia-aligned regime, Najibullah was trying to present to the people as somehow a kind of national or regional face, to deceive them for example, by building some mosques and even allying with some religious mullahs and making them local governors. His government also gave a chance to other parties. But the people didn't trust him because they knew his background.

Also, in the pro-Russian camp, they were divided into two groups, the [Khalq](#) and [Parcham](#), who were fighting each other, and his rule couldn't benefit both. And the US especially didn't want Najibullah's so-called peace and reconciliation process.

Let me end with this comparison — I hope it will help the reader. Najibullah was a big man, fat, and the people nicknamed him "the bull". And the seven other extremist fundamentalist party leaders who were responsible for the civil war, the people called "the donkeys". So, they would say: "Please give us back our bull and take back your seven donkeys."

None of this means that Najibullah was the right person for Afghanistan. He was a puppet of the Russians and, in the end, he was killed by these extremists who were puppets of the US.

You know that in Afghanistan we compare April 27 [1978, overthrow by the [People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan](#) (PDPA) of Afghan president [Mohammed Daoud Khan](#),] with April 28 [1992, overthrow by the Mujahedeen alliance of the Najibullah government]. April 28 led to the destruction, mass murders and devastation of the warlords, and that's why people say April 28 is a blacker day in the history of Afghanistan than April 27. But in both cases — and also when the Taliban drove out the warlords in 2006 — we are talking about puppet regimes, manipulated by the imperialist powers.

They didn't want to eliminate the Taliban totally then and now they don't want to eliminate the warlords. These mice have escaped back down their holes, but they are being saved for possible use in the future. After spending billions of dollars on them the US doesn't want to lose them as an option, they may need them again for their own unhealthy agenda.

After the Soviet pull-out in 1989, the US, along with Pakistan, continued to support the mujahideen. According to British correspondent Jonathan Steele, "this was one of the most damaging periods in recent Afghan history when the West and Pakistan, along with mujahideen intransigence, undermined the best chance of ending the country's civil war." Even Charles Cogan, the CIA director of operations for the Middle East and South Asia (1979-84) admitted that "this inertia of aiding the mujahideen after the Soviets had left was probably a mistake." What is your opinion?

That's really funny: it's a painful joke. It's clear now — it was unclear to the world then, perhaps —

that the US consciously wanted to support these extremists. This wasn't a mistake, but a policy, one that was a war crime. They supported the warlords because they needed an unsafe Afghanistan. That's why, with the support of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the dictatorial regime of Iran, they brought them to power. That's why we cannot say it was just a mistake.

I totally disagree with this opinion. US policy towards Afghanistan was just a continuous war crime and they must pay for all that they did. They should be brought to court. If the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is not just symbolic, they must be put in front of the court. Not only those who in the past committed crimes but also those who over the past 20 years have been responsible for what was done to my country: first Bush and Barack Obama and then Donald Trump and Joe Biden. All four were warmongers who committed war crimes.

Nature of the Taliban regime

What differences, if any, are there between today's Taliban regime and that of 1996-2001?

Their essential nature has not changed. Of course, they have done some training in public relations and changed a few minor policies. For example, they allow people to watch TV. But what is the programming on TV? Brainwashing. Maybe tomorrow they will allow more schools to open, but these schools will be more dangerous open than closed, because teaching there will also be brainwashing.

How much resistance, and of what sort, is there to the Taliban regime?

As I said the Taliban were and are a foreign, imposed, project: the shape of occupation changed but occupation itself remained. We don't know for how much longer they will be in power. Anyone who raises their voice gets immediately suppressed.

However, they face resistance, and the main source is the women of Afghanistan. They are an extraordinary source of inspiration and hope. When you follow the news and see the resistance of these women in the context of the history of Afghanistan, their resistance really is a source of hope, courage, and inspiration.

Every day brings shocking news about women being publicly whipped, stoned, forced into marriage, banned from listening to music, deprived of education, and even prohibited from going to the park, sport clubs and just outside the home without a male relative. Different sources report that when they imprison women they touch their private parts, and these innocent women unfortunately cannot reveal this action to the public and the media. They therefore tolerate various kinds of tortures by the Taliban. When the Taliban rape women and they become pregnant, the Taliban beat them so harshly that they have miscarriages.

Despite all this cruelty our women maintain their resistance. For example, Elaha was a young medical student and victim of forced marriage to one of the key leaders of the Taliban, Said Khosti. When she escaped from his house, she was arrested on the border of Pakistan and held in detention for months. She was released because of international pressure and has exposed how she was tortured. There are many other such examples.

Recently, the Taliban closed the doors of hairdresser shops, most of them run by women who were the only breadwinner in the family. They demonstrated against the closure of their shops and their demonstrations were brutally suppressed. There are many other instances of women carrying out such resistance.

Afghanistan comes off worse in a comparison with Saudi Arabia, which also has a religious extremist

government. Saudi women are allowed to fly, to take overseas trips for research, including even space research. But for our criminal misogynist Taliban, the woman must stay at home. Either in the grave or in the house — that is their notion: the woman must stay at home to look after the babies and satisfy male sexual lust. That's her only function. They don't look at women as human, and don't care about their wishes. Even the women on TV that present for them must cover their faces and hair.

How to survive? Women are driven back into the home, but men suffer as well. Due to poverty men are forced to sell their kidneys or their loved ones. Or people give up and commit suicide. A large number, most of them from the younger generation and some of them young girls in forced marriages, just kill themselves. Because nobody has listened to them.

From my point of view, it is very important for our women to be educated, then the future generation of women will also be educated, and properly treated. That's why the Taliban program for women is so very dangerous for the future of Afghanistan.

So, given the repression, resistance remains mainly underground?

Many people are offering brave resistance, even if a lot of media do not report it. But right now, yes, it is mainly underground and careful not to expose itself to repression. This resistance is testing out what degree of support it has. Does it, for example, have the social support that I experienced in the past when I was an underground teacher under the previous Taliban rule?

There are women in Afghanistan doing the same underground teaching work today — I am in contact with them. What they are doing is planting seeds for the future, not allowing themselves to be disappointed, lose hope and just be housewives. Underground, they can teach the girls at least until the end of high school. Then, we don't know in the future if they will be able to continue, if it will be possible for them to go abroad, but hopefully they will have a chance to go to university, at least to study after 12th grade.

That indispensable project is for the longer term. But what are the chances of overthrowing the regime in the meantime? Are there any other signs of more immediate resistance to the regime by sections of the population, or is everything quiet? With the US defeated and [Russia, China and the other bordering powers \(Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan\)](#) seeking some degree of accommodation with them, aren't the Taliban set to rule the country for a long time?

We have a famous saying in Afghanistan — silence before speech is telling us to begin speaking. And now the time has come again. And I think it happens in all movements, not only in Afghanistan. The anger of people will come out — I cannot say when, but it cannot be suppressed indefinitely. So, there is hope for the future.

When you look at Afghanistan today, you see that everything is under their control, and they can suppress any single voice. Women are doing more of the resistance now, but the men as well, even if in a different way.

We must always remember that despite the Taliban's announced "amnesty", since they came to power they have been killing those who were part of the former regime. They have been killing those who were close to the police, those who worked in the intelligence services, all those publicly associated with that regime. They have been killing them brutally.

So, they will suppress single voices, male or female. For this reason, things take time — slowly,

slowly. But I'm sure that the anger of people will come out, come out and spread. I cannot say when. But there is hope. There is resistance, a big hope for the future.

But with the Taliban now in power, there's no force that can remove them in the immediate term, is there?

[There are differences within the Taliban](#), even while they have their own single interpretation of Islam. Regarding education for girls, one group says no to education after 12 years old — girls must stay at home, get married and bring up babies, etc — while the other group says they can study, but separately from men. Both use Islam to justify their position. These sorts of small contradictions are of benefit to us. Secondly, there's the fight for power, which never goes away.

They have other differences, but they usually try to hide them or pretend they don't exist. It sometimes happens regarding militants from the non-Pashtun ethnic minorities, for example, with the few Taliban leaders from a Hazara or Uzbek background who raise differences. One of them they even killed, and another was shifted to another job. These kinds of issues are ongoing, no doubt, although they are not about benefiting the people, but power and money.

It is impossible to say how long these contradictions will be contained or under what conditions they will break out. But in the end, these will also offer openings for the benefit of the public as well.

How do you view growing Russian and Chinese informal collaboration with the Taliban regime, which seems designed to help their plans for economic influence in Central Asia at the cost of the US but also to dissuade it from supporting anti-Russian movements in Central Asia?

It is an open secret now that each of these countries have their own strategic interest in Afghanistan and that for the past 20 years they have supported all these extremists and terrorists for their own agenda. For instance, the US is paying them \$40 million a week. On the other hand, [the Chinese have their own interest in Afghanistan](#), not only because of its rich mines and their own Belt and Road project, but also because they are wary of the influence the Taliban could have on China's own Muslim minorities across the Afghanistan-China border. The same goes for Russia.

Afghanistan has [rich mineral deposits](#), starting with very pure lithium. We have high grade uranium ore and the [second-biggest copper deposit in the world](#). Coal and wolframite too. And these national resources are looted for the interests of the elite. During the regime of Karzai, it was revealed that [then mines minister Ibrahim Adel received a \\$30 million payoff from the Chinese](#).

In the meantime, Russia, China and the US fight against each other and are not concerned in the least for the Afghan people, who are left on their own. That is the nature of empire. The US wants to maintain itself as the one superpower against the rising superpower China, and also against Russia, and this despite their defeats in Afghanistan and Iraq.

What alternative to Taliban rule?

In your *El País* interview you say: "Self-determination is the solution. We do not want a Western democracy, democracy isn't a flower that a gang of strangers gives us, we want an Afghan democracy, a democracy of our own." What, to your mind, would an Afghan democracy look like?

You know, from my point of view it actually makes no sense to talk about Afghan democracy as opposed to Western democracy. I think maybe the journalists also misunderstood when I was explaining to the students: I was saying it made no sense to talk about Afghan democracy as opposed

to Western democracy or Western democracy as against, say, Middle Eastern democracy. It just makes no sense.

Democracy is democracy, it has one meaning. At least it has one meaning for me: government of the people for the people, to put it in the simplest words. In Afghanistan there was not democracy, because the enemies of democracy wearing the mask of democracy were in power. It was impossible for these people to bring us democracy.

At the same time they were giving a false impression about the Muslim people of our country, implying that the point of view of the Muslims of Afghanistan was that of the Islam of Mullah Omar, or of Osama bin Laden, or the Islam of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, or the Islam of ISIS, of Al Qaeda, of Islamic State, of Boko Haram etc., that is of all these Arabic extremists that mix Islam with politics and then use it against our people. They created a bad impression about a Muslim nation just as previously the pro-Russian government had done about socialism and secularism.

Secularism has the elementary meaning that religion must be separate from politics. And people love that message. I would go to the mosque and the village people would clap when I explained it. Some advised me not to talk about this, saying: "It is too early to talk about this. It is dangerous. They will call you an infidel. They will call you Communist." I said: "No. I will speak in the language of the people, and I am sure they realise the true meaning of the message. Let's see what happens."

My personal experience, and that of many others, is that if you are honest with the people the reaction will also be good for you, they will accept the message. The same goes for democracy. When you ask people what they think about democracy, they say: "No, no, no!" They are fed up with so-called democracy, the donated democracy of the US, which betrayed the values of democracy like the Russian invasion betrayed the values of secularism.

It's the equivalent of looking to Franco, Hitler, or Pinochet or the Indonesian generals to bring peace. It's impossible. I wish we had a Daniel Ellsberg in Afghanistan to make that clear, so that our terrorists and their imperialist backers would have paid for their crimes.

How can the democratic alternative to the Taliban be built? Or, to put the question another way, how to break the cycle of oppressive misrule, where the only alternative to one armed gang seems to be another, with the outside powers lining up to exploit the ethnic and national differences?

All people must stand up together against all warmongers. Otherwise, if today it's Afghanistan, tomorrow it's crimes against Ukraine, and the day after that they will act against your country.

Yes, they say some wars are "good" and some "bad". Do you remember that their Iraq intervention was "bad" and Afghanistan was "good"? Well, how does that look today?

You know in the past when King Amanullah Khan was in power, he would say that we are all Afghan. We have a lot of different peoples, a lot of ethnicities — Pashtun, Uzbek, Tajik, Hazara, etc — but they are Afghan, which gives a basis for our national unity.

At that time the British applied their dirty policy of divide and rule. That's still the imperialist policy but applied in a different way. For example, in the past 20 years, during the Karzai and Ghani regimes, we had a national anthem that mentioned the name of every ethnic group. If you are Hazara, you get a mention and the feeling that you as a Hazara have been accounted for.

But why not only Afghan? Why isn't that enough? They wanted this because they wanted to give this feeling that contrasted Afghans with each other in different ways: through books, the universities,

the mosque, the schools and the communication system they don't allow the sentiment of a common Afghan identity to grow. In all academic and social spheres, they try in different ways to grow the ethnic conflict among the public. It means they do not want the sentiment of national unity among the public to grow.

It is the same today now that the Taliban are back in power. They call themselves Pashtun and are against other minorities, because their foreign masters don't want Afghan national unity, because if we got united, we would give them a good lesson like in the past against Russia and the British.

That is why this policy of divide and rule persists and why they are against the education of women (and of men too). If people get educated, it's not so easy to deceive them. So, they want the population, women especially, to be inactive, imprisoned in the home and trapped in ignorance, turning society as a whole into a corpse that's impossible to resuscitate.

You keep coming back to education as the key to advance...

When women are uneducated, they don't know their own identity, they don't know their own role and they don't know how to defend themselves. First educate yourself and then other Afghans. That's why education, especially for women, is so critical. Once a mother is educated, then the next generation will be a proud, open-minded generation.

Former MP and women's rights fighter [Shukria Barakzai](#) said after the 2021 Taliban takeover that, apart from a few military, "Afghan women are the only resistant force to the Taliban". Is that true?

Well, I wish this was not her quote, the quote of a beautiful doll. She was part of the puppet regime, a two-time senator and then ambassador to Norway. So, she herself played a symbolic role in justifying it. A well-educated lady, who compromised with the occupiers and their puppets. Her husband was a very, very corrupt man, and even went to prison because of his corruption. Over the past 20 years we have had quite a lot of this kind of beautiful doll, such as [Fawzia Koofi](#), [Sima Samar](#), [Habiba Sarabi](#) etc They were brought into power and given important positions to prettify the occupation.

But regarding the quote of Shukria Barakzai, we cannot say that Afghan women are the only resistant force to the Taliban. Men and women are both carrying out resistance. Yes, as I said, nowadays the women doing resistance are playing a special role as source of inspiration and hope, but men too are resisting. For example, after schools were closed the male teachers raised their voice and got arrested and suffered the Taliban's tortures. Some male teachers even resigned and lost their jobs. So, let's not make resistance a gender issue.

Is neutrality and/or non-alignment the only basis for a free and stable Afghanistan?

Yes, we need a neutral Afghanistan, an Afghanistan where no other country interferes in its internal issues. No more occupations under the nice banners. For four decades our people have experienced this chess game, where one set of puppets is brought in to replace another. This painful game must end. If the Afghan people are allowed to breathe a little in peace, they will know what to do and how to build their country.

The effort and role of progressive forces is vital at a moment like today and they should be in the front line, organised together. Progressive men and women have a big responsibility on their shoulders.

However, because we are in the heart of Asia, the big powers will always act in their own interest

and not let Afghanistan be Afghanistan. They need an unsafe Afghanistan, an unstable Afghanistan, and an Afghanistan at war. They need Afghanistan to be backward, they need the people to live in poverty.

For example, that is why they did not teach the people fishing, but just gave them fish when they were available. Then what happened? When the fish ran out, most people became beggars — they went out onto the street. If they had been taught fishing, they wouldn't be suffering so much today from hunger. In the past 20 years US, NATO and their puppet regime always favoured grand superstructural projects rather than people-oriented infrastructure.

I love what Maxim Gorki says: "A hungry person does not have the right to religion and faith." I agree with that. It's why all extremists and their bosses just want to pay money to the people but not educate them, to make them dependent. Dependent because of the suffering of their empty stomachs.

Strategy of anti-Taliban resistance

There is a very large Afghan diaspora, which has been generated in waves by foreign intervention and war. Do you find points of agreement with refugees from the mujahidin and the previous Taliban takeover? What role can the diaspora have in building towards an Afghanistan built on human and democratic rights?

I hope that this convergence will happen because there have been many different organisations, NGOs and individual activists supportive of democracy in Afghanistan.

Here we have another betrayal by the US of the Afghan people, because when they withdrew their troops, they also tried to take all these intellectual, well-educated people abroad. But they are the future of Afghanistan, and when the Karzai regime was installed, most previous refugees came back, and tried to play a role in the reconstruction of the country. They had tasted hunger, poverty and being second-class human beings in foreign countries: they had tasted the bitter life, the pain, of the refugee. So, they came back to Afghanistan with love in their heart, and they fought for their country.

Many remain inside Afghanistan. Not as in my case: I was forced to go into exile because, even though up until the last moment I was determined to remain, it was impossible because of the security problem that I had in the first days of the Taliban takeover, when they were searching for me.

My colleagues also put pressure on me, and my family said "if you die, your voice, the voice of the Afghan people, will be silenced, and it will be like committing suicide. Get out of Afghanistan to be their voice outside, as when in a war you must retreat for the good of the cause." But tomorrow I will be back, and with the same passion.

I want Afghans first to come together here in exile, in the name of national unity and for the future of Afghanistan. To try from outside to help those inside to also be that voice for unity, and then in the future to go back to serve their country. Not to be demoralised, not to forget the Afghan people while living in this safe haven of exile.

Your country is like your mother. We must take care of her. It is not enough just to think about her. So, let's unite hand in hand from different parts of the world, and one day I'm sure we will win.

But it is a prolonged struggle. And meanwhile we are another generation of victims. The same bitter history repeats. It is painful for my son, for example, for his generation as well. And inside

Afghanistan those generations that were the victims don't have anything to eat and don't have access to education. So, my message is to raise our families in this awareness, and through greater awareness prepare the future of Afghanistan.

My hope is that one day all progressive forces outside and inside Afghanistan will be united and receive international solidarity. I expect solidarity and support from justice-loving people from all countries, especially those who are suffering from the same enemies as us, but also from the other people of the world, because we believe in humanity.

You say in your autobiography: "If I ever decided that I could be more effective working within the framework of an organisation, the [RAWA \[Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan\]](#) is the first I would consider joining. It is a group that makes Afghan women proud, and I have learned a great deal from their uncompromising struggle for women's rights and democracy." Do you still feel the same way about RAWA or has that organisation moved on to a new stage?

No, I was also an independent in the past and I am not in contact with them anymore, especially at this moment when they are underground. I hope that all activist organisations, male or female, that fight against fundamentalism will be united one day in the future.

One of the few hopeful signs in today's black political period is the rise of women's resistance against authoritarianism and dictatorship — for example, the Kurdish women's battalions in Rojava, Russian Feminist Anti-War Resistance, the Iranian "Women! Life! Freedom!" movement, and #MeToo. Does the Afghani women's movement look to link up with these and other struggles for the emancipation of women?

Yes, from the bottom of my heart. I want the movements of these different countries to join hands because we have the same enemy, suffer from the same problems, and are struggling for the same cause. If these extremists, fundamentalists, these misogynists from different parts of the world, easily join hands, why not us?

It will be our weakness if we do not unite. Yes, my voice is the voice of the Rojava women, the voice of Iraqi women, and especially the voice of Iranian women, because if we compare Iran with Afghanistan, both are dictatorial regimes, despite their different names. They have many things in common, and when they sometimes raise their voices, it is just a family squabble between them — to distract their peoples with secondary issues.

The extraordinary resistance of the women's movement in Iran had a huge positive impact in Afghanistan, but still the Iranian regime remains in power acting as if they cannot be defeated. My message to Iranian people is never to expect foreign governments, especially a warmonger government like the US, to remove their regime.

How do you view the conflict in Gaza, which pits the colonial-settler state of Israel against a Muslim fundamentalist organisation such as Hamas, a member of the family of political Islamism that you have been fighting in Afghanistan?

The conflict and war in Palestine between Zionist occupiers and Hamas terrorists is not a new phenomenon. For the Palestinian people, Israel is a fascist, terrorist, occupying state, an ally and a partner in the criminal and predatory acts of the US and NATO. It has been mercilessly slaughtering the Palestinians and occupying their land with impunity.

On the other hand, Hamas obeys the fascist-religious government of Iran by taking hostages of the

oppressed Palestinian nation and killing innocent people of Israel. It is the thief of the Palestinian people's liberation movement and the servant of the destructive policies of Iran, Qatar, Russia and China in the region. This is very similar to the game played in my country by the occupying US and its terrorist mercenaries, the Taliban and the warlords, who shed the blood of our innocent people for years in behind-the-scenes deals to legitimise war and occupation of the region.

The experience of years of fighting with the occupier has proven to us that the Taliban terrorists are no different from the "peace lovers" of the US government in their brutality and killing. The people of Israel and Palestine will only have the opportunity to achieve an independent land where the people of both countries can live freely together in solidarity by fighting both against the Zionists who rule Israel and against the fundamentalist and mercenary terrorists in Palestine.

I feel this similarity between the two tragedies very keenly in a situation where our country is losing its beloved people and is suffering due to the [recent earthquake and lack of facilities in Herat.](#)

Where will, as you put it in the interview with *El País*, the "security and a helping hand of friends around the world" that you seek for Afghanistan come from? You also said "peace without justice is meaningless, that's why we need lawyers, courts, above all, international solidarity." How best can international solidarity with the struggle for a democratic and peaceful Afghanistan show itself?

At this critical time of the history of Afghanistan we need any type of support, especially support for women's education, as I strongly believe the power of education is key to overcoming ignorance, extremism and unemployment and to achieving the emancipation of Afghanistan.

The only way to escape from our predicament is for progressive people to be organised and united, and to struggle for this goal. That's the only cure for our pain.

Malalai Joya is presently active in supporting underground education for women and girls in Afghanistan. To find out more and help this work contact mj.joya@outlook.com.

Dick Nichols

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