

'The Afghan People Are Fed Up': An Interview with Malalai Joya

Written by Elsa Rassbach
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For the U.S. government, the wellbeing of the Afghan people has no value at all.

Elsa Rassbach, [Common Dreams](#), January 10, 2013



Malalai Joya, 34, first gained international attention in 2003 when she spoke out publicly against the domination of warlords. She was at that time serving as an elected delegate to the Loya Jirga that was convened to ratify the Constitution of Afghanistan; in 2005 she became one of 68 women elected to the 249-seat National Assembly, or Wolesi Jirga, and was the youngest member of the Afghan parliament.

In 2007 she again spoke out against former warlords and war criminals in the Afghan parliament and was thereupon suspended from the parliament. Since then she has survived many assassination attempts. She travels in Afghanistan with armed guards and has worked tirelessly on behalf of Afghan women and to end the occupation of her country.

She has received broad international recognition. In 2010, Time Magazine placed Malalai Joya on their annual list of the 100 most influential people in the world, and Foreign Policy Magazine in listed her in its annual list of the Top 100 Global Thinkers. In March, 2011, The Guardian listed her among "Top 100 women: activists and campaigners." Her most recent book is "Raising My Voice."

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I first met Malalai in 2007 in Berlin, after she was invited to speak in the German Parliament (click [here](#)), and we've met again during some of her further visits to Europe. This interview is based on our conversation during her most recent visit to Berlin and subsequent email correspondence between us.

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The above text and following interview is by [Elsa Rassbach](#), a US journalist and filmmaker based in Berlin, Germany.

RASSBACH: Last month in Paris representatives of the Taliban for the first time met with their former enemies of the Northern Alliance, the collection of militias that fought them in the 1990s and eventually helped the U.S. to oust the Taliban regime. Now President Obama has invited Afghan President Hamid Karzai to meet with him in Washington on January 11th.

What do you make of this?

JOYA: To make the current puppet regime in Kabul more powerful, the U.S. and NATO have been trying to bring together three groups that emerged during three criminal periods of war in Afghanistan: the warlords, the Taliban, and some of those who served the hated Russian occupation.

Both the Taliban and the Northern Alliance warlords are long-time allies of the West. These groups are criminal, dark-minded, and reactionary to the core. In their lust for power, they are ready to sacrifice national interests of Afghanistan to any foreign power.

The Taliban and the Northern Alliance warlords are responsible for much of the suffering of the Afghan people. They are like a wolf and a vulture and can never be regarded part of a "solution" to Afghanistan's tragedy. Our people want them prosecuted as traitors and war criminals. But the West wants to "unite" them and impose them on our nation. Joining this dirty mafia regime are some of the ex-Russian puppets, the Khalq and the Parcham, who tortured

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and killed countless innocent democratic-minded people. Such "unity" may serve the U.S./NATO interests in Afghanistan, but will lead to another reign of terror and brutalities upon our poor people.

As history shows, the U.S. has relied on criminals, dictators, human rights violators, and reactionary forces in many other countries of the world. Recently in Libya the U.S. and NATO supported fundamentalists who are worse than Qaddafi; in Syria they are supporting Al-Qaeda and other such dirty groups. So it is not surprising that they are once again working with the Taliban and with Hekmatyar and other criminals in my country.

It was the U.S. that brought the warlords into power in Kabul, and the U.S./NATO puppet Karzai is even more shameless than previous Afghan puppets of the British and the Russians. While the puppets of Russia and Britain negotiated behind closed doors, Karzai is publicly selling Afghanistan to a foreign master. The so-called strategic agreements like the Bilateral Security Agreement provide for long-term U.S./NATO military bases in Afghanistan. The U.S. wants to remain in Afghanistan because of its geopolitical location: to be able to control other Asian powers like Pakistan, Iran, Russia and China.

Karzai and Obama are working on an outline of an agreement for legalizing permanent military bases in Afghanistan. But as long as we have foreign military bases in our country, we have no independence. And when we have no independence, we have nothing, and all talk of democracy, human rights and women's rights is a joke. Afghanistan is the second most corrupt country in the world. And Afghanistan is the worst place to be a woman, according to a recent international study. They are looting our rich mineral deposit mines worth three trillion dollars, and they are raking in money from the drug trade.

For the U.S. government, the wellbeing of the Afghan people has no value at all. The U.S. elites just want relative stability in order to continue the occupation and maintain military bases in Afghanistan without much trouble. If "stability" can be achieved by empowering the worst enemies of Afghan people, they are ready to do this. After all, the U.S. schemes to interfere with and control Afghanistan did not begin with 9/11. They go back for decades.

What means has the U.S. used to interfere with and control Afghanistan?

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The warlords who were put into power in Kabul by the U.S. are extremist fundamentalists. In the 1980s, during the Cold War, they received much financing and support from the ISI (the Inter-Services Intelligence agency of Pakistan) and from the CIA to fight the Soviets. The warlords were known to be misogynists; for example, one of their leaders was Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (founder of Hezb-e Islami), a fanatic who in the early 1970s ordered his followers to throw acid into the faces of Afghan women who refused to wear burkas in Kabul.

The U.S. government supported and nourished these fundamentalists to kill democratic, leftist, secular and progressive people in Afghanistan. Eight fundamentalist parties were created -- seven in Pakistan and an eighth in Iran -- and each of them wanted to be the one in power. After they ousted the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan, they conducted a brutal civil war among themselves in Afghanistan from 1992 to 1996. Alone in Kabul the warlords killed more than 65,000 innocent people and turned the city into ashes.

In the 1990s, the CIA provided financing to the ultra-fundamentalist Taliban and encouraged Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to support the Taliban in their drive to power; in 1996, the Taliban defeated the warlords and ruled Afghanistan for five years.

In 2001, after ousting the Taliban regime with the help of the warlords, the U.S. government announced that it had learned from past mistakes and would not empower Islamic fundamentalism again. But in reality they are still helping the brutal fundamentalists and imposing the old criminals and looters upon us. Islamic fundamentalism is once again the main tool in the hands of the U.S. to control Afghanistan, to suppress progressive and freedom-loving forces of my country, and to stop the emergence of a powerful democratic anti-occupation movement.

The power of media has been another effective way for the U.S. to mislead Afghans, especially the youth, to say "yes" to the occupation and to the continuing presence of foreign military bases in Afghanistan. Over the past eleven years, the U.S. has promoted media in Afghanistan and has spent large sums of money on propaganda and "soft war." Almost all the major media outlets in the country are under U.S. control. A large majority of the Afghan people is illiterate, and we have no independent, progressive media to neutralize and counteract the pro-U.S. media.

The NGOs are another tool of the U.S. and other NATO countries in Afghanistan. Through financing NGOs, they buy the loyalty of some Afghans and use them as their puppets to

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advance their agenda in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, there are many Afghans, especially intellectuals, who are paving the way for a continued U.S./NATO occupation.

There are many reports that the U.S. and NATO want to keep a significant "troop presence" in Afghanistan well after 2014. But if all the foreign troops were to leave, would there be civil war in Afghanistan?

There is already a civil war, a dangerous civil war. Whether the foreign troops stay or leave, war is going on. The presence of foreign troops only makes our struggle for justice harder, because the occupiers empower reactionary warlords -- and now also empower Taliban, along with killers from the past Russian puppet regime. At least if the foreign troops leave, one of the biggest evils will be gone. Then we will face internal enemies. If the occupation leaves, at least the Taliban will not get more powerful. If the troops honestly leave, the backbone of these terrorists will break. They will become like orphans, because their godfather is the U.S., which was also the godfather of Al Qaida.

We are fed up with the so-called helping hand of the U.S. and NATO that is used to justify occupation. The mother and father of all these tragedies is the occupation itself and the U.S./NATO support of the killers of my people. When the occupation leaves, these fundamentalists will get weak. They have no roots in the heart of the people, and their backbone will break. If the U.S. stops helping terrorists and killers, then they may not be in a position to wage a civil war and destroy Afghanistan like they did in 90's.

So the first request of the people is: Leave Afghanistan and stop supporting our enemies.

Have you seen any improvements at all for the people under the U.S./NATO occupation, for example in the situation of women?

The situation of women in Afghanistan was used as an excuse for the U.S. and NATO to occupy our country. But it is clear they were not fighting on behalf of women, because they have put into power the reactionary warlords who are sworn enemies of women. If your family were bombed in a wedding party or your daughter raped by Taliban, what would be your reaction? And you want to negotiate with them?

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There is no question that some schools and universities have been built during the U.S./NATO occupation, and some money has been given to the Karzai regime for projects on behalf of women's and human rights. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of civilians, most of them women and children, have been killed during these eleven years of occupation. They even used white phosphorous; they even bombed wedding parties.

In comparison to the dark period of the medieval-minded Taliban, today there is now a Ministry of Women, and 25% of the representatives in the parliament are women. But the female representatives have mainly a symbolic function, and little is done for ordinary women. In the larger cities like Kabul and Herat, women have some jobs and education, but in most of Afghanistan their lives are hell. The media don't write much about the many women who are raped or stoned to death in public. Hundreds of schools have been closed, and even in Kabul women don't have security going to school; in many provinces acid is thrown in their faces. In most places killing a woman is still as easy as killing a bird.

Due to lack of justice and pressure on women, last year 2300 suicide cases were recorded among Afghan women, which has no parallel in our history.

These warlords are misogynists, just like the Taliban, and they don't want women's rights in Afghanistan; a few token fundamentalist ladies wearing beautiful clothes should not fool people.

And many of the women who have positions, who run NGOs, are corrupt and have received money from the occupation; they betray the truth and justify the U.S. occupation and are even ready to negotiate with the Taliban. Through this, the situation of women will become more bloody and more of a disaster.

Under the U.S./NATO occupation, there is day by day a widening gap between rich and poor. A small percentage of drug-lords, warlords and corrupt officials have everything in their hands while a large majority of the people suffers from poverty and unemployment. Under the occupation, Afghanistan has become the biggest producer of opium and heroin in the world. With the efforts of the U.S. and NATO, Afghanistan has become the capital of the world drug Mafia and also now tops the list of the world's most corrupt countries (according to a recent study by Transparency International). All of the "achievements," if any, that can be attributed to the occupation are spoiled by these shameful epidemics that have had and will continue to have a long-run disastrous effect on the whole society.

Where do you place your hopes for the future of Afghanistan?

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I tell people, don't just see two fronts like the Taliban vs. the occupation or the warlords vs. the occupation. There is a third front of democratic-minded intellectuals, activists, parties, organizations, groups, and individuals. Focus on them.

The Afghan people are fed up. Fundamentalism and occupation are no longer accepted among the common people because of the brutalities and savagery they have experienced over the past decade. There is more openness, now, to progressive and democratic organizations and ideas. With the passage of time, I hope for the emergence of a powerful justice-loving alternative in Afghanistan. The U.S. is the main obstacle towards the development of such democratic forces.

Some people are deceived by the anti-imperialist banner of the Taliban, and education is in fact the key to get rid of all of these miseries, all of this ignorance. I remember someone called me when I was in Kabul and said, "Oh my sister, I am in the mountains. I support you. I agree with you. You are against occupation. You are against these warlords. I went to the Taliban to take my revenge against the warlords" -- and he told me a long story on the telephone. I said, "Please come down from the mountains. Don't go with the Taliban. Going with one terrorist to take revenge on another terrorist makes no sense. They are deceiving you." He said, "Yes, I agree with you, but there is no way for me." And I discussed with him. This is part of the important role of democratic-minded activists.

When women learn to read and write, many of them become extraordinary activists, and these brave women are running projects and organizations that are really working on behalf of women's and human rights, like RAWA, like OPAWC, like the Social Association of Afghan Justice Seekers, and a few others that I know who are also justice-seekers. And now women are even coming onto the streets and demonstrating, wearing the burka, in resistance against the U.S. and NATO and also against the Islamic fundamentalists. This is a positive example and a source of hope. In the history of Afghanistan, we have never before seen this kind of activism by women.

In different parts of Afghanistan there are small protests -- in Kabul, in Jalalabad, in Helmand Province and in Farah Province, and in many other places -- and for the first time women are joining these protests. I hope that with time, there will be a broader movement in Afghanistan like in many of the Arab countries. It will take time.

As the great German writer Bertolt Brecht said, "Those who struggle may fail. Those who do

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not struggle have already failed."

If you were invited to speak to the U.S. and NATO officials, what would you say?

Stop this criminal war in my country as soon as possible. Your war, waged under a fake banner of human rights and democracy, is in fact a war against poor Afghan people. You are not only traitors to the Afghan people, but to your own people as well. You are stealing from the pockets of poor Americans and Europeans and wasting billions of dollars on killing and looting in order to safeguard only the interests of a very small, elite minority. You have a massive war and propaganda machine to sell your lies. But the world's conscience, which includes a large number of U.S. antiwar veterans, is against you: you can't overturn it by any means. So your war machinery is doomed to fail, and the toiling people of the world will win.