

WAKE UP!! IT'S YER TALIB-ANARCHY...

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EYE WITNESS AFGHANISTAN

FROM KEMP TOWN TO KABUL, AS SCHNEWS INTERVIEWS AL JAZEERA JOURNALIST MEDYAN DAIRIEH ABOUT HIS TAKE ON THE WAR

Ever keen to get an up close and personal look at the world's most troubled regions, SchNEWS was fortunate enough to sweet-talk Brightonian Al Jazeera journalist Medyan Dairieh recently returned from reporting in Afghanistan. As someone who grew up in Palestine, studied in Iraq and worked in Turkish Kurdistan, he's a man with a useful perspective on events on the ground in what's become Britain's longest war since the days of Empire. Medyan has become a well known figure amongst pro-Palestine and anti-war protesters, informing the public in the Arab-speaking world about the UK's solidarity movements.

So what was it like arriving in Afghanistan?

When I arrived in Kabul I could see even from the plane that it is a very poor city. When you walk from the airport you can see Turkish army and American armies, but the airport is very small and the electricity is cut off for half an hour at a time. Once I went to the street, I knew everything about this country. There is no life at all. The electricity is sometimes on, sometimes off, no clean water, no sanitation at all. And this is in Kabul. Outside the city is nothing, most people don't know what a cooker is - they just cook on wood. Most of the roads in Afghanistan have not been concreted. The water you see on the street is sewage water coming from the houses since no proper sewage system is in place. Some of the streets I visited have a stream of dirty water running, and they are really hazardous. The houses are very poor. This is Afghanistan.

People said to me, "We wish we were in Soviet times, the Soviet period. We fought the Soviets, and they attacked us, but they also built for us. But the Americans, they attack us, destroy everything and don't build anything." Now I think people would prefer to go back to the Soviet period.

I met a man who lost 3 children. One son and two nephews. He ran away from where he lived after they were killed by an American aeroplane just a few months ago. The refugees say that the fighters don't come in the daytime, they come at night, so why do the Americans attack in the afternoon? Some people say that in the village there are no Taliban, the Taliban go away from the villages. They use the mountains; sometimes they come to the villages for water and food. But the Americans don't know where the fighters are so they attack civilians.

What do people make of the Taliban?

What can I say? People think that the Taliban will give them a better deal than the Americans will. People can't believe in the Americans, they can't believe in the government either. All the buildings, government departments, are corrupt. And so people hate America now. Not because of religion, but many people join the Taliban because they want to take revenge against America. There are many, many areas that the Americans can't go. Many areas of Afghanistan are under the control of the Taliban. The mayors of some cities in Helmand province have run away. The Americans take them back after heavy fighting, for just one day, two days, and then they run away again, because the Taliban is



...and now it's over to Tom with the weather...

really completely in control of the area.

I interviewed many Taliban leaders; one was an ex-minister, Mullah Abdul Azar. He is the leader of the Taliban in Kabul. The Afghani army surrounds his house all the time. When I went to see him he gave me food and [somewhere to] sleep and tea and everything, so we talked about this a lot. He said, "One day the Americans will come to this house to talk to us about the situation in Afghanistan." He promised me this.

So tell us about the Taliban. Are there 'moderate' and 'extremist' political factions within the Taliban? Do you think that the Americans will be able to negotiate?

Absolutely not. Absolutely not. The Taliban are a united group who make decisions together. Brown is trying to talk to moderate Taliban; however, moderate Taliban do not take decisions independently from the other Taliban. The people in Kabul, they are the face of the Taliban. They don't do anything military, they're the political half of the Taliban. Their fathers fought, you know, and they believed, and they fought the Soviets because of religion and communism first, and secondly because of the land.

I dedicate this Best Actor Oscar to my wife Cherie... We knew The Chilcot Inquiry was going to be a winner - it was such an excellent script...



The same has happened - the Americans are like the Soviets now. Many people who are not religious look at the Taliban and want to fight the Americans because of the land. Most Afghan people believe that they are under occupation and they have to do something with America.

I asked Taliban leader Mullah Abdul Azar, "Where does your money come from?" He said, "We never had money from drugs. We fight the Afghan army for sometimes one hour, sometimes three hours. We control the area, we take everything from them, weapons, money. And some people give us money." A Taliban leader said to me, "We have weapons, fighters, and the land to fight on. We can continue for many many years, and if the Americans do not believe us they must go and ask the Soviets, they will have their answer. When they come in, we go. When they're just standing around, we attack them. And then we go back. We can hold an area for a day or a maybe few hours, just to show everyone that we are still here and we can fight America, that America is nothing."

What does all this have to do with 'America's Most Wanted' - Osama Bin Laden?

Some people, he, and al Qaeda, were created by America. People say that Osama's time is over in Afghanistan. Everyone believes that al Qaeda is just a name; just a few people maybe. Just cassettes on al Jazeera. One guy, sitting in his bathroom, you know, saying, "We will fight America!" Maybe he's with the CIA - I don't know!

In the UK, especially in Brighton, you report on the protest scene. Are people in Afghanistan aware that there's a big movement against the war?

Well, I'm sorry to tell you but so many people are without TVs. In some areas people don't know even who it is that they are fighting. They haven't gone to school, they've lived in the mountains for many, many years, and they don't even know who the war is between!

Before you left did you see any evidence of any development?

When I came to the airport I saw there was one room, just a normal room - not even chairs, paintings, anything like that, not like an airport [lounge] at all. But when you leave you'd think you're in an Israeli airport. Everybody in smart uniforms, x-ray machines, everybody checked one by one. I asked about this because normally they do this when people come to a country. They told me, "Well, if you want to bring weapons here we have many more. You would be crazy to bring heroin to Afghanistan when we give all the world its heroin. So we don't need anything from outside." They said the Americans built this building, the airport. It was the only new thing I saw there.

* Read the full interview - coming soon to the website features section.

PARTY & PROTEST

For events listings updated weekly see www.schnews.org.uk/pap

INFORMATION FOR ACTION

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A HONDURAN LOBO-TOMY

Hundreds of thousands of Hondurans protested the appointment of a new president last week, taking to the streets in defiance of police repression.

In a rejection of the legitimacy of the new president, protesters flooded the streets of the capital Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula and around the country. In the capital, the crowd gathered at the airport to see deposed president Manuel Zelaya leave for exile in the Dominican Republic.

Porifrio Lobo was sworn in as president last Wednesday (27th) after triumphing in elections held last November following June's coup (see SchNEWS 692). The elections were widely touted as a return to democracy with Honduran and American officials crowing over how the 63% turnout legitimised the process. However, independent investigations showed the figure appeared to have been plucked out of the air and that even the more accurate figure of 49% was tarnished by allegations of fraud, intimidation and coercion. It was still enough for Hilary Clinton to swoon over the Honduran people's "commitment to democracy".

Until his flight into exile, Manuel Zelaya remained holed up in the Brazilian embassy, issuing tetchy press releases. His final chance for a return to power before elections slipped away when he agreed a deal with coup leader Roberto Micheletti that allowed him to return to power but (always check the small print) only if Congress voted for it. They didn't. The Americans backed the deal and Zelaya retreated to the embassy.

The Honduran resistance movement has kept opposition to the coup alive throughout. The state has responded with disappearances, torture and assassinations. Military police shot dead five members of a resistance organisation on the streets of Tegucigalpa. A well known LGBT activist involved in the opposition, Walter Trochez, escaped from a police van after he had been abducted and beaten. A week later he was killed in a drive-by shooting. The decapitated body of Carlos Turcios, vice president of a regional resistance movement, was found days after he was kidnapped by police. Opposition radio stations have been burned to the ground and newspaper journalists abducted and tortured.

Representatives from America, Colombia, Panama, the Dominican Republic and Taiwan attended Lobo's swearing in ceremony. Although most Latin American countries refuse to recognise the new president, even there doors were left ajar. A Brazilian official stated, "For now, Brazil does not recognise Lobo's government."

Lobo's first act as president was to give amnesty to the soldiers, politicians and judges behind the June 28th coup. The day before the ceremony a judge dismissed all charges against six military commanders implicated in the coup.

With the world readying itself to look away, the Honduran resistance is bracing itself for the next stage in the ongoing assault on their liberty.

INSIDE SCHNEWS

EDO Decommissioner James Elijah Smith has been moved, again. He is now on remand at Sheppey Prison, Church Road, Eastchurch, Sheerness, Kent ME12 4DZ. Show your support by writing or visiting (VP7551). Visiting times are 2pm-4pm, to book call 01795 882272.

*see <http://www.smashedo.org.uk/supporttelijahsmith.html>

STOP 'N' SUE

Climate campers from the 2008 Kingsnorth power station protest have won a High Court ruling branding the stop and search tactics used by police 'unlawful' and in violation of three Articles in the European Human Rights Constitution; the right to privacy, freedom of expression and freedom of association.

The police operation at Kingsnorth was the largest and most expensive of its kind in UK history. Kent Police admitted 'total surrender' after it was revealed that top brass were giving orders for blanket stop and searches in briefings.

The decision has now opened the way for the other 3,500 people that were stopped and frisked at the gathering to sue the police and submit claims for damages.

* www.climatecamp.org.uk/get-involved/working-groups/legal/kingsnorth-judicial-review

VOULEZ VOUS COUCHE?

After the closure of the much needed night shelter last week (see SchNEWS 706), No Borders and SôS Soutien aux Sans Papiers have set up a large warehouse in Calais to offer an autonomous safe space for the migrant community and their supporters.

The Kronsadt building in the town will provide shelter and a forum for debate, information and practical solidarity. Talks with the local residents of Calais are planned to discuss how individuals and organisations can join in with the project and show support.

*<http://calaismigrantsolidarity.wordpress.com>

TREADING A FINE LINE

In the wee hours of Wednesday morning (3rd) the Fine Line Art Collective targeted the Brighton branch of RBS by presenting a 'free public art installation' on their doorstep. Stripes of black and red paint were sloshed across the floor outside RBS' front entrance and the cash machine was decorated with black paint oozing from its money spitting orifice.

The group chose the big bonus bank for its involvement in the tar sands extraction in Canada which is forcing indigenous people off their lands, and is shaping up to be the world's biggest emitter of CO2.

DIAMONDS ARE FOR NEVER

On Wednesday (3rd), demonstrators from Survival International protested outside top nob jewellers Tiffany in London, San Francisco, Madrid, Paris and Berlin. Tiffany have been donating to the government in Botswana to fund boreholes in the Kalahari Game Reserve that are for the exclusive use of the game animals in the reserve. The indigenous people whose ancestral land they drilled to access the boreholes are forbidden to use them.

The Botswanan government kicked the indigenous Bushmen tribe out of the area in 2002 then cut off their water supply. Four years the Botswanan High court condemned this as illegal, but officials still refuse to allow the Bushmen access to water. As well as drilling new boreholes that are reserved for animals but not people, the government has also allowed a tourist lodge (complete with swimming pool) with a 'Bushman experience' on the illegally seized land.

Supporters of Survival International handed letters in to the Tiffany stores and picketed outside, telling the chain to support the indigenous people before they support the government.

*www.survivalinternational.org/news/5500

OVER THE MAINSHILL?

The eviction of Mainhill Solidarity Camp (see SchNEWS 697) finished last Friday, after five days of resistance. A total of 45 people were arrested. The last day was a little confusing for the bailiffs as they discovered the last person in the tunnel didn't exist, but there was still an unseen protester lurking in the woods. He was forced out when the bulldozers started felling trees all around him. They also arrested someone for taking photographs.

Bailiffs often put speed before safety. They cut a walkway with someone stood on it and lowered people from trees with lock-ons still attached. Some people were injured while being cut out of lock-ons.

The eviction has been a massive financial burden, bad publicity for Scottish Coal and delayed work on site. Scottish Coal were apparently hoping the camp would be deserted during the freezing winter, but they obviously haven't experienced that warm glow you get from resisting corporate greed within a supportive and lively community (and a good wood burner).

One Mainshiller told SchNEWS, "*The experience and inspiration we've gained will fuel further resistance to new coal in Scotland, building on the alliances we've been developing. We must stop open casting coal now for any chance at creating a sustainable future.*"

*see www.coalactionscotland.noflag.org.uk

BLAIR FACED CHEEK

As Blair smirked and simpered his way through his evidence at the Chilcot Inquiry, protesters outside demonstrated against the illegal Iraqi invasion and the buck passing that was taking place in the conference centre.

Numbers were in the hundreds all day, with a 'Blair' handcuffed and on trial outside. At lunchtime the family members of soldiers killed in Iraq who had been listening to the evidence inside came out to report the goings on and made speeches to the assembled crowd.

As the inquiry finished, around 500 people gathered round the doors to tell Blair exactly what they thought as he left. True to form though, he'd chickened out of facing his ex-public and disappeared, presumably down one of the many secret Westminster exits.

*For pics, see <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2010/02/445546.html>

...and finally...

No fin ventured nuffin gained.

The interspecies environmental resistance movement is on. Total Oil have admitted that a lone eco-warrior swordfish launched a swift sabotaging attack on an oil loading pipe in Angola recently, causing a three day delay in tanker shipments.

The shashbuckling young swordfish had obviously been paying attention at er... school (and eating a diet rich in omega 3 fish oils no doubt). It was well briefed on Total's environmental misdeeds and humanitarian mishaps and prepared to back its eco-convictions to the hilt. Literally. We're now holding out for Dolphins with dynamite and porpoises with purpose wielding manta-ray-guns. Er... This article should have been funnier, but, on this occasion, the swordfish has proved mightier than the pen.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers, Osama is a has Bin, but the Taliban has a plan. Honest.

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