

Bala Murghab, Afghanistan, December 2008. A view of a remote Afghan village during a transfer flight.

Carrying the burden of today's wars

In every contemporary military conflict, from Afghanistan to Libya and Ukraine, local communities are hit by lethal and effective weapons, such as hunger.

by Fausto Biloslavo, war correspondent



Barricades in Maidan Square, Kiev, January 30, 2014

Pro-revolution protesters in Maidan Square, Kiev, February 2, 2014

'September 11: God forgives, I don't.' These were the words written on the helmet of a U.S. Army sergeant from New York City advancing with his troops in the Iraqi desert in 2003. Although Saddam Hussein had nothing to do with 9/11 the sergeant, who had joined the army voluntarily, was a former policeman who witnessed the collapse of the Twin Towers by the hands of terrorists.

of Ahmed's house. His father had begged them not to shoot against the approaching armored column with their rusty weapons. But their blunt reply was: 'You must be proud to die with us.' While the Fedayeen were blown away with a single shot, a shrapnel shell would mutilate Ahmed and his entire family forever, like a tiny human shield.

The Wars these days are devastating especially communities and civils, entire nations. Not only soldiers

The only certainty is that everything has changed since 9/11. War has become more and more unbalanced and unconventional, exerting a devastating impact on the communities and civilians crushed by an epoch-making conflict. Ahmed knows it well; a 7-year-old Iraqi young boy, he had his arm torn away by a cannonball shot by a British tank. His family desperately wanted to tell me his tragic story in front of the distressed boy, sitting in a corner holding his bandaged stump. The Fedayeen Saddam (Martyrs of Saddam), a paramilitary group of fighters loyal to the dictator, had climbed the roof

in Afghanistan, there are 4000 casualties every year, mostly civilians. Since 2002 Italy has lost 54 lives to restore hope in an endlessly war-torn country, and it is still not clear whether we have won or lost. Even the number of casualties is out of balance.

Ten years after the Twin Towers collapsed, a series of Arab Springs broke out on our doorstep catching everyone by surprise. At first, many people believed they were simply some kind of Arab student revolt against immovable tyrants in a world which seemed at a standstill. But soon, the Arab Spring turned into a bloody winter taking a deadly toll on those peoples who



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War correspondent, he was born in Trieste in 1961. He filed his first story during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Founder of Albatross Press Agency, he focuses on the forgotten wars, from Afghanistan to Africa and the Far East. In 1987 he was captured and imprisoned in Kabul. He covered the genocide in Rwanda and the Balkan Wars. In 1997 he was in Chochrya, while in 2003 he followed the Allied Forces until the fall of Saddam Hussein. In 2011, he was the last journalist to interview Muammar Gaddafi. He lives with his family in Trieste, the place he'll always go back to.



All Muhammad Shaswar, leader of the Asayish security forces in Garman area, Iraq, June 2014



In Garaqosh, Iraq, people buy ice from an old ice-making shop. Because of the lack of electricity, refrigerating systems stopped working properly, July 2014

had embarked on the arduous journey of change, full of hopes. Overthrowing the Gaddafi family cost Libya 50,000 victims. Meanwhile, the end is nowhere in sight in Syria despite the 190,000 casualties and 3 million refugees according to UN sources. The most disconcerting figure concerns Iraq and the number of internally displaced people in both countries, with 13.6 million individuals escaping war. And let's not forget the consequences for the West, confronted with the spread of the Caliph's black flag from Iraq to Cyrenaica.

Under his notorious Bedouin tent, I was the last Italian journalist to interview Muammar Gaddafi only a few days before his death as the revolt rapidly expanded. 'If these gangs inspired by Bin Laden were to take control over a stable government providing security, African citizens will take to sea towards Europe and the Mediterranean will become a sea of chaos,' the Colonel predicted as his words remained unheard. When I asked him whether he was afraid to die like Saddam, hung by his own people, the interpreter had turned pale and mumbled he could not translate the question. But Gaddafi understood English and replied with a laugh first, then got all serious and quietly acknowledged the likelihood of his own tragic end.

In Damascus, when the US planned to bomb the Syrian regime, the people in the street would stop any rare Westerner and tell them angrily, 'Your raids will open the way to the black flags of the jihad. They will kill us all.'

Today's conflict sees not only the return of the Caliph, but also the resurfacing of medieval war strategies such as the powerful weapon of hunger. Only a few meters away from a bunch of Syrian children playing football in the streets, a Damascus quarter has turned into a ghostly front line where no building is left standing and the deadly silence is interrupted only by shooting snipers. The Palestinian camp of Yarmouk, allied with rebels, paid the price of a terrible siege which resulted in starving its own inhabitants. When the United Nations managed to deliver the first aid among the rubbles of the war, they were met by a number of ghost-like starved human beings. Last summer in Iraq, the winning armies of the Caliph forced the Yazidi minority to escape. 40,000 people embarked on an infernal march in the Sinjar Mountains where they would die of hunger and thirst squarely before the eyes of the international community.

120,000 Christians from Mosul and the Nineveh plains were forced to exile and seek refuge in Kurdistan. Most of them dream of a visa for Europe in order to leave the war

behind, as the ancient Christian community in Iraq risks disappearing.

Conflict and economic instability are pushing growing waves of refugees and migrants towards a European Eldorado which simply no longer exists. In Zwuara,

**Today the most destructive
weapon to exhaust
the population is hunger**

on the Libyan coast, I watched them living in disgraceful conditions in overcrowded shacks while awaiting their departure to Lampedusa. And when the order to board came, human traffickers forced them to drag a long rubber raft up to the sea, plodding along the seashore like slaves.

Last year, the newly arrived 166,000 immigrants brought Italy face to face with the dilemma between human pity and solidarity more than ever before, as the latter becomes a too heavy burden for common citizens struggling through an economic and moral crisis.

On top of this, the Old Continent is once again threatened by war, which we

1300 Syrian refugees are living in the Akro refuge camp. The camp is located in the castle of the city of Akro, Iraq, a former Saddam prison, July 2014



People of Jalewta, Iraq, leave the city during the fights, June 2014





Taking a picture with iPad: the number of hi-tech shops is constantly growing in the main cities like Mashhad, Iran, November 2013

considered something of the past with the end of the former Yugoslavia conflict on our doorstep. In Ukraine, in the heart of Europe, a brutal war affecting the seven million citizens of Donbass is taking place amid feeble truces, in the country's Eastern region near the Russian border which took up arms against Kiev. Bruno Giudice, the only Italian still living in Donetsk, the 'capital city' of Donbass, has put forward an appeal to stop the war which amplifies the cry of pain of all the civilians affected by this dangerous strength test between the East and the West. 'Hospitals, kindergartens, schools, markets, houses and even bus stops were hit,' Giudice denounced. The

local population is forced to live in nuclear bunkers and the grip of the cold weather is terrible, with several areas without gas, water or electricity. Banks are closed, pharmacies open intermittently. After working for 30 or 40 years, retired people no longer receive their pension and survive on humanitarian aid in order not to die of starvation. This is 21st century Europe.

Every time I return home after reporting from another war front, I choose to take the train, which travels along the coast. I can then admire the extraordinary splendor of the Gulf of Trieste and I keep reminding myself how lucky we are to live in peace. And we should never forget it.