

Documentary exposes US aggression in Somalia, Sudan and Afghanistan

21st Century Wars: Unseen wars by Sorius Samura for Britain's Channel 4

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Award winning journalist and film maker Sorius Samura, who originates from Sierra Leone, presents a damning exposure of the terror campaign waged by US imperialism against the people of Somalia, the Sudan and Afghanistan in the Channel 4 documentary *21st Century Wars*.

Samura is a seasoned war correspondent. In 1999 he made the much-acclaimed *Cry Freetown* about the ongoing civil war in Sierra Leone. In 2000 he and three others were jailed in Liberia for three weeks whilst filming a documentary for CNN. And in the making of "Exodus from Africa" in 2001, he braved bandits and dehydration while retracing the hazardous route followed by migrants fleeing Africa in the hope of a better life in Europe.

21st Century Wars: Unseen wars contrasts the justification successive US administrations have given for their military interventions with the reality on the ground, the rubble that was once homes, traumatised children, and thousands of murdered civilians.

Whilst Samura fails to inquire as to true motives of the US, or what really lies behind their attacks, the facts he reveals run contrary to the attempt by the Americans and their British allies to present a plausible *casus belli* for a war against Iraq today.

Part One entitled, "The Good Guys: When America goes to war in the name of justice and protecting the innocent," begins with US military Urban Combat Training at Victorville, California where a mock town has been set up with the enemy hidden among a civilian population, in a country named *Al George*.

The purpose of this training is said to be to "accustom soldiers to a culture alien to their own and to avoid 'collateral' casualties." Samura takes part in the war game as a journalist. One of the other civilian participants complained of being "shot" four times. The response of a soldier to this was "That's part of the risk of urban war You

don't know who are the good guys and bad guys until it's too late."

From there Samura goes to Somalia, where US urban warfare techniques were tested for real in *Operation Restore Hope* in 1992. What was supposed to be a humanitarian operation turned into a manhunt, when one faction leader, Mohammed Farah Aideed, refused to disarm.

Walking through streets in the capital, Mogadishu, Samura films the consequences of this operation. He shows scenes of devastation. Scores of buildings are barely standing. Many have no roof. Walls have gaping holes.

A local cameraman filmed a US attack on Mogadishu, showing US helicopter fire from all sides into a building where a meeting of Somali clan leaders and elders was being held. A Somali witness described the carnage: "You couldn't count the bodies, bodies covered in blood, scattered. After the helicopters, marines came, checking bodies and shooting any not dead."

Events reached a climax on October 3-4 1992, when two black hawk helicopters were shot down and 19 American marines were killed. The number of Somali dead remains unknown. At least 1,000 Somalis died, but many believe the figure was nearer 3,000.

Witnesses described their experiences:

"My brother was looking at a helicopter. He was told to put his gun down. He said he needed it to mind his shop. American soldiers shot him dead."

Another said, "Five occupants in a house were killed. Eighty in this neighbourhood."

At one point a Somali woman picked up a stone to attack Samura's white cameraman. They managed to calm her down and she was asked why was she hostile. "I was hostile because my people were slaughtered," she said bitterly.

"My husband was killed. My people massacred. Our land was invaded. I can't stand it when I see white men. We

never attacked the American soldiers. They came to us. They came to our land and they destroyed our houses. They killed our elders, our most senior people. They killed women with newborn babies. They killed innocent babies! Now what do you think of that?"

Samura went on to Sudan to film the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory, which was destroyed by American bombing after President Clinton claimed that it was associated with the bin Laden Al Qaeda network in 1998 and was producing chemical weapons.

After the bombing Samura says, "US scientists found no trace of chemicals associated with weapons. The factory was cleared of any connection with Osama bin Laden."

The owner of the factory spoke with Samura. All the chemicals there were associated with pharmaceutical production. Samura explains, "The factory was also the biggest producer of cheap generic medicines for humans, from painkillers to drugs to treat malaria and TB. They were sold at a cheap price—for poor and undernourished people—for a course of treatment that takes months.

"The hospital authorities and doctors said supplies ran out a few months after the attacks and they were unable to deal with a big malaria epidemic which struck the Sudan the following year, allowing the rapid spread of the disease. With the shortage of affordable medicine, the Sudanese, being poor, are hit badly by any increase in price.

"About seven and a half million are infected annually by malaria, with 35-45,000 losing their lives. In 1999 [Sudan] had its single biggest epidemic of malaria. Many more died in the period the Al-Shifa factory has been out of business and prices doubled. It is estimated 10,000 lives have been lost."

Finally, Samura visits Afghanistan. The war there, Samura says, was "seen by many as a convincing justification for US methods after the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center when American forces removed a brutal regime, the Taliban, and gave cause for hope for many Afghans."

Samura comments, "On TV screens, shown in the US and Europe, it seemed to show the bombing as amazingly accurate. But as the technology becomes more accurate the danger is the military simply takes more risks in the way they use it."

Samura's film vividly shows the effects of US bombing. He interviews survivors who describe the bombing and its lasting psychological effects especially on the children. A mother says of her child, "She just cries 'Mother, Mother.' Before, she was a good person. After, the doctor says she is in shock, mentally disturbed."

Another says, "The children are restless and can't sleep. They hear a noise of a plane and begin crying. All of us are scared."

And another man: "It was a tragic and bitter experience—it will be with me for life." He names his children and relatives, giving their ages, a roll call of those killed. He then added: "... not only my children, we should have compassion for all those killed."

Samura comments: "It's hard to make an estimate of how many civilians have been killed in 'Operation Enduring Freedom'. Some reports give figures of more than 4,000."

He goes to investigate the incident in which a wedding party was bombed. A badly injured man in Kandahar hospital tells him, "My young nephew was killed. And others. They didn't spare anyone, including nine children. Why? There was no Al Qaeda here."

Another survivor says, "My son was killed. I was hit and unconscious. In the past seven to eight months [the US] has not killed any Al Qaeda. Only Afghan Muslims. Women, men, children. It's a cruel act against Afghans. A boy in the corner lost both parents. He cries all the time.... Where is the morality?"

At the village compound where the bombing took place he speaks to other witnesses who tell him that the groom lost 25 relatives. US ground troops, after the attack, took away all the munitions they could find but fragments remained embedded in the walls and lying on the ground.

An elder describes the carnage:

"Here were cooking pots. This area was carpeted. People were lying here. There is blood. There are bullet holes in the walls. Dead bodies lying all around. [My] nephew was lying here."

He points out a young girl who received a shrapnel wound to her neck: "She lost her father and mother," he says.

Indicating a building with its upper structure destroyed the elder says, "People were asleep. Old men, women, children. A missile hit, blowing a hole down into the cellar. Many ran outside to escape and were hit by another missile."

Samura continues, "I was told that up to 48 died here. Men, women and children. The US have accepted there were civilian casualties, but still claim the attack was justified. For these poor people this random bombardment was cruel and unfair. No different then as to how it felt for the victims of the terror attack in New York."

Samura sums up: "In each of these countries I've visited, for all the American good intentions, for all the precision technology, there are many people who believe they [the US] are the real terrorists."



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