

## Invasions have effects



By Bunn Nagara

***Many Western officials cannot fully understand a humanitarian crisis like today's refugee exodus when they have lost sight of their own humanity.***

IT seemed so simple at the time: the 2001 US invasion of Afghanistan removed the ruling Taliban expeditiously. The ragtag band that ran Kabul was no match for the world's sole superpower.

Then came the March 2003 invasion and occupation of Saddam Hussein's Iraq, led by the United States in the "coalition of the willing". That was said to be "a cakewalk", a "slam dunk", something of an open goal.

Eight years later to the month, much the same happened in Muammar Gaddafi's Libya. Toppling a prickly government and "taking out" a third-world nation in distant parts was only too easy for a superpower and its European allies.

The pattern is being repeated for Bashar al-Assad's Syria: weaken and eliminate the government, destabilise the country and focus only on the presumed fruits of the ideological exercise.

In this unreal fantasy process, the real-life consequences are forgotten. Among these consequences: the human suffering on the ground and the flood of refugees emerging from the broken societies that bombings produce and leave behind.

Where would people with nothing left to lose except their lives go? Many in the war-torn lands of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria now go west.

Up to 3,000 people a day from these countries arrive in Europe through Greece or Turkey. In the first week of September alone, 10,000 crossed from Macedonia to Greece and close to 8,000 were registered in Serbia.

UNHCR recorded 219,000 refugees arriving in Europe last year, expect another 400,000 this year and yet another 450,000 next year. The final figures could be higher.

Many of these refugees seek to settle in more developed Austria, Germany and Scandinavia where job and security prospects are better. But they first need to pass through Serbia and Hungary, the so-called "Balkan route", in their long march to freedom.

After braving the elements at sea, the lucky ones survive their journey by boat only to face man-made dangers on land. Many fall victim to smugglers, human traffickers, extortionists and other criminal gangs or are subjected to violence by hostile locals and abuse by government authorities.

Europe's present generation has not seen anything like the current tide of human beings washing over their territory. So they cannot respond rationally or react intelligently.

Several local communities revert to vile subhuman behaviour. Even child refugees have been assaulted.

In June, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's argument was that his government would stop "economic migrants" seeking a better life and not genuine political refugees seeking safe haven.

By this month, however, the real distinction for Hungary in its migrant settlement policy was exposed as religious – between Christian and Muslim. For two years Hungary had secretly settled Christian refugees, but like Slovakia it is rejecting Muslim ones.

This discriminatory policy has been condemned by United Nations and other multilateral agencies. Hungary's specious argument is that the government has nothing against Islam, only Muslims.

This month, Orban announced plans for new prison-like migrant holding centres that would also help to deport refugees back to Serbia. Human Rights Watch condemned Hungary for treating refugees like animals.

Meanwhile, Budapest wants to build a fence with razor wire along the border with Serbia, choking off the Balkan route. This was despite many refugees only passing through Serbia and Hungary, enraging Serbia which would be stuck with having to settle or resettle them.

Hungary is a European Union country and EU regulations require refugees to seek asylum in the first member country they arrive in. So although many register in Hungary along the Balkan route, they intend to settle in more developed and hospitable countries further west.

Despite the scale of the refugee crisis, in Orban's surreal universe no such crisis exists. His right-wing Fidesz party may be under pressure from Hungary's far-right neo-Nazi Jobbik, but with Orban it seems to require little help to be anti-humanitarian.

Last Monday, Hungary finally allowed trains carrying refugees to proceed towards Austria and Germany through Budapest, then stopped them again the next day. Such confusion has spread to other countries like the Czech Republic, where nobody seems certain of policies on migrants anymore.

Despite their government's discriminatory policies, there are Hungarians and civil society groups demonstrating their support for the refugees through word and deed. They condemn the government's actions as cruel and un-Christian.

Such governments have failed in their Christian obligations, as Pope Francis recently reminded parishioners, even as they strike poses as Christian nations. They have also failed to observe the UN and EU conventions on human rights and refugees they had signed up to.

Third, they have failed to educate their public, particularly hostile local communities, to be more understanding and supportive of refugees. They have further failed to set a good example of mature governance to neighbouring countries and the international community.

Only a few centuries ago, the imperial nations of Europe were only too glad to devastate the nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America in their colonial carve-up of these continents. Their imperious ways established the notion of the advanced societies in a developed and prosperous Europe.

Then came the West's destruction of countries in the Wana (West Asia, North Africa) region that began just over a decade ago. One direct result of that carnage is today's torrent of refugees heading for the citadels of fortune in the West.

Saddam and Gaddafi were no doubt tyrants, as is Bashar al-Assad, but it had been tyranny that kept terrorism and other destabilising factors down and out. Remove the tyrants and the tyranny, and terrorism and chaos would rush in before the glory of human rights and a golden age of democracy.

Naturally, that obvious connection may not be widely acknowledged in Western establishment circles. Ideology and its consequences are seldom acknowledged by ideologists.

Some countries would seek to muddy the picture further for their own interests. Israel blames the waves of refugees on Islamist extremism, conveniently ignoring how the extremism was created and facilitated by the fall of tough governments that had been tougher on extremists than on Israel itself.

Some British officials are equally myopic. When asked about likely solutions to stem the refugee tide, one official in London recently talked of further weakening the Syrian government.

Perhaps London is too far from Europe's refugee crisis. Or perhaps the refugees are still too far from British shores.

Historically, the United States has been more hospitable to refugees from abroad than Europe is today. But last year's refugee women and children from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras arriving in the United States also revealed hostility from local communities.

In today's refugee crisis, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and Venezuela have opened their doors to the destitute. These Latin American countries will in time reap the bounty of the contributions from the new migrants.

In all the petty and hideous xenophobia against refugees, the benefits which migrants bring to their new countries are often forgotten. Their gratitude produces more appreciation and patriotism, while their hard struggle for peace and goodwill combine with their contributions to the economy and cultural enrichment.

Much of what they can give to their new countries may shame many locals who have grown apathetic. And that may be one reason for their racism.

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